

SONGS FOR RED DUST AND BLACK CLAY:  
THE BLACK INDIAN IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

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(Under the Direction of Barbara McCaskill)

ABSTRACT

This project examines the figure of the black Indian in the work of six significant American writers: John Marrant, Herman Melville, Elizabeth Stoddard, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Leslie Marmon Silko. The complex relationships between Native Americans and African Americans, while sufficiently explored by historians, are under-examined in American literary productions. The texts studied here, ranging from eighteenth-century to twenty-first-century in origin, represent diverse perspectives about black Indians. The black Indian characters I examine use masks, costumes, or other performative tools in their demonstration of how such cultural and racial markers can become conflated. Thus, my study of this literature concludes that, like the performance of race in general, representations of black Indians are varied and complex and often reflective of stereotypical, racist perceptions of both groups. However, I show that just as often as these characters reinforce or are subjected to simplistic depictions of their identities, they just as often use their multiply rooted identities as a means to gain freedom and agency.

INDEX WORDS: American literature, Black Indian, John Marrant, Herman Melville, Elizabeth Stoddard, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Leslie Marmon Silko, African American, Native American.

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2008

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May 2008

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Upon the completion of this project, I am keenly aware of how much help I have received along the way. I am grateful to those who have helped me complete it. I'd like to first thank my husband, Mordecai, both for his unwavering love and for his utter disbelief in my chosen career path – he has kept me grounded and helped to keep the (relative) insignificance of my work in perspective. I'd also like to acknowledge the crucial role my children played in my completion of this project. Cash and Tallula, born in the midst of either studying for exams or writing, helped me prioritize; depending on the circumstance, they motivate me to work harder or urge me to stop working. I hope I can one day inspire and motivate them as much as they have me. I also gratefully acknowledge the support of my parents, Claire and Larry Byars; my in-laws, Mike and Betsy Nichols; and my sister, Ellen Byars. Without their support, love, and caring for my children, I never would have dreamed this possible. My major professor, Barbara McCaskill, is a true mentor. I am eternally grateful for her encouragement and candor about my work and this profession. I also graciously thank my committee members Hugh Ruppensburg and Carolyn Jones Medine for stepping in at a crucial time and offering their advice and support. And, last but certainly not least, I express my deep gratitude and respect for my friend and colleague Meredith McCarroll, and not just because we always said we would thank each other on this page. We have done this together. I hope it is the first of many collaborative projects.

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

### WITHIN OUR BOSOM AND ON OUR BORDERS:

#### NEGOTIATING SHARED BLACK AND NATIVE HISTORIES

the bodies broken on  
the Trail of Tears  
and the bodies melted  
in the Middle Passage  
are married to rock and  
ocean by now  
and the mountains crumbling on  
white men  
the waters pulling white men down  
sing for red dust and black clay  
good news about the earth

-Lucille Clifton (1972)<sup>1</sup>

Lucille Clifton's poem points to a relationship largely ignored in studies of American literary identity – the relationship between Native Americans and African Americans. The exact nature of this relationship is often muddled and complicated by the fact that African Americans and Native Americans have both denied and claimed dual ancestry for political and nationalistic reasons, regardless of the genetic realities of their identities. And because written records of genealogy are sometimes lost, destroyed or non-existent for peoples who identify with either group or both, this specific relationship is a suggestive and illuminating, but problematic, crossroads. In 1826, as America expanded its borders in every direction against Native, Spanish and British forces, the then President James Madison wrote, regarding Indian Removal: "Next to the case of the black race within our bosom, that of the red on our borders is the problem most baffling to the policy of our country" (qtd in Takaki 83). Such a statement from an American

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<sup>1</sup> *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969-1980*.



president indicates the growing anxiety or preoccupation white European Americans had toward “black” and “red” Americans. National policies geared toward the subjugation of both groups were based on pseudo-scientific concepts of the “one drop rule” or blood quantum. Tiya Mile explains that the “one drop rule ensured that there would be more black laborers for slavery’s human machine, while the blood quantum ratio ensured that there would be more available land for White settlement and development” (“Uncle Tom” 147). Historical research demonstrates that their relegation as Other often placed these two marginalized groups in close physical contact with one another. The historical scholarship regarding the relationship between African Americans and Native Americans is relatively substantial and offers a useful context for understanding America’s past and present. William Katz (1971 and 1986) and Kenneth Porter (1947-1981; 1994) were some of the first to research the relationships between African Americans and Native Americans.<sup>2</sup> Both of these writers, however, tend to focus only on the egalitarian, communal relationships between African Americans and Native Americans – Katz in the American West, and Porter among the Seminoles of the American South. Although symbiotic relationships such as the ones they describe did exist, their texts lapse into an overly sunny simplification of multiculturalism (characteristic of the times in which they were writing or publishing). Kevin Mulroy (1993) extends and complicates Porter’s research on the black Seminoles and their journey for freedom from West Texas to Mexico around 1850.<sup>3</sup>

A more comprehensive look at tensions and conflict (including in-depth discussions of Native Americans’ enslavement of African Americans) characterizes the scholarship by Daniel Littlefield Jr. (1979) and Theda Perdue (1979 and 2003), Claudio Saunt (1999 and 2005), and

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<sup>2</sup> William Katz: *The Black West* (1971) and *Black Indians* (1986); Kenneth William Porter: *The Black Seminoles* (written between 1947-1981, and published in 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Mulroy: *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, Indian Territory and Coahuila, and Florida* (1993).

Katja May (1996).<sup>4</sup> Littlefield and Saunt focus on Creek forms of slavery and ultimately posit that many Creek tribes practiced harsher forms of slavery than Cherokee; in both accounts, they suggest that Creek slavery was made crueler and more racist by the influence of European slavery. Perdue and May primarily discuss the Cherokees' enslavement of African Americans and the implications of the United States government's decision to force Cherokee adoption of African slaves after Emancipation. Circe Sturm (2002) and Tiya Miles (2005) extend and complicate existing research on the effects of slavery on the current social and political dynamics of contemporary Cherokee and African American communities.<sup>5</sup> And perhaps the most controversial scholarship is from Ivan Van Sertima (1987) and Jack Forbes (2003), who both describe numerous accounts of historical and archaeological evidence of African American and Native American transatlantic sea travel and contact well before 1492 – some artifacts suggest contact as early as 1250.<sup>6</sup>

These texts suggest that there is a solidly growing body of work documenting contact and exchange between African Americans and Native Americans; however, the same cannot be said of scholarship exploring the manifestation of such contact in American literature and letters. Additionally, the scant literary scholarship that does explore sites of contact between African Americans and Native Americans does so by focusing on more abstract manifestations of

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Littlefield Jr.: *Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (1979); Theda Perdue: *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866* (1979), and "Mixed Blood" Indians: *Racial Construction in the Early South* (2003); Claudio Saunt: *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (1999), and *Black, White and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (2005); Katja May: *African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations, 1830s to 1920s: Collision and Collusion* (1996).

<sup>5</sup> Circe Sturm: *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (2002), Tiya Miles: *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Ivan Van Sertima: *African Presence in Early America* (1987); Jack Forbes: *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (1993).

cultural contact and exchange, such as in religion and folklore.<sup>7</sup> What my project aims to do instead is look at how specific individuals (albeit fictionalized) negotiate, redefine, construct, and often obscure the lines between the two groups.

Jack Forbes asserts that “Contemporary scholarly and popular literature in the United States has largely ignored the significance of widespread Native American ancestry among Afroamericans and, also, of African ancestry among many Native groups. The consequences of this neglect are far-reaching” (190). Yet, the absence of such scholarship is easy to understand when one looks at the nature of both past and present relationships between African Americans and Native Americans. In the first section of his book, *Black, White and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family*, Claudio Saunt relates his experience at the Black Indian Symposium at Dartmouth College in 2000. This brief narrative outlines one aspect of the nature of the contemporary discourse between African Americans and Native Americans. Emotional outbursts during panel presentations and discussions ranged from disgusted to sad and enraged (Saunt, *Black* 7-8). One woman pointed a finger of blame to the Cherokee for their practice of slavery, and similar animosity was fueled by mistrust of certain tribal members’ levels of authenticity (Saunt, *Black* 7-8). Robert Warrior echoes Saunt’s assessment of the “weirdness and madness” of this seminal conference (Warrior 324). Saunt explains the tension and awkwardness of the event by saying that “On some occasions, blacks and Indians did indeed form common alliance, but many other times they fought each other. Today it seems that

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Brennan’s *When Brer Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature* (2003) explores how African folklore was influenced by Native folklore, and vice versa; and Joanne Brooks’s *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (2003) discusses how African and Native adaptations of Christianity in America retained many of their native traditions, and sometimes borrowed from one another. To date, only the collection *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (2006) offers the kind of thorough reading of mixed-race identity that I aim to do.

divisions between black and Indians are as deep as they are between blacks and whites” (*Black* 7).

This tangible tension has its roots in the specter of slavery; however, it is also very much caught up in racist conceptions of identity, many of which were invented by European (white) hegemony to enforce and maintain slavery, removal and subordination. Some scholars, including Katja May, suggest that slavery based on race/skin color is a peculiarly European invention. Such systems necessarily depend upon absolute “pure” definitions of race that, in reality, rarely exist. Forbes writes, “It is sad to say that many such persons [of both Native and African ancestry] have been forced by racism into arbitrary categories which tend to render their ethnic heritage simple rather than complex. It is now one of the principle tasks of scholarship to replace the shallow one-dimensional images of non-whites with more accurate multi-dimensional portraits” (271). Such one-dimensional conceptions of race and self enforce racism and silence histories. Ann McCullen in her essay “Blood and Culture: Negotiating Race in Twentieth-Century New England” in *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (2002) explains this dynamic in reference to kinship and blood quantum:

Historical Black-White-Indian intermarriage patterns have created generations of individuals who are problematic for race-conscious Americans who classify individuals on phenotype, especially skin color, hair texture, and facial features. The racial boundary between Whites and Blacks makes such classifications important to many, especially given the persistence of the “one-drop rule” in identifying individuals as Black. All of this is bound up in “folk biology” and how people understand genetics and race, at least part of which stems from analogies to “breeds” of dogs and horses. Physical traits play a strong role in identification, especially where mental templates of racial and ethnic

groups exist, and the belief in ‘blood’ or the biological basis of difference, outweighs other criteria, including demonstrated cultural identity. [...] Racial definitions may be mystical, biological, or administrative, and for American Indians, racial identity is administrated through the concept of blood quantum. (268-269)

Her assessment encourages the careful reader of history to search for a more complex truth in the instances where no easy, neat answer can be reached regarding racial categories. Exploring attitudes toward and historical and literary treatment of mixed-racial identities can reveal the most complete and realistically complex attitudes Americans hold regarding racial, cultural, and national identity. More specifically, as Tiya Miles suggests, if “we look at Native American history and African American history side by side rather than in isolation, we will see the edges where those histories meet and begin to comprehend a fuller and more fascinating picture. At the intersections of black and Native experiences, we gain greater understanding of the histories of both groups” (“Uncle Tom” 139). The examples of such imbricating borders of “separate” histories are not easy to find; they are obscured by discourse of the “one-drop rule” and blood quantum rhetoric, but they are there.

With the writings of William Apess (1789-1839), the American literary canon records its first black Indian writer. Around the same time, Paul Cuffee (1759-1817) rose to prominence in New England as a merchant ship captain and activist for black Americans; he also led an effort to re-colonize Sierra Leone with free black Americans. Interestingly, both men have one black parent and one Native American parent, yet Apess’s speeches, sermons, and autobiography are read and taught as a Native (Pequot) texts, while Cuffee is described in most popular accounts of his life as a black American activist. My most compelling explanation is that Apess is more phenotypically “Indian,” while Cuffee is more phenotypically “black.” Another explanation,

however, could be patrilineal bias (both men are identified in alliance with their fathers' races). In these seminal examples, we witness the desire to classify race and cultural identity in *either* one camp *or* the other. Despite their mothers' identities, both Apess and Cuffee are identified by their fathers' racial heritage – Native or African, respectively. This urge to classify race, something that is ultimately a thing of human construction, is the core motivation in my line of inquiry here. While surely not all individuals and characters succumb to this urge to choose one (Native or African American), even those that do exist in a third space of “both/and” remain vigilant of their double Otherness under the gaze of white Euro-American hegemony. After Cuffee's and Apess's deaths, well into the mid-nineteenth century, the American nation-state found itself still actively engaged in the process of defining for itself what constituted “Americanness” in the peculiarly American way of defining what it was by defining and then Othering what it was not.

African American slavery, and the forced removal, assimilation and genocide of Native Americans, are the events in American history that most significantly “proved” the righteousness of American expansion as a manifestly pre-destined event, and ushered the nation into the Industrial Age. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as the two groups often shared and competed for resources and protected (marginalized) space, the nature of their relationships became more intimate; true kinships were formed. As Americans simultaneously expanded and contracted their definitions of self and nation, the roles of African Americans, Native Americans, and black Indians provide rich examples of how and by what criteria American identity is constructed. In this study, I will address both the literal, physical (I hesitate to use the word “biological”) aspects of the mixed-racial identities of black Indians. To this end, I will examine specific black Indian characters in the American literary canon: John Marrant in

his “captivity” narrative (1785), Queequeg in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), Chloe in Elizabeth Stoddard’s *Temple House* (1867), Sam Fathers in William Faulkner’s *Go Down Moses* (1942) and “A Justice” (1930), Milkman in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977), and finally Clinton in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991). Through their varied and complex negotiations between and constructions of definitions of self and culture, these characters demonstrate an abiding preoccupation with the black Indian in American literature.

This specific aspect of multiracial identity was recently touched on in the documentary, *African American Lives* (2006), hosted and produced by Henry Louis Gates Jr. The PBS project maps the genetic make-up of famous African Americans (including Gates) in an attempt to recover knowledge of ancestors stolen from many African Americans in the tragedy of slavery. Background information on the film reveals that the typical African American is twenty percent European and five percent Native American (*African American Lives*). However, many of the participants (including Chris Tucker, Oprah, and Colin Powell) find that although they were told by parents or grandparents that they were “part Indian,” the DNA mapping used by the program’s scientists proves such claims unfounded; hence, there are inconsistencies between what they were *told* and what the DNA mapping “proves.” The study’s findings have sparked outraged responses that point out that DNA mapping will only trace unbroken gender lines.<sup>8</sup> The PBS project’s findings and possibly faulty scientific basis, in essence, perpetuate the vanishing Indian mythology and deny many African Americans the full knowledge of their ancestry by using only one method to determine ancestry and racial and cultural identity; it necessarily ignores the significance of purely non-genetic means of cultural transmission, and declines to complicate the very real genetic claims that may be missed in the type of testing used.

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<sup>8</sup> As evidence by Troy Duster’s “Deep Roots and Tangled Branches” (2006), Gary Younge’s “New Roots” (2006), and in online posting to Native-African American Scholars Listserve by Angela Walton-Raji (2006).

Such controversy highlights the often ephemeral distinction between race and culture, and our collective desire to know where we come from ethnically, biologically, geographically and culturally. However, what inevitably comes to light are the preconceptions regarding how and by whose means and definitions we define ourselves as Americans. Further, this line of inquiry seeks to delineate how one's internal racial identity (self-definition often based on both biology and culture) interacts with, contradicts, reinforces, and informs one's perceived racial identity (phenotype). Gates's project, like mine, simultaneously tries to challenge or at least interrogate strict scientific racial categories *and* relies on them to illustrate a point.

Simply stated, in the texts I will examine, race and culture are conflated. Racial identity becomes cultural identity, or cultural identity becomes racial identity through the characters' powerful use of costume, a "mask" or some type of physical, visible marker that indicates a claimed racial identity and integrates both African American and Native American phenotypes.<sup>9</sup> In making such a statement, I realize the already essentializing nature of describing what in each character what "blackness" or "Indianness" is based on appearance. It is my hope that by examining specific characters (instead of generalizing about how these two cultures are defined, because that is both impossible and dangerous), the characters' perceptions of identity, and the authors' perceptions of race, I will be able to demonstrate the complicated and suggestive ways such intermixture of culture and race operate. The differences between the treatment of these characters, based on historical context, the authors' cultural identities and experiences, and the climate of American society at the time the books were written and published will all factor into my analysis of the texts and all work to generate a deeper understanding of racial and cultural identities in the formation of American identity.

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<sup>9</sup> I'm using the word "costume" here to indicate some attempt at disguise or to transform oneself or "play Indian," *not* to refer to traditional attire or regalia worn by Native peoples for tribally specific religious ceremony.



To clarify the distinction between race and culture that I make in my discussion of the literary texts, I'd like to flesh out exactly what I mean by "race" and "culture." As stated earlier, I hesitate to use the term in my project "biology" because of the historical use of it by pseudo-scientific race theorists to link non-white races with cultural and intellectual inferiority. However, as many contemporary race theorists have noted, there is an undeniable physical reality linked with being someone "of color." Houston Baker Jr. notes in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1984) that to deny a biological reality of blackness is to deny the significance of trauma inflicted upon black bodies, solely because they are black; it is to deny that race does matter, that it is inextricably linked to experience, and thereby to knowledge. So when I say "race" in this paper, I do mean biology; I mean that a character is identified or identifies as physically both "black," and/or "Indian." I say this also with the knowledge that in reality and in the texts I'll discuss such terms and categories do not indicate monolithic or standard experience, and in many cases racial identity changes within the course of the narrative depending on the character's behavior, dress, or audience – in other words, these characters' racial identities are fluid and subject to change depending on cultural context or markers. In my discussion, when I use the word "culture," I mean a character's or people's dress and outer appearance, beliefs, worldviews, and ways of speaking and interacting with the world. In my discussion of these texts, both race and culture are outed as social constructions and (in some instances) as performances.

In each major text, symbolic language about dual identity is rooted in the characters' garments and bodies in a way that clarifies and makes apparent the fluidity of racial definitions. These somatic and surface markers will often linger too long beside historically stereotypical traits of both African Americans and Native Americans, but my aim is to show these markers as

symbols of agency and cultural capital in each character's own definition of self as an American. By using and focusing my analysis on the characters' garments and "masks," I hope also to interrogate to what extent race is a social and cultural construct and how exactly it operates with this specific mixed-race identity, unique in its exclusion of whiteness.<sup>10</sup> In many ways, corporeal difference, costume or masks act as extensions of biological phenotype; they sometimes mask skin color and allow the character to perform as someone of another racial or cultural background, sometimes permit movement between two cultural and social milieus that would not otherwise have been granted, and sometimes grant the power to evade being labeled by the dominant culture into one group or another. In John Marrant's captivity narrative, his Cherokee costume serves as a trope by which we can more completely understand the complexity of his passing from African American to Native American. In Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Queequeg's tattooed body and motley garments mark him as Other, but more specifically indicate a mixed racial identity somewhere between black and Native. Elizabeth Stoddard's Chloe, only in times of intense emotion, is described as an Indian as a way to explain her freedom from social convention. Sam Fathers in William Faulkner's "A Justice" and *Go Down Moses* becomes a physical manifestation of the romantic, natural past. In Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Milkman as an African American with Native ancestry removes his costume of Eurocentric materialism as he journeys to discover his lost ancestors. And Clinton, as a disabled black Indian and leader of the Homeless Army in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, wears the uniform of a Vietnam vet to make material the connections between Natives and African Americans in wars abroad and at home.

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<sup>10</sup> By this I mean that most discussions (in literature and scholarship) of mixed-race identity focus on Indian-white, mixed-race identity, and black-white, mixed race identity.

Chapter 1 focuses on John Marrant's transformation as a result of his captivity by a Cherokee tribe. The text, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black (Now Going to Nova Scotia) Born in New York, in North America* was one of the most popular captivity narratives in America at the time of publication (1785), but lapsed into obscurity by 1835 (Montgomery 105). However, Gates's resuscitation of the work in *Signifying Monkey* (1988) renewed scholarly interest in it. Religious themes of rebirth and suffering suffuse Marrant's account of interacting with a Cherokee tribe; his absolute transformation as a result of his conversion and captivity and the incorporation of Cherokee dress, language and traditions make this narrative unique among other captivity narratives. Marrant has a dramatic conversion to Christianity at fourteen, runs away from home, meets and is captured by the Cherokee, then converts them to Christianity; they then become his allies in spreading the word of God. Then Marrant returns home, but has so completely and convincingly adopted the manner and dress of the Cherokee that he is unrecognizable even to his own family. In the interaction between Marrant and the Cherokee, both parties are affected permanently and absolutely by the other; the Cherokee are converted to Christianity and Marrant becomes in appearance like these Indians. Even though Marrant himself is not biologically mixed- race, I read his narrative as a clear example of "an emerging polyethnic American identity [and] an important document in the development of American culture as a whole" (Montgomery 105). Because Marrant is an African American connecting to Native tradition in belief and custom, the narrative and Marrant's costumed body act as Native-African American text. Passing and playing Indian, Marrant challenges nineteenth-century notions of what it means to look like an Indian, and what it means to look like an African American. If he could be so transformed by his dress that his own family could not recognize him, Marrant's tale makes a powerful statement

about definitions of race. The interplay between Native and African American in the character of Marrant in his *Narrative* also points to the symbolic intermixture that occurs between these two groups in a forming American nation. In this chapter, I explore this relationship using the costume he wears as a symbolic text through which to read his passing.

Chapter 2 explores the connections between Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) and Elizabeth Stoddard's *Temple House* (1867). Both writers and texts are centered in New York and Massachusetts, respectively, and both demonstrate a rootedness in maritime industry as a symbol of multiculturalism in America. In Melville and Stoddard's novels, Queequeg and Chloe (respectively) act in some capacity as African-Native characters negotiating the agency and confines that their racial identities afford them. Although most read Queequeg's homeland as the South Pacific Island of Fiji, he also works as "composite savage, an archetype of all the tribal peoples who might be found aboard whaleships" (Barsch 80). Throughout the text he is bestowed with attributes stereotypical of African, Polynesian, Islamic, Christian, savage, Native, and cannibal identities. And Queequeg's dark, tattooed body, the garments he dons, harpoon he carries, and the role he plays aboard the *Pequod* mark him as Other and allow him to move about in Melville's narrative as archetype and symbolic unifier for the Natives and Africans that he works alongside: Tashtego (Gay Head Island Native American), Dagoo (African), Pip and Old Fleece (African American). Using the research of Russel Lawrence Barsch that asserts that a large portion of seamen during the early 1800's, like those aboard the *Pequod*, were "actually Afro-Indian in ancestry" (Barsch 77), I explore Queequeg's characterization and duties to posit that he is both marginalized and empowered by his Otherness. As in the institution of slavery, the "subordinates" do possess power in the "masters'" dependence upon their labor and bodies.

Similarly, Elizabeth Stoddard's *Temple House* explores issues of freedom and agency through a multiracial character. Chloe, a servant to two of the families in the novel, is described as both "colored" and "Indian." Her father is black and her mother a Gay Head Indian. Unlike Queequeg, Chloe is an example of a character that exists in "either/or" terms in the novel, as her racial and cultural identity is not described in the language of hybridity; rather, she is either mild-mannered and Christian (black), or wild, angry, and disobedient of social norms (Indian). Once Chloe is removed to live in Temple House, the wildness and freedom she experiences as her Indian self is personified in the house itself, which also comes to symbolize the same freedom from (white) cultural norms. Like the Pequod, Temple House acts as a vessel containing a multicultural reality sometimes defining and sometimes at odds with the "American dream."

Chapter 3 examines William Faulkner's characterization of Sam Fathers in *Go Down, Moses* and the short story "A Justice." In the character of Fathers, Faulkner creates in his fiction someone who was not an uncommon reality in Northern Mississippi – the son of a Choctaw chief and his black slave. Sam Fathers is identified in *Go Down, Moses* and "A Justice" as somewhere in between African American and Native American. Although he has different fathers in the two texts (in *Go Down, Moses*, his father is a Chickasaw chief, and in "A Justice" his father is Choctaw), in both accounts Fathers is betrayed by his father, and raised and eventually sold as a slave. The physical descriptions of Fathers are, at best, problematic: Fathers "talked like a nigger [...] and his hair was nigger hair. But his skin wasn't quite the color of a light nigger and his nose and his mouth and his chin were not nigger nose and mouth and chin. [...] And he wouldn't jump up and go back to work when Mr. Stokes or even Grandfather came along" ("A Justice" 344). Sam Fathers is sometimes simple and monolithic, sometimes complicated; sometimes he is written as inferior to his white companions, while other times he is

wiser and more knowledgeable; at other times still he is described as primitive, then he is enlightened. In the end, however, Faulkner always manages to lapse into or at least engage some sort of stereotype – which makes his discussion of Fathers an even more interesting reflection of white attitudes toward black Indians. Sam Fathers’s unique perspective is that he has knowledge of nature and land that other characters do not. At the same time that these romanticized description of nature-worshipping Indians engage stereotypes, they also complicate Southern, black and Indian identity because of how Sam integrates knowledge from multiple racial and cultural sources.

In Chapter 4, I explore black Indian identity through the character of Milkman Dead in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. Though this text is traditionally read as an African American novel, focused on connections to African ancestors, the Native branches of Milkman’s family tree cannot be ignored. Obsessed with finding gold hidden in a cave in Virginia, Milkman travels south to the homeland of his ancestors. Once in Virginia, he slowly abandons the “costume” and symbols of his Eurocentric success: two hundred dollars, his glittery watch, Florsheim shoes, and new suit. Only when he is freed of these can he learn the truth that his relative Susan Byrd tells him: that his grandmother, Singing Bird, was Native American. Her name, shortened to “Sing,” also becomes the action through which he locates himself within this multidimensional family tree. By learning and then singing the song that children sing as a game, Milkman realizes that his quest was not for the gold after all, but for knowledge of his ancestors. The interaction between Milkman and Byrd reveals vestiges of the animosity and tension between African Americans and Native Americans as a result of the 1866 doctrines requiring Native Americans to adopt their slaves into tribal culture as terms of sovereignty. On his journey, Milkman is also offered an opportunity to connect with the land that held and supported his

ancestors, both African and Native American. In *Milkman*, Morrison expands Paul Gilroy's notion of a "black Atlantic" to a transatlantic reading of slavery that is both red *and* black. Morrison moves through Guitar's black nationalism and Macon Dead's (Milkman's father) materialism to a more wholistic conception of identity that does not ignore the complications of his Native and African heritage. Ultimately, however, Morrison does not identify Milkman as an African Native American; she identifies him as a black man, with Native heritage.

In Chapter 5, I assert that Leslie Marmon Silko extends Morrison's discussion of the black Indian by creating a character who does fully embody both African American and Native American cultural identities. Silko's character, Clinton, in her epic novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, explores the historical reality of Native American and African American contact through Clinton's educational radio broadcasts. Like Morrison, Silko aims to show this relationship in its complexity and violence. Clinton himself serves as a physical reminder of a complicated past, since he and the rest of his family had been "direct descendants of wealthy slave-owning Cherokee Indians" (Silko 415). Clinton is a Vietnam vet; his green beret, army uniform and disability further mark him as Other and provide a "mask" through which he can work to empower the disempowered. Clinton fully explores and embraces the duality of his identity by moving beyond binary definitions of race. Through Clinton and other characters, Silko outlines in details how revolts and uprisings throughout the histories of the Americas often involve collaboration between the groups. From Haiti, to the American South, to the black Seminoles in Mexico, Silko demonstrates how culture is anything but a one-way land bridge. Silko creates a tale of multiracial identity by keeping her narrative focused on Native ideology, while at the same time allowing for African ideology as "Native." This ideology involves moving beyond materialism (like that of Macon Dean Sr. and countless oppressors in *Almanac*) into a more

communal, land-based worldview. Silko (through Clinton) offers knowledge of the past as a key to successful revolution and reversal of the type of Eurocentric definitions of race that perpetuate opposition and conflict; she focuses instead on agency and willed uprisings to show how separate groups with individual histories and identities can still collectively work to overthrow dominant, oppressive ideologies. Clinton's cultural hybridity offers readers an understanding of American history similar to Gilroy's black Atlantic site of contact, but it moves beyond locating a geographic area. Clinton himself becomes this site of contact. In him, a history of the Americas is personified. Most significant in Silko's novel is her choice to have a man she identifies as a black Indian to be such an oracle.

The instances of contact, collaboration, and conflict between Africans and Native Americans in the Americas both before and after European contact reflect beyond any doubt the fact that the dramas and details of history cannot and do not occur in a vacuum. By connecting narratives of shared histories between Native and African Americans to the narratives the literatures reveal, I hope to show that these two groups constitute, both in isolation as well as in the crossing of their "national" and racial borders, an essential and often-ignored aspect of American identity. However, in my comparative discussion of this literature, I wish not to fall into the harmonious melting-pot metaphor attributed to multiculturalists by so many traditionalists on both the Left and Right, but neither do I wish to reside in the neat but altogether false divisions of ghettoized camps of literary study. Rather, my project aims to demonstrate how the dynamics of race, culture and American identity shift when two of America's most historically marginalized groups come together and manage from "the margins" to define American culture so indelibly. By choosing such multifaceted and varied texts, my answer is not neat. The characters that identify as or are identified as *both* African American and Native



American often find themselves on the losing end of both racial realities, but they just as often find that they can productively challenge attitudes toward race and perceptions about what it means to be American – if not for the other characters or their authors, at least for present and future readers.

## CHAPTER 2

### ASSUMING THE HABIT OF THE COUNTRY:

#### JOHN MARRANT'S *NARRATIVE* AND PLAYING INDIAN

John Marrant (1755-1791) was an African American evangelist and missionary, who published in his lifetime both his missionary journals and a narrative of his religious conversion and captivity by a tribe of Cherokee.<sup>11</sup> While the events of John Marrant's life, some described in his *Narrative* and some pieced together by scholars, paint a compelling image of a character engaged in multicultural and multinational exchanges and relationships, the most interesting and historically unique event in his life is his time spent among the Cherokee. As described in his narrative, Marrant converts to Christianity, befriends and then is held captive by the Cherokee, converts the tribe, then lives among them for several months. He returns home to his family, spiritually transformed and visually changed as he is dressed completely in the attire of the Cherokee. His description of the experience among the Cherokee is an illuminating account because of what it reflects about the formation of American identity during the eighteenth century, and because of the specific ways that it challenges and interrogates African American and Native American cultural and racial markers and masks informed by the notion of "America" at this time. The process through which Marrant comes into contact with the Cherokee and uses the Cherokee language and dress to signify his full conversion demonstrates the power of costume and masking. Through a close reading of the text, I will show how Marrant moves through the

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<sup>11</sup> For further discussion of Marrant's *Journal*'s publication and content, see Joanna Brooks's "John Marrant's *Journal*: Providence and Prophecy in the Eighteenth Century Atlantic" (1999).

Cherokee community he creates in his *Narrative*, the extent to which he forges a transformed and liberated self/character, and the extent to which he lapses into exoticization and mere passing.

John Marrant was born in 1755, into a free black family in New York (Potkay and Burr 67).<sup>12</sup> Around 1761, the family moved to Georgia – possibly due to the colony’s encouragement of free blacks to move south in order to “help stave off hostile incursions of neighboring Native American tribes” (Potkay and Burr 98). The family eventually settled in South Carolina, near Charleston (Potkay and Burr 67). Briefly, *A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black (Now Going to Nova-Scotia) Born in New-York, in North-America* (1789) recounts his adolescence, Christian conversion, and incidents of conversion he fostered and witnessed in others. At age eleven (before his conversion), he learned to play the French horn and violin; he became very proficient and by age thirteen worked as a musician for mostly white audiences (Marrant). Marrant writes that he was converted to Christianity, and abandoned music; his religious zeal made him an outsider to his community of friends and family. As he describes in his *Narrative*, Marrant then goes into the wilderness, befriends a Cherokee man, but is later held captive by the man’s tribal leaders. After eventually converting this tribe to Christianity, he spends about two years proselytizing to Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes, before returning to his family in the middle of 1772 (Marrant; Potkay and Burr 67-70). He then works as a minister in Charleston, alongside slaves at the Jenkins Plantation (1772-1775), and is impressed by the British army to fight in the Dutch-Anglo War in 1781 (Potkay and Burr 67-70). He travels to London and is ordained by a Methodist evangelical group in 1785, just before his arrival in Nova Scotia (Potkay and Burr 67-70).

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<sup>12</sup> Each reference to Marrant’s *Narrative* is to the fourth edition, as published in Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr’s *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas* (1995): 65-105. Earlier editions and other texts where his *Narrative* is collected are mentioned specifically, later in the chapter.

Marrant uses the Cherokee dress and language as a tool to achieve his freedom and gain converts to Christianity. But, to more fully understand Marrant's transformation, I would like to begin with the events that led him there. After his conversion, Marrant is cast out of his own family and community because of the perceived extremity of his religious conversion. Altered in more than just physical appearance, Marrant's religious convictions after his captivity reach beyond eighteenth century American confines of rationality; upon his return, he is ostracized by family and neighbors (Montgomery 109-110). The descriptions Marrant gives of his conversion are outside the conventional (white) confines of acceptable modes of communion with God and are perhaps more in keeping with African and Native American traditions. In *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (2003), Joanna Brooks argues that the American evangelical movement, of which Marrant was a part, provided a space for African Americans and Native Americans to "recycle and bind together" indigenous and African religious symbols and practices (10). In his first religious experience, Marrant was "Struck to the ground, and lay both speechless and senseless for near half an hour" (78). In Marrant's *Journal*, there are similar descriptions of the African, African American and Native American congregation he later led at Birchtown, Nova Scotia:

Those who were not struck down by the spirit were elevated and invigorated beyond the natural reach of sleep. Marrant frequently reports that worshippers stayed up until four and five in the morning, singing hymns, exclaiming praises, but refusing to return to their homes. [...] Marrant's report from Nova Scotia corroborates others from America and the Caribbean in documenting visions, trances, shouts, and "falling out" as elements of black worship. (Brooks 111)

Both Marrant's description of his conversion and the conversions of members of his congregation describe such profound and dramatic scenes. Marrant's conversion is so absolute that he at once refuses to continue to play the violin, even upon his sister's urging. His sister calls him "crazy" and tells all their neighbors as much, "which opened the mouths of all around against [him]" (Marrant 80). Thus he resolves to leave his sister's (who was his guardian) for Charleston to see his mother. At his mother's house, the family begins supper without asking blessing, which Marrant objects to because it offends him so profoundly. He recounts that they then

called me every name but that which was good. The more they persecuted me, the stronger I grow in grace. At length my mother turned against me also, and the neighbors joined her and there was not a friend to assist me, or that I could speak to; this made me earnest with God. (Marrant 80)

In the face of such adversity and opposition, Marrant grows stronger in his belief and resolve. His self-imposed status as outcast and outsider ultimately lead him to a position of great power and enlightenment in the narrative. In the tradition of the slave, captivity and conversion narratives, Marrant faces great hardship as a necessary obstacle on his path to self-discovery.<sup>13</sup>

Finding no fellowship among his family or community, John Marrant recalls that at age fourteen, one morning

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<sup>13</sup> In her Introduction to *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (1987), Marilyn Richardson writes of the African American conversion tradition as at once a political and spiritual realignment of faith. In Stewart's case, she "gave herself over to a secular ministry of political and religious witness" which made her a "warrior" for the cause of oppressed Black Americans (8). By 1831, her religious recommitment manifested itself in her speaking out "against, tyranny, victimization, and injustice as she felt them affecting her life, her community, and her nation" (8). Her writing "pronounced herself willing to place her faith at the service of social activism" in the cause for freedom (8). Richardson states that her "religious vision and her sociopolitical agenda were intrinsically bound together, defined one by the other [...] religion and social justice [were] closely allied" (9).

I took up a small pocket bible [sic] and one of Dr. Watt's hymn books, and passing by them went out without one word spoken by any of us. After spending some time in the fields, I was persuaded to go from home altogether. Accordingly, I went over the fence, about half a mile from our house, which divided the inhabited and cultivated parts of the country from the wilderness [...] [A]bout evening I began to be surrounded by wolves.

(81)

After four days without food and only a little water, he devours deer-grass and, declaring it the "best meal" he'd ever had, eats it "like a horse" (Marrant 81-82). Then, he prays for water and is directed to a puddle of muddy water "some wild pigs had just left" (Marrant 81-82). Abandoning the "civilized" rules of behavior, Marrant more intimately connects with God's will and grace and finds that he will be provided for among wolves and other "wild beasts of the forest" better than he is among non-believers (Marrant 82). Karen Chandler states that such descriptions of this part of Marrant's journey demonstrate how his narrative "implicitly faults" black southern society for its incapacity to foster Marrant's autonomy: "The God Marrant has discovered encourages his spiritual, psychical, and social freedom and empowerment" (Chandler 29). Also implicitly at fault is white southern society. Even though he was free, he lived in a racist society that often sought to limit his personal and civic freedom; in eighteenth century South Carolina many free blacks were forced to leave the state (Chandler 25, 31). Such conditions may also have contributed to Marrant's decision to leave "civilization" for the wilderness (my quotations; Chandler 31).

In the "wilderness" he comes upon an "Indian hunter" (Marrant 82). The hunter, who stood at first behind a tree, "bolted out and put his hands on my breast, which surprised [Marrant] a few moments" (Marrant 82). The Cherokee man's ambush of Marrant recalls attacks by Native

of whites in more conventional captivity narratives. However, Marrant's break with tradition is never more evident than here, as the man actually shows himself as a true guardian and teacher for the young black man. Apparently confused by Marrant's solitary walk in the woods and by overhearing him in conversation with God, the Cherokee man asks Marrant where he is going and to whom he is talking (Marrant 82). The man is surprised, but views Marrant's "beliefs neither 'crazy' nor 'mad' but consistent with [his] own sense of divine immanence" (Montgomery 110). Marrant's close communion with the divine surprises the Cherokee man, though such connection is in some ways not foreign to Native ideologies.<sup>14</sup>

Acting as an older guardian and showing himself as a neighbor, the man reveals that he knows Marrant's family, and offers to take him back home (Marrant 82). When Marrant refuses, he says he can stay with him if he agrees to help with the hunt (Marrant 82). As an act of cultural and familial adoption, the Cherokee hunter allows the boy to stay with him in the woods for ten weeks, during which time their tasks are "killing deer, and taking off skins by day, which we afterwards hung on trees to dry till they were sent for; the means of defense and security against our nocturnal enemies always took up the evenings" (Marrant 83). As a team united against newly common enemies of the forests, they

collected a number of large bushes, and placed them nearly in circular form, which united at the extremity, afforded [them] both verdant covering, and a sufficient shelter from the night dews [...] and this was [their] defense from the dreadful animals, whose whining eyes and tremendous roar [they] often saw and heard during the night. (Marrant 83)

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<sup>14</sup> Jace Weaver (Cherokee), while acknowledging great differences between tribes, states that most Native cultures do not recognize a "split between sacred and secular spheres" and stresses that in general Native worldviews remain "Essentially religious, involving the Native's deepest sense of self [...] existence, and identity" (28). Interestingly, and in contrast with Marrant's conversation with God, Weaver states that "Native religious traditions demonstrate no such interest in a relationship with ultimate reality" (31). In other words, the Creator would have no "different or special regard for human beings than with the rest of the created order" (Weaver 31).

Unlike narrative forms upon which Marrant's tale is modeled, the descriptions of his relationship with this man do not describe a solitary triumph over hardship or a singular recognition of one's own strength and courage. Rather, Marrant's descriptions here reflect common strivings – the work of one man and one boy, racially, visually different, but perhaps united by their belief in the power of nature and of divine providence.

One of the most significant steps Marrant takes in his assumption of Cherokee identity is his acquisition of the Cherokee language. In his meeting and travels with the Cherokee hunter, Marrant “emphasizes not the tension between them, but their comradeship and his acculturation to the hunter's way of life. Marrant conveys his union with the hunter by repeating the words ‘we’ and ‘our,’ thereby departing from a linguistic tendency to stress his singularity” (Chandler 31). And Marrant's knowledge of his language is an essential part of this union. He describes, “By constant conversation with the hunter, I acquired a fuller knowledge of the Indian tongue: This, together with the sweet communion I enjoyed with God, I have since considered as a preparation for the great trial I was soon after to pass through” (Marrant 83). Celia Naylor-Ojurongbe's discussion of Works Progress Administration interviews of former slaves of mixed African American and Native American descent proves useful here to examine the two men's discussion of language. Naylor-Ojurongbe writes, “Ex-slaves' abilities to communicate in Native languages symbolize an additional dimension of acculturation. Although representing a discernible marker of cultural identity, the use of language is not one limited to communication solely; language also embodies other aspects of culture, namely mores, values, oral history, and tradition” (Naylor-Ojurongbe 169). Thus Marrant uses his knowledge of the Cherokee language to gain knowledge of another culture, and thereby trust. In this partnership, Marrant “acquires



more control over his situation in the wild” and in his knowledge of the Cherokee language, a skill which will help “to enhance his standing among hostile Cherokees” (Chandler 31-32).

The young John Marrant and the man leave the woods at the end of their hunting season, to return to the Cherokee Nation (Marrant 84). At the entrance of the fortified town, the man assures Marrant that since he was with him, “nobody would interrupt [him]” (Marrant 84). However, upon meeting the guards of the “Indian fortification” Marrant was “surrounded by about fifty men, and carried to one of their principal chiefs and Judge to be examined by him” (Marrant 84). When he explained that he came with the hunter, the Judge declared his answer insufficient and sentenced him to death.<sup>15</sup>

When the judge heard Marrant speaking in Cherokee, he asked where he had learned it and who his Lord Jesus was; but, Marrant just continued praying for his life (Marrant 84). At this time, his behavior is dismissed just as it was by his family – as the ramblings of an irrational person. Awaiting his execution in a “dreary and dismal [...] dungeon” he prays and the space becomes his “chapel” where the Lord is with him (Marrant 84). His planned execution is to be exceptionally cruel. Marrant relays the process:

I was to be stripped naked and laid down on one side by the basket [of turpentine wood, stuck full of small pieces like skewers], and these sharp pegs were to be stuck into me, and then set on fire, and when they had burnt to my body, I was to be turned on the other side, and served in the same manner, and then to be taken by four men and thrown into the flame, which was to finish the execution. (Marrant 84-85)

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<sup>15</sup> No critical text explores the motive for such surprising and historically inaccurate hostility against Marrant. Aside from the religious allegory and conventions of the captivity narrative he is conforming to, the harsh sentence (if historically accurate at all) could be explained by the Cherokee animosity to freedmen during and beyond the eighteenth century over land rights and national sovereignty. Such tension is explored in texts such as Tiya Miles’s *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (2005) and Katja May’s *African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations, 1830’s and 1920’s: Collision and Collusion* (1996).

Potkay and Burr note that this type of execution is unique to practices of the Iroquois, not Cherokee, and appears throughout captivity narratives (100). We can only assume then that this part of the account is intended to comply with the genre of the captivity narrative, and make his captors seem more savage before their conversion. The dramatic convention works, when out of sheer terror, Marrant begins again to pray aloud:

the Lord impressed a strong desire in [him] to turn to their language, and pray in their tongue [...] which wonderfully affected the people. [...] I believe the executioner was savingly converted to God. He rose from his knees and, embracing me around the middle was unable to speak for about five minutes; the first words he expressed, when he had utterance, were, 'No man shall hurt thee till thou hast been to the king.' (Marrant 85)

Thus begins Marrant's career as preacher to the Native Americans of the southern United States. Among the Cherokee "Marrant transcends the sense of powerlessness that he felt in white society and with his family" (Chandler 33). With this executioner as his first convert, Marrant is taken next to the king, to whom he explains that his God made all people and heaven and earth; the king refuses to believe Marrant's claim (Marrant 86). Marrant explains, "I then pointed to the sun, and asked him who made the sun, and moon, and stars, and preserved them in their regular order; He said there was a man in their town that did it" (Marrant 86). The king, apparently unimpressed, insists on enforcing the sentence the next day. That night, as Marrant prays in his cell with the king's daughter and the Cherokee convert

the Lord appeared most lovely and glorious; the king himself was awakened and the others set at liberty. A great change took place among the people; the king's house became God's house; the soldiers were ordered away, and the poor condemned prisoner had perfect liberty, and was treated like a prince. [...] I remained nine weeks in the king's

palace. Praising God day and night. [...] I had assumed the habit of the country, and was dressed much like the king, and nothing was too good for me. The king would take off his golden ornaments, his chain and bracelets, like a child, if I objected to them, and lay them aside. Here I learned to speak their tongue in the highest stile [sic]. (Marrant 87)

Among the Cherokee, Marrant's God grants him more power than his black community did (Chandler 32). Marrant uses his knowledge of the language and his deep understanding of a more intimate and visceral communion with God to connect to and convert to this Cherokee community.

However, as Chandler points out, "Marrant does not simply act as a representative of white colonial culture and attempt to indoctrinate the Cherokees to its standard. He chooses to stay among the Cherokee for several months, presumably benefiting from a spirit of reciprocity that he has not portrayed in his family or the larger colonial society" (34). Marrant next decides to travel, with the companionship and good will of the Cherokee people, to a town sixty miles away in the Creek nation, where he stays five weeks; he then travels fifty miles to proselytize to the Choctaw, where he stays seven weeks; he then travels eighty miles to stay with the Chickasaw for another seven weeks (Marrant 88). He further explains the cultural and historical context of these visits:

These nations were at peace with each other, and I passed among them without danger, being recommended from one to the other. When they recollect that the white people drove them from the American shores, they are full of resentment. These nations have often united, and murdered all the white people in the back settlements which they could lay hold of, men, women, and children. I have no reason to believe that these three nations were savingly wrought upon, and therefore I returned to the Cherokee nation [...]

I continued with my old friends seven weeks and two days [before deciding to return home]. (Marrant 88)

Ultimately, Marrant does make a distinction between the civility of the Cherokee and the relatively “savage” practices of other tribes. The intellectual, moral and ethical superiority of the Cherokee is reinforced as a stereotype in Marrant’s writing just as it is in other (white) texts of the eighteenth century. Here, it seems, Marrant begins in his narrative to slip into easy and predictable patterns of descriptions of Natives.

Marrant’s bifurcated view of Cherokee civility in contrast to the Creek, Choctaw and Chickasaw he meets can be easily explained in light of Marrant’s agenda as an evangelical Christian. The drama of Marrant’s conversion of the Cherokee is further emphasized by contrasting them with the Other Indians. When Marrant prepares to return home, he is dressed in Cherokee clothes, as he had for two years. He has adopted the clothing of his Cherokee community, just as they had adopted him and his religion. He walks part of the way accompanied by Cherokee companions, then travels the rest of the route alone. When a family in a town along the walk home sees him they “were frightened, and ran away,” then a young girl “fainted,” and many others were “so terrified” (Marrant 88). In an attempt to explain such fear, Marrant describes for his readers:

My dress was purely in the Indian stile; the skins of wild beasts composed my garments; my head was set out in savage manner, with a long pendant down my back and a sash round my middle, without breeches, and a tomahawk by my side. (88)

Marrant’s characterization of his dress as Other, foreign and shocking continues as he comes to his family’s home: “I knock’d at my mother’s door, my sister opened, and was startled at my appearance [...] The singularity of my dress drew everybody’s eyes upon me, yet none knew

me” (Marrant 89). It is the combined assumptions that he has died, that his facial appearance has changed over the course of two years, and that he wears shockingly “savage” clothing that cause his community’s and family’s reactions. Celia Naylor-Ojurongbe asserts that for phenotypically black Americans living among Native communities, “clothing represent[s] one of the most viable signs of their cultural identification with Native Americans. Clothing [as historical document] often represents layers of cultural meaning and significance. It is not only a form of basic protection and adornment but also a form of self- and group expression” (166). This is true for Marrant, even though his group alignment to the Cherokee was temporary, and outside of his own racial identification. Despite his complete transformation, his youngest sister recognizes him and eventually convinces the rest of his family of his true identity. He returns to them and to the cultural identity of his African American community.

Philip Deloria’s description of white Americans dressing up as Native Americans in *Playing Indian* (1998) proves an especially illuminating text to interpret this incident in American literature. Although the specific incident that Deloria describes is the Boston Tea Party, his astute analysis of Americans’ “awkward tendency to define themselves by what they were not [and to] savor both civilized order and savage freedom at the same time” (3) so accurately describes the type of narrative practice in which Marrant is engaged, it is surprising that no other critical text aligns Marrant with Deloria’s theoretical model. While scholars like Chandler earnestly applaud Marrant for his ability to craft authorial and actual freedom – both in his relationship with the divine and with the Cherokee people and their language – she fails to note that Marrant’s descriptions of Native Americans engage blatantly in the same type Othering and exoticization as do white writers in this genre do. Though not as severe as the descriptions in Mary Rowlandson’s narrative (1682), Marrant’s Indians are still wildness “coded as freedom”

– they are “oppositional figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national self” (Deloria 3). And Marrant’s civilized self is indeed formed in opposition to the Indian’s severe execution practices and their initial dismissal of his God and his worship practice. The Indians, however, are eventually valorized once they are converted to Christianity. And the Indian culture (language and dress) are the only parts of Indianness that Marrant allows to be integrated into his identity – the aspects of Native ideology are ostensibly erased. Marrant uses the “costume” of the Cherokee to make material the power he has gained in his experience with them.

Deloria himself even touches on the connections between African American and Native American communities in the context of white colonization in his observations that both blackness and Indianness have been “an essential precondition for American whiteness” (5). In his description of costuming, he even briefly references “African-American Indian play – especially the carnivalesque revels of Mardi Gras” which follow “white practices to a degree, but it also stems from a different history of Afro-Caribbean cultural hybridity” (Deloria 7). While I’ll go into further details about Mardi Gras costuming traditions in Chapter 3, it is worth noting here that Deloria refers to a larger, more global practice of cultural exchange between African Americans and Native Americans. Such traditions, while rooted in shared histories, are also part of a universal desire to disguise one’s self:

Costume and disguise – especially when associated with holidays, rituals, or the concealing dark – can have extraordinary transformative qualities. Almost everyone has experienced the sense of personal liberation that attends the wearing of disguise, be it Halloween masks, cross-gender clothing, or garments signifying a racial, ethnic, or class category different from one’s own. Disguise readily calls the notion of fixed identity into

question. At the same time, however, wearing a mask also makes one self-conscious of a *real* “me” underneath. This simultaneous experience is both precarious and creative, and it can play a critical role in the way people construct new identities. (Deloria 6-7)

Marrant’s dress, fashioned out of the skins of “wild beasts,” does indeed allow him the agency and freedom to construct his own identity. In this garment, Marrant challenges the notion of fixed racial identity in the very transformative act of *being* a black free man in an Indian’s clothing. Definitions of race as a biological construct are shattered when friends, neighbors and his own blood-relations mistake him for a “savage” Cherokee. The power of the costume here is a potent mask that momentarily hides Marrant’s race and confuses his audience. Having simply donned the attire of the Cherokee, Marrant has (to the viewers) become an Indian. Hence, the line between race and culture is for a moment undeniably blurred, their very existence as static, namable and natural things are challenged. And this identity, albeit one forged in problematic language and contexts, stands as a testament to the multicultural reality of eighteenth-century America.

So what does Marrant do with the power gained from his physical, religious and cultural transformation? In the tradition of black conversion narratives, Marrant uses his newfound, culturally expanded spiritual knowledge to affect political change. As explained in Richardson’s Introduction to *Maria W. Stewart, America’s First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches* (1987), the African American conversion tradition was at once a political and spiritual realignment of faith. In Stewart’s case, she “gave herself over to a secular ministry of political and religious witness” which made her a “warrior” for the cause of oppressed black Americans (8). By 1831, Stewart’s religious recommitment manifested itself in her speaking out “against, tyranny, victimization, and injustice as she felt them affecting her life, her community, and her

nation [in such a way that she] pronounced herself willing to place her faith at the service of social activism” in the cause for freedom (Richardson 8). Marrant is a forerunner of this tradition that combines religious awakening with political activism and a fight for freedom. Thus, after his return to his family, Marrant goes to live with his brother, and work alongside him as a carpenter repairing the house on the Jenkins plantation near Charleston (Marrant 91). After being approached by some slave children from the plantation, Marrant began to organize meetings with children and adults to teach them about God and the Bible (Marrant 91). Mr. Jenkins was not opposed to this, but Mrs. Jenkins said it was the “ready way to have all his negroes ruin’d” (Marrant 91). Despite the Jenkins’s instruction to stop, the slaves continue their meetings. Marrant describes graphically the scene that ensues upon their capture:

[The] poor creatures [were] strip’d naked and tied, their heads and feet to a stake, their hands to the arm of a tree, and so severely flogged that the blood ran from their backs and sides to the floor, to make them promise they would leave off praying, &c. though several of them fainted away with pain and loss of blood, and lay upon the ground as dead for a considerable time after they were untied. (Marrant 91)<sup>16</sup>

This scene readily recalls the promised execution method of Marrant by his Cherokee captors. Both descriptions have the victims stripped naked, laid upon the ground and tortured with wooden instruments; both recall descriptions of Christ on the Cross. In contrast to the Cherokee men in the earlier description, here Marrant describes a white woman as the fiendish source of such abuse. In this example, Mrs. Jenkins (as the ostensibly civilized Christian) is no less savage than Marrant’s Cherokee captors. Herein lies another mask in this *Narrative* – that of the white Christian slaveholder.

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<sup>16</sup> This graphic description is unique to the fourth edition. Potkay and Burr speculate that it is because Marrant gained courage as subsequent editions were published, and escaped some of the control that his white editor and amanuensis, William Aldridge, may have had over content (this discussion is developed further on page 39).



Mrs. Jenkins tries to persuade her husband to beat Marrant, but he refuses to because “he was free” (Marrant 92). Marrant feels obligated to leave the plantation, and two months later Mrs. Jenkins dies. The meetings and prayer continue with Mr. Jenkins’ knowledge (Marrant 92). The extent to which Marrant’s teaching were truly rebellious is unclear; while he only explicitly states that the children learned to recite the Lord’s prayer, the anger and suspicion that this incited in Mrs. Jenkins makes me wonder if the the whites were also suspicious that they were being taught to read. In *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (2007), Heather Williams describes an enduring history of secret educational systems among slaves. She explains the power of such systems and the condition of their secrecy: “Because it most often happened in secret, the very act of learning to read and write subverted the master-slave relationship and created a private life for those who were owned by others. Once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom” (Williams 7). Although Marrant’s descriptions are vague in this regard, he leaves room for interpretation, when one considers the political context: he says only they had meetings, during which time he “instructed them,” and that they later met together after Marrant had left (91-92). Perhaps feeling pressure to walk a fine line as a free black man in a very racially hostile American South, Marrant meters his description of the Jenkins plantation as “neither pro-slavery or anti-slavery”<sup>17</sup> (May 562). By only describing education in terms of religious education, Marrant is careful not to advocate other forms of education for slaves, while at the same time undeniably advocating some form of freedom for them and condemning the type of harsh treatment slave owners like Mrs. Jenkins

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<sup>17</sup> The Countess of Huntingdon (Selina Shirley Hastings), his benefactor and leader of the branch of Calvinistic Methodism to which he belonged, owned slaves (May 562). Additionally, Potkay and Burr write in their introduction to Marrant’s *Narrative* how recently discovered documents reveal that he owned at least one slave.

would prefer to practice. Thus, he only insinuates that religious education can be used to subvert oppression (May 562-563). Marrant's hybrid identity as both hegemonic Christian and racial Other (made even more so by association with the Cherokee) does inform his subtly rebellious, egalitarian acts.

Marrant's *Narrative* ends, as the title announces, with his arrival in Birchtown, Nova Scotia, to lead a congregation composed of "ex-slaves expatriated during the Revolution," "black American loyalists, poor white persons, and Micmac Indians" (Gould 665; Chandler 35). The Birchtown population at that time was documented at about three thousand people and consisted more specifically of "freeborn, former indentured servants, and ex-slaves; they were African-Americans, Afro-Native Americans, black Britons, native Africans, and French-speaking West Indians; and their birthplaces ranged from Massachusetts to Georgia, Antigua, Grenada, Jamaica, Barbados, Montserrat, and Guinea" (Brooks 91). Birchtown was unconventional in that, unlike hegemonic white religious traditions of the eighteenth century, Birchtown's congregation did not rely on:

Dominant political discourses of the era as bases for their collective organization [...] they did not assume the "natural" or "self-evident" character of their societies. [...] Black Atlantic communities like Birchtown sought to redeem gross violence of enslavement, the confusion of diaspora, and the arbitrary imposition of race. [They] forged new common identities and envisioned new common destinies. They developed rituals of worship that dramatized the radical disruption and regeneration of their lives. (Brooks 88)

To add to this cultural diversity, some Birchtown families even retained their native female-led family structures (Brook 91). The multicultural nature of this congregation reflects the mixed

racial identities that Marrant had both embodied and then comes into contact with throughout his life. Birchtown also demonstrates Marrant's commitment to challenging traditional racial and ideological tenets, and acts as a geographical symbol of Marrant's multicultural and multiracial identities. Perhaps, too, Marrant's relocation to Birchtown with its history of tolerance and diversity offered him the physical distance he needed to break more profoundly with the white editor and amanuensis on previous editions of his *Narrative*, William Aldridge.

Aldridge (1737-1797) was a Methodist minister who trained at Countess Huntingdon's ministerial college in South Wales; he took full financial and editorial responsibility for the publication of the first three editions of Marrant's *Narrative* (Potkay and Burr 97). Although over forty-three imprints of Marrant's *Narrative* (some incomplete) exist, this fourth edition (discovered and published in 1995 by Potkay and Burr) is deemed "most complete" and most uniquely different because of evidence suggesting that Marrant himself commissioned its publication and made some additions to its content (Potkay and Burr 72). Potkay and Burr also assert that Aldridge's decision to abdicate responsibility for the publication of this edition as he did others suggests that Marrant's authorial control is greater here (Potkay and Burr 72-73). After decades of academic neglect, and fortified by the rediscovery of a uniquely different fourth edition of the text, Karen Chandler claims it is now a "signal text of the eighteenth-century black Atlantic" (20). Richard VanDerBeets asserts that Marrant's *Narrative* was one of the three most popular "Indian Captivity Narratives" (177). Its popularity during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America helped define the "will for freedom" and autonomy "central to black Atlantic writing" like that of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Frances E. W. Harper, and Charles Chesnutt (Chandler 34).

As suggested by the editorial decision of Potkay and Burr, and by comments by other Marrant scholars like Chandler, the fourth edition of the narrative may have proven to be even more of catalyst for other African American writers and thinkers of the early black Atlantic. Since this edition delves more deeply into issues of race and violence that existed in his life and in colonial South in general, it “reveals the ramifications of social inequity and the means by which black persons suffered, withstood or fought it” (Chandler 22). In this more personal account Marrant explores “his own and others’ personal freedom, rather than [only] the expectations of the middle-class Methodist church” (Chandler 22). Even though all editions made surprisingly and relatively little of Marrant’s identity as a black man,<sup>18</sup> the fourth edition does include more content dealing with race in its inclusion of descriptions of the Native American resentment over removal, and the negative descriptions of the treatment of slaves (Potkay and Burr 73). Other editions, however, give almost “no sense of how Marrant’s racial identity factors into a society stratified by race and class” and “do not offer a clear analysis of how, specifically, his identity as a black person intersects with a white colonial society intent on freeing itself while keeping African American enslaved” (Chandler 21). Somehow, a change in the relationship between Marrant and Aldridge allowed Marrant the freedom to author content changes that resulted in a narrative with more personal agency and more accurately reflected the racial climate of eighteenth-century America.

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<sup>18</sup> Rafia Zafar notes of editions published prior to the discovery of the fourth: “Virtually none of the narrative concerns issues of race or slavery [...] Only the title page identifies Marrant as a black; only the closing paragraph indicates his sentiments as a man of color” (29, 30). Marrant’s closing paragraph ends in a prayer that “the Indian tribes may stretch their hands to God; that the black nations may be made white in the blood of the Lamb; that the vast multitudes of hard tongues and strange speech, may learn the language of Canaan, and sing the song of Moses, and of the Lamb” (Marrant 95).

Aldridge's "Preface" to Marrant's *Narrative* echoes other apologies, explanations and verifications made by white men for women writers and writers of color.<sup>19</sup> Aldridge explains that Marrant's *Narrative* is "plain and artless as it is surprising and extraordinary" (Potkay and Burr 75). His patronizing explanations, however, do not end with comments about Marrant, as he states that "among the Cherokees [...] gross ignorance wore its rudest forms, and savage despotism exercised its most terrifying empire" (Potkay and Burr 75). Aldridge then humbly claims that he has "always preserved Mr. Marrant's ideas, tho' I could not his language; no more alteration, however, have been made, than were thought necessary" (qtd in Potkay and Burr 76). Much has been made of his claim. Readers and scholars alike wonder how much of the *Narrative* can be considered Marrant's and how much of it Aldridge's. Zafar argues that such oral narrators are not as powerless as scholars like John Sekora have suggested, because "the telling itself indicates a specific decision" (Zafar 27). Aldridge himself, aware of the incredulity of some of Marrant's story, verifies Marrant's character, the truth of the account and (perhaps the most important detail) that "God is with the subject of them" (Potkay and Burr 76).

Can Aldridge's assertion that Marrant's writing skills and grasp of the King's English were insufficient be seen as credible when we know that Marrant could "read and write well enough to keep his own journal" which was published in 1790? (Chandler 21). Still others assert that Marrant's writing skills at the time of the *Narrative*'s publication reflected the "black vernacular of his South Carolina upbringing [which] probably appealed to members of his congregation," but warranted alteration before being published for white readers (May 567). For

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Rowlandson's *Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) was introduced by an anonymous "friend" (almost certainly Increase Mather); Phillis Wheatley's 1773 collection of poetry is prefaced and attested to by seventeen well-known men of Boston; Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845) was introduced by William Lloyd Garrison; Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) was introduced and edited by Lydia Maria Child; Paul Lawrence Dunbar's *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896) was introduced by William Dean Howells.

the purposes of my analysis, however, the extent to which Aldridge altered Marrant's narrative serves only as an interesting lens through which to view how race, power and readership interact in eighteenth-century America. I agree with Philip Gould's assertions that, although the language of narratives like Marrant's is of "indeterminate origin," such "ambiguity of authorship" can be seen as "an enabling ambiguity of black language forged in the very act of literary collaboration" (Gould 663). Regardless of how much of Marrant's narrative was affected, or altered, by Aldridge, I assert that the events of the narrative (specifically, Marrant's interaction with the Cherokee) demonstrate Marrant's ability to negotiate and engage racial and cultural identities in a way that affords him more freedom and physical and spiritual agency than did the confines of his family life and the political, social and religious realities in the southern United States.

In terms of the *Narrative's* genre, Marrant's tale is classified and anthologized with slave narratives, and captivity and conversion narratives. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates asserts that although it is usually described as a slave narrative, it is an Indian captivity tale, a genre that was extraordinarily popular in the eighteenth century; Marrant's, in fact, was one of the most popular of this genre at the time of its publication (Gates 142). Since Gates, scholars have tried to emphasize the way the text does and does not conform to genre-specific conventions. The quintessential slave/conversion narratives of Quobna Ottobah Cugoana, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery Commerce of the Human Species* (1787), and *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustava Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* (1791) document both men's capture in Africa, conversion to Christianity and subsequent dedication to abolishing slavery (Potkay and Burr 126-127). While Marrant's *Narrative* does detail the cruelty of slavery in its description of the treatment of the slaves on the

Jenkins plantation, and make some of the same assertions about the salvation of Christianity and Western culture, Marrant's differs significantly from slave narratives in that he defies the racial and religious norms and codes of conduct upon which Cugoano and Equiano depend for narrative and theological consistency. Further, Marrant's *Narrative* also defies genre-codes of Indian captivity narratives in that half of his Cherokee encounter (his time spent with the hunter) does not classify as captivity. Captivity narrative told by white prisoners, like Rowlandson and John Smith, persistently and overtly demonize their captives as Other, and often as sub-human creatures. Perhaps most significantly, Marrant's *Narrative* differs from other (Puritan) captivity narratives in his refusal to advocate "a 'white' social and political hegemony" (Zafar 20). Gould agrees with Gates, but asserts that other anthologies that do include his *Narrative* place it with "Indian Captivity Narrative" even though in many ways it "actually inverts the moral geography of Indian captivity" (Gould 669).

Collections where Marrant's *Narrative* appears also reflect its slippery nature. At the time of this writing, Marrant's *Narrative* is published in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century* (edited by Vincent Carretta and published in 1996), and *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic* (edited by Carretta and Gould and published in 2001). Both of these collections include a variety of types of writing by black authors, from poets like Phyllis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon, to the slave narrative of Equiano, and captivity and conversion narratives (most strikingly similar to Marrant's) of Cugoano and Britton Hammon. In *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900* (edited by Philip S. Foner and Robert J. Branham and published in 1998), Marrant appears in print with famous black orators such as Frederick Douglass, Ida B Wells, Sojourner Truth, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, and W.E.B. Du Bois. Critical collections that address

Marrant's *Narrative* also demonstrate its complexity and the difficulty editors have in classifying it. Brooks and Cedric May read Marrant's *Narrative* as primarily a religious text, while Frank Suffleton's edited collection *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America* (1993) classifies it as a testament to a racially diverse early America. Major anthologies of American literature published by both Heath and Norton (even the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*) fail to include it in their collections.

Among other critical essays I refer to in my discussion, there is significant debate about how to classify this text in terms of genre, and which conventions it utilizes, alters, and signifies. I am most interested, like Chandler, Zafar, and Gould, in the ways that Marrant knowingly uses and alters a variety of genre-specific conventions in order to narrate a story that both reflects an awareness of racial prejudices and subtly attempts to defy them. However, even these scholars do not sufficiently take into account the way Marrant's specific and unique cultural and racial identities (a black man "passing" as an Indian) affect and inform his transformation, or the way he reflects American identity. The identity he constructs from this experience "is neither exclusively European nor African; it is also Native American" (Montgomery 110). The unique and significant difference with my claim is that I am looking at Marrant as a character and author who negotiates and combines Native culture and African American racial and cultural markers to transcend societal and spiritual limitations of his milieu. The *Narrative*'s resistance to easy classification is in itself a more subtle form of masking. Marrant's narrative relies upon the reader's easy familiarity with all these forms and genres, then subverts them by not conforming completely to any one tradition. The form, conventions, codes and symbols of the text itself resist and renegotiate the genre, in the same way that the content of Marrant's cultural conversion and masked performance collapse familiar perceptions of race and culture.



Marrant's *Narrative* both complicates and illuminates the ways in which race is defined in eighteenth-century America. Marrant passes into a mixed-cultural identity somewhere between African American and Native American in a way that foretells future literary and cultural tropes. His new identity after his journey from captivity blends "hunter, trader, and finally Indian scout" in a way that foresees Daniel Boone and Natty Bumppo (Montgomery 110). As a black man, who was never a slave, who lived and preached in the American South, and who wrote about living and working among the Cherokee, Marrant challenges strict and absolute preconceptions of how racially marked peoples negotiated space and freedom between and among themselves. Although Marrant's description of his encounter with the Cherokee relies heavily on conventions of the captivity narrative at the expense of relating an "accurate" tale, at times lapses predictably into the racist language of white authors, and is further complicated by the unknowable amount of control his white editor had over the text, if we read Marrant's *Narrative* with the fully aware knowledge of all its contexts, it can serve as a valuable tool to greater understanding of American identity. The power of an individual body to costume itself and pass into and out of another cultural identity, and to change and be changed by another culture, demonstrates undeniably how arbitrary and powerful visual appearance is in the construction of race – and how much agency one is granted with the skillful use of such masks.

### CHAPTER 3

#### DOMESTICATED SAVAGERY: BLACKNESS AND INDIGENEITY IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S *MOBY-DICK* AND ELIZABETH STODDARD'S *TEMPLE HOUSE*

On September 18, 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law was passed by the United States Congress. This law strengthened an earlier act passed in 1793 by making explicit the fines and punishments white Northerners would face by harboring or in any way assisting slaves who had escaped to the North. In essence, this law expanded slavery, since it made individuals in free-states accountable for enforcing slavery. Though many northern abolitionists refused to act as agents of slavery, and continued to speak out against the injustice, the tension and conflict brought about by this law would, in part, bring about the American civil war eleven years later. When South Carolina seceded from the Union in December 1860, its state government listed among its complaints the Northern states' inability to abide by the Fugitive Slave Law and protect state property (slaves). These national tensions inspired many nineteenth-century American writers to create texts that explain how human lives were affected by racial violence. In their texts, writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, Walt Whitman, and Harriet Jacobs explicitly address slavery, or the Civil War, and its aftermath; others, while not explicitly naming the particulars of the conflict, constructed allegorical narratives influenced by the division of the nation over the issue of personal freedom. Writers like Emily Dickinson and Nathaniel Hawthorne addressed issues inherent in this period of our nation's history by more generally exploring themes like self and Other dynamics, and insider and outsider dichotomies. The latter group could also count among its members Herman Melville, and a much lesser-

known writer, Elizabeth Stoddard. Both writers lived around roughly the same time in American history (Melville lived between 1819-1891, and Stoddard between 1823-1902), and both spent most of their lives in either New York City or Massachusetts. While today Melville's texts enjoy much more commercial and critical attention than do Stoddard's, at the time that they were writing, both authors' works suffered at some point from their inability to fit within popularly acceptable modes of writing. I assert, as others certainly have, that Melville's narrative serves as allegory for the racial tensions that existed in the country during the time that he was writing.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, I see Queequeg as a character of paramount importance as a symbol of multiracial composition of the whaling industry, and as a racial composite in general – embodying stereotypes of both black and indigenous peoples. Chloe, in Stoddard's *Temple House*, proves an illuminating character to compare to Queequeg because of the similar settings, and because of the contrasting ways that the two develop their multiple identities. While Queequeg remains a complex composite of shifting and multiple identities, Chloe's characterization is more bifurcated and indicative of the stricter moral and cultural codes of conduct that exist in her domestic milieu.

Herman Melville was born to a once-prosperous family in New York City in 1819; by the time he was ready to attend college, his father was in poor health and could scarce afford tuition. Drawn to the water at a young age, Melville worked on the Erie canal as a cabin boy aboard a New York ship set for Liverpool, and finally on a whaler out of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, called the *Acushnet*. This voyage took him to the South Pacific, an experience which inspired later writing. He published his first novels *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847); both showed some commercial promise. In 1847, he married Elizabeth Shaw, daughter of prominent Massachusetts

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<sup>20</sup>Michael Paul Rogin, in *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (1983), outlines some of the readings of Melville's texts as racial and political allegory.

Supreme Court judge,<sup>21</sup> and they moved to a western Massachusetts farm. Melville struggled to make ends meet with his writing, and had to borrow often from his wife's family. When *Moby-Dick* was published in 1851, it was not a financial success, and was met with mixed (by best accounts) reviews (Parker 277-283). *Moby-Dick* is narrated by Ishmael, an emotional and naïve, but well-meaning young man, who seeks employment aboard a whaling ship. Prior to being hired as a crew member, he rents a room in town and find his roommate, Queequeg, and his "pagan" and "savage" practices to be frightening. Despite vast cultural differences, Ishmael and Queequeg become friends before being hired by Quakers (Bildad and Peleg) aboard the *Pequod* (named after the Native American tribe). They depart on Christmas Day, and once they reach warm waters, Ahab (the ship's monomaniacal captain) reveals his true purpose: to find Moby-Dick. Ahab (and eventually the crew) perceives the albino whale as a creature that is at once sublime, evil and supernatural. Ahab's secret crew emerges, led by Fedallah, who has prophetic abilities. On their hunt, many calamities befall the crew: Queequeg narrowly saves Tashtego (a Gay-Head Indian) from nearly drowning in the head of a slaughtered whale; as a result Queequeg falls ill and nearly dies, but not before his casket is made; Starbuck (first mate) sees an electrical storm as a bad omen and considers killing Ahab; ships are encountered that tell of tragic encounters with Moby-Dick, and foretell doom. On the final day of the hunt, Ahab himself goes out with harpoon boats; the whale brings Ahab and the entire *Pequod* down into a vortex. Miraculously, Ishmael survives by staying afloat on Queequeg's coffin. He alone survives to tell the story.

Elizabeth Stoddard's work allegorically addresses the racial and political climate in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. She also relies upon the historical reality of

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<sup>21</sup> Melville's father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, established a separate but equal doctrine in an 1849 Massachusetts Supreme Court Decision, and upheld the Fugitive Slave Law in an 1851 Massachusetts Supreme Court Decision.

African-Native populations in New England during this time, and the historical reality of the multiracial nature of maritime commerce. Elizabeth Stoddard was born and raised in Mattapoisett, Massachusetts, a fishing community; her father was a successful shipbuilder there (Zagarell 22). Mattapoisett was a “major shipbuilding center whose prosperity was inextricably tied to the vagaries of the whaling industry” (Weinauer and Smith 1). In fact, the *Acushnet*, “the whaler on which Herman Melville shipped in 1841 and which he later immortalized as the *Pequod*, was launched in 1840 from a Barstow yard in Mattapoisett” (Weinauer and Smith 1). After the death of her sister and mother in 1848 and 1849, Stoddard left home to study literature, and in 1851 became part of New York literati, where she met poet Richard Stoddard, whom she would later marry (Zagarell 23-24). Stoddard biographer and critic Zagarell notes that, while she did not fit the model of a proper nineteenth-century woman, her writing was “distinctly American – an idiosyncratic and highly charged New England regionalism” (21). She committed herself in her writing to strikingly contemporary ideals: “sexuality, self-expression, and a quest for agency” (Zagarell 22). Zagarell notes Stoddard’s idiosyncratic tendencies and contemporary worldview: “Elizabeth Stoddard was daring and original; she was outspoken on behalf of women’s rights to self-realization, if sometimes personally quite unsisterly; but she was also profoundly narcissistic and often handicapped by a deep need for personal and literary admiration” (22). Stoddard published three novels during her lifetime: *The Morgensons* (1862), *Two Men* (1865), and *Temple House* (1867). Neither her novels nor her short prose found a substantial audience (Zagarell 27). Of these, *Temple House* proves the most interesting in its discussion of race, and offers a suggestive and illuminating comparison with Melville’s *Moby-Dick* because of the parallel presence of the black Indian characters in similar historical periods

in American history (immediately before and after the Civil War), but completely different social milieus.

*Temple House* begins with the life of Argus Gates, a retired ship captain, comes to inherit the large, decrepit Temple House from an unknown relative. The house is located in Kent, a fishing village, and despite its disrepair, Argus and his wife decide to make it their home. Unexpectedly, she dies only several years after their marriage, while Argus is away at sea. He returns home, and decides to stay on there in solitude. Decades later, Argus learns from a friend that his long-lost brother, George, lives in a nearby town, and is in financial trouble. Argus takes into his home his brother and his family (wife Roxalana and young daughter Tempe, called Tempe). George drains Argus of what little money he has and abandons his family. Argus, Roxalana and Tempe live a quiet, frugal, and unconventional life together until Tempe decides to marry a young man of Kent, John Drake, for his money. John dies only months after the marriage, Tempe moves back home, to give birth to their son, George Gates. The Gates household continues to grow: they take in a shipwrecked “Spaniard” named Sebastian, and Chloe, a black Indian servant seeking refuge from an abusive family. As the novel continues cataloging domestic events and dramas, Argus decides he loves one of Tempe’s childhood friends, Virginia, and proposes marriage to her. After a flurry of unexpected and impulsive declarations of love, the novel’s open-ended final lines suggest that Argus will marry Virginia, and Tempe will marry Sebastian. The final lines of the novel are simply: “we shall carry on Temple House” (Stoddard 333).

None of Stoddard’s three novels achieved “anything like popularity in her lifetime,” but *Temple House* “seems to have suffered particularly acute neglect” (Weinauer 232). Before 2002, when a comprehensive collection on Stoddard’s work was published, *American Culture, Canons,*

and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard, the *MLA Bibliography* contained no work even referring to *Temple House*, and only scant reference to her other two novels (Weinauer 233).<sup>22</sup> Critics now note that its absence from academic and popular culture media is due in large part to the fact that “Elizabeth Stoddard’s work has always eluded prevailing paradigms” (Zagarell 32). In this aforementioned collection, Ellen Weinauer writes that “one of the consistencies we can recognize in responses to and assessments of *Temple House*, whether in Stoddard’s day or in our own, is the *absence* of any reference to the immediate post-Civil War context in which the book was written and published” (234). Despite the lack of substantive or explicit reference to Civil-War era national issues in Stoddard’s *Temple House*, many critics, myself included, assert that Stoddard’s novel can most certainly be critically read in light of issues of race, slavery and freedom that preoccupied pre-Civil War audiences and artists. Jennifer Putzi, another contributor to the collection *American Culture, Canons, and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard*, observes that prior to its publication, despite the fact that *Temple House* was written at the precise moment that the Civil War battles were being fought, “no one [else] has attempted to read any of these novels as responses to the war or related issues” (Putzi 183). In Stoddard’s *Temple House*, Chloe is a character that deserves more critical attention in the study of race in American literature. I am especially interested in Stoddard’s construction of the character of Chloe because of the role that the dual disenfranchisement of both Native Americans and African Americans played in the formation and commercial success of the American nation state. In her depiction of Chloe, Stoddard brings to the forefront the prevalence of mixed Native-African American communities in New England at this time. In this chapter, I will compare the way that both Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and Elizabeth Stoddard’s *Temple House* depict this particular

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<sup>22</sup> To date, *American Culture, Canons, and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard* (2002) is the only comprehensive collection of critical essay on Stoddard’s work.

racial and cultural intersection. Both novels portray America's pre-War and Civil War era preoccupation with the dichotomy between self and Other, and freedom and slavery, and the often arbitrary and racist means by which cultural and personal identities are created and defined. They do this most interestingly through their exploration of black indigenous characters of Queequeg and Chloe.

One example of this preoccupation with racial definitions is in the language Ishmael uses to describe Queequeg. In *Moby-Dick*, Queequeg is described as "pagan," "cannibal" and "savage" throughout. Most critical accounts of Queequeg's origins are based on research by Geoffrey Sanborn that asserts that Melville based Queequeg on indigenous New Zealand tribes (228). Others attest to Melville's travels in the South Pacific as sufficient historical basis for the character of Queequeg (Parker and Hayford 26). However, still others view Queequeg's racial identity as more composite, less monolithic. In *Ruthless Democracy: A Multicultural Interpretation of the American Renaissance* (2000), Timothy Powell admits "Queequeg's cultural identity is more difficult to construct" than other crew members' (164). Further, Russel Lawrence Barsh, in his essay in *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (2002), states that despite popular perceptions of Queequeg as a "Pacific savage," he is actually a "composite savage, an archetype of all of the tribal peoples who might be found aboard whaleships" (79, 80). Indeed, Ishmael's version of Queequeg's relation of his origins is minimal and vague: "Queequeg was a native of Kokovolo, an island far away to the West and South. It is not down in any map; true places never are" (Melville 59). This ambiguity surrounding Queequeg's racial identity and native land provides a valuable opportunity to examine race, how it is defined in the character of Queequeg, and what implications such



slippery descriptions have. To this end, I will examine Queequeg as “a racial composite” of tribal peoples, at once a Nativist and Africanist character.<sup>23</sup>

My reading here rests on the research put forth by Barsch in “‘Colored’ Seamen in the New England Whaling Industry: An Afro-Indian Consortium,” which asserts that “[t]he whaling industry provides an ideal environment for exploring cooperation and competition among Whites, Blacks, and Indians [because the] four largest whaling centers of New England – Nantucket Island, New Bedford, New London, and Sag Harbor – were all located near large communities of Indians and African American freedmen” (Barsch 77). Intermarriage between blacks and New England Indian tribes was widespread, but because of the “racist conceptualization” of race and culture, “an Afro-Indian could not be genuinely Indian [and] the Long Island Indian was a thing of the past” (Barsch 80). So, not only had intermarriage with African Americans “disappeared” Native tribes, a similarly racist stereotype figured whalers as “national archetype [and] fundamentally *White* [...] with Tonto-like Indian sidekicks” (Barsch 77). Queequeg and the other non-White crew members certainly do act as sidekicks to the heroes Ahab and even Ishmael, as sole-survivor of the whale’s revenge. Barsch’s description of Queequeg draws attention to the way he is figured as Other, against white cultural norms:

Queequeg sports blue facial tattoos, smokes a long-stemmed pipe, wears a beaded poncho, brandishes a tomahawk, and sells shrunken heads on the New Bedford wharves.

Inscrutable and monosyllabic to the end, he is the master harpooner aboard the Pequod, a whaleship named for the tribe that in Melville’s time lived in Stonington, Connecticut, a

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<sup>23</sup> I will rely on the theoretical framework that Morrison develops in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the American Literary Imagination* (1992) by similarly using her term “Africanist” to explore similarly constructed “Nativist” descriptions. Morrison’s term “Africanist” refers to the “denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people. [American Africanism] provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanics for testing the problems and blessings of freedom” (Morrison, *Playing* 6-7). She further states that “Africanism, deployed as rawness and savagery, [...] provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity” (Morrison, *Playing* 44).

few miles east of New Bedford, and produced a score of seamen and whalemens. (Barsch 80)

When Ishmael first sees his roommate and future “comrade” he is truly frightened: “good heaven! What a sight! Such a face! It was of a dark purplish, yellow color, here and there stuck over with large, blackish looking squares” (Melville 34). Queequeg enters after Ishmael has already started to settle himself; Queequeg does not notice Ishmael, who is hiding in the corner, gazing upon his exoticized subject.

So shocked at the sight of Queequeg’s darkness and foreign markings, so completely outside his own cultural norms, that Ishmael convinces himself that the facial tattoos are bandages. Still unwilling to believe that a man could actually have skin this dark, he convinces himself Queequeg is a white man who had been captured by cannibals and tattooed, and tanned by the sun (Melville 34). In relief, he admits, “after all! It’s only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin” (Melville 34). Once Queequeg undresses and removes his “beaver-cap” and heavy overcoat, and Ishmael sees that his whole body is the same dark purple-black skin, he realizes the “truth”: his roommate for the night is

some abominable savage or other shipped aboard of a whalman in the South Seas, and so landed in this Christian country. I quaked to think of it. A Peddler of heads too – perhaps the head of his own brothers. He might take a fancy to mine – heavens! Look at that tomahawk! (Melville 34-35)

The shocking darkness of Queequeg’s skin contributes to the Africanist elements of his characterization. To add to Ishmael’s surprise, as he continues to hide in the corner of the room, Queequeg then removes a small wooden idol from his coat pocket and proceeds to make offerings to it. Ishmael observes: “he made a polite offer to the little negro” (Melville 35).

Finally, Queequeg realizes Ishmael is in the room and is understandably frightened. His tomahawk-pipe frightens Ishmael even further and they both start shouting; the landlord comes in and calms both of them down. Once calm, Queequeg motions for Ishmael to get in bed, and Ishmael notes:

For all his tattooings he really was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal.

What's all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself – the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him.

Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian. (Melville 36)

As he does earlier in the same scene, Ishmael has to talk himself down from his fear at a person so foreign to him, so dark in contrast to his white skin. The “fear and longing” conjured by the “dark and abiding” presence of Queequeg is part of his Africanist characterization (Morrison, *Playing* 33).

As the two become closer, Queequeg's foreignness to Ishmael diminishes somewhat. However, his descriptions of Queequeg continue to be drenched in stereotype. Here, Ishmael imparts to Queequeg's character certain nobility:

Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes, fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a thousand devils. [...] He looked like a man who had never cringed and never had a creditor. [H]is head was phrenologically an excellent one. [...] Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed. (Melville 55)

In this noble savage depiction, Queequeg's body is read as a text that contains all the world's great mysteries. The great awe-inspiring mystery that Queequeg's body symbolizes is again described after Queequeg recovers from grave illness aboard the *Pequod*. His coffin is made in

anticipation of his death, but when he recovers, he curiously spends many hours making elaborate carvings on the lid to the coffin:

it seemed thereby that he was striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on his body. And his tattooing, had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and the mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last. (Melville 366-367)

This “fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American” is a fundamental aspect of Queequeg’s characterization as both Nativist and Africanist (Morrison, *Playing* 38). In the final assessment of Queequeg he is romanticized, and made mysterious and wise.

Indeed, throughout the novel, references to indigenous and tribal cultures exoticize or make mysterious and “dark” the spaces that they mark. Ishmael reminds the reader of the namesake of the whaling ship itself: the *Pequod*, “you will no doubt remember, was the name of a celebrated tribe of Massachusetts Indians, now extinct as the ancient Medes” (Melville 69). While Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, in the footnote to their Norton critical edition, assert that “The Pequods were not extinct, but had been nearly annihilated in 1637,” it is unclear whether it is Melville or Ishmael who is misinformed (69); regardless, Melville and Ishmael’s commentary here contributes another line in American literature to the myth of the vanishing

Indian. Melville's description of the harpooner Tashtego, squire to Stubb (the 2nd mate), is part of this vanishing (but not yet vanished) Indian motif:

[Tashtego is] an unmixed Indian from Gay Head, the most westerly promontory of Martha's Vineyard, where there still exists the last remnant of a village of red men, which has long supplied the neighboring island of Nantucket with many of her most daring harpooners. In the fishery, they usually go by the generic name of Gay-Headers.

Tashtego's long, lean, sable hair, his high cheek bones, and black rounding eyes – for an Indian, Oriental in their largeness, but Antarctic in their glittering expression – all this sufficiently proclaimed him an inheritor of the unvitiated blood of those proud warrior hunters, who, in quest of the great New England moose, had scoured, bow in hand, the aboriginal forests of the main. [...] To look at [his lithe snaky limbs, you would [...] half believed this wild Indian to be a son of the Prince of the Powers of the Air. (Melville 106)

From Ishmael's retelling of a Native origin story (how the "red-men" founded Nantucket) to his comparison of the ship's ropes to "the top-knot on some old Pottowottamie Sachem's head" the text is full of Nativist descriptions (Melville 69, 70).

Melville similarly includes depictions of Africans and African Americans. Indeed, the skeleton of a whale is described as an "Afric Temple" in which whalers or readers could "silently worship" (Melville 351). Dagoo, another harpooner and squire to Flask, is African and described as "a gigantic, coal-black negro-savage, with a lion-like tread [...] Dagoo retained all his barbaric virtues, and erect as a giraffe, moved about the decks in all the pomp of six feet five in his socks" (Melville 106-107). One African American character, Pip (referred to by Ishmael as the "Poor Alabama boy!") is a cabin boy who speaks in heavy dialect and initially acts as Ahab's jester, then after a near drowning seems mad and prophetic (Melville 107, 319). After

they pull him from the water, Stubb reminds him that a whale would be worth thirty times what he would be on slave market (Melville 321). The acknowledgment that slavery is alive and well in much of the United States is not lost on Pip. Ishmael's perceptions of black Americans rely upon stereotypes of them as lazy and simple: "For blacks, the year's calendar should show naught but three hundred sixty five Fourth of Julys and New Year's Days" (Melville 319). He quickly recants, though, then tries to elevate the race with a reference to blackness in the natural world as a thing of great beauty: "this little black was brilliant, for even blackness has its brilliancy; behold yon lustrous ebony, paneled in king's cabinets" (Melville 319). This comparison parallels the way that whiteness is described in the whale, as something that typically signifies goodness and purity, but in the albino whale signifies terror, evil and doom.<sup>24</sup> Melville offers a similar inversion of a cultural norm in Ishmael's pondering by suggesting that there is, perhaps, nothing natural or inherently good or evil, superior or inferior in blackness or whiteness. Humans alone construct and impart these qualities and attributes, "formed in fright" (Morrison, "Unspeakable" 18).

The multicultural crew aboard the *Pequod* is certainly not limited to African and Native. Historically, whaling ships were made up of a racially mixed group of men, most commonly "White, Blacks and Indians" (Barsch 77). This industry provides an instance to explore how both inequalities based on race and equality despite racism played out on board ships like Melville's *Pequod*. Barsch reports that "Working conditions for seamen were particularly miserable in the New England whaling industry, but all crew members regardless of color

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<sup>24</sup> As the hunt progresses, the crew envisions the whale as something evil and foreboding; superstitions about the crew's fate abound. Their fear is described as "unborrowed from anything that visibly appears" and the "incarnation" of all "malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them" (Melville 153, 156). Ishmael notes that in many things whiteness "enhances beauty, as if imparting some special virtue...giving the white man ideal mastership over every ducky tribe"; he even lists cultural practices from indigenous American to European and Asian beliefs that demonstrate whiteness as good and sacred (Melville 159-160). However, Ishmael admits that in the whale, "[whiteness] appalled me" in the same way that an albino man "repels and shocks" (Melville 159, 161).

received equal shares in profit at the end of a voyage” (Barsch 77). Despite the equality of pay, the hierarchy on Melville’s *Pequod* dictates that workers of color have the most difficult and dangerous tasks; meaning in essence that the pay is “equal” but fair because it is not based on difficulty or dangerousness of the task or training required to perform one’s job. For instance, the harpooners’s work was the most dangerous and, arguably, required the most skill and training; on the *Pequod*, those roles belonged to Queequeg, Dagoo (African), and Tashtego (Gay Head Indian). Flask literally stands on Dagoo’s shoulders; Tashtego nearly drowns after being ordered to go into the head of a slaughtered sperm whale to retrieve the valuable spermacetti. What may seem like a multicultural, egalitarian ship really just exhibits hierarchies seen on land: non-white characters perform more dangerous and dirty jobs, and white characters and industry are still dependent upon them for their livelihood and profit. Morrison notes, “On the *Pequod* the multiracial, mainly foreign, proletariat is at work to produce a commodity, but it diverted and converted from that labor to Ahab’s more significant intellectual quest” (“Unspeakable” 16).

Melville (through Ishmael) ponders the multicultural reality of the whaling industry early in the novel:

at the present day not one in two of the many thousand men before the mast employed in the American whale fishery, are American born, though pretty nearly all the officers are. Herein it is the same with the American whale fishery as with the American army and military and merchant navies, and the engineering forces employed in the construction of the American canals and Railroads. The same, I say, because in all these cases the native American liberally provides the brains, the rest of the world as generously supplying the muscles. (107)

Here, the whaling industry is seen not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a larger system based on racism and the exploitation of non-white European Americans. Despite the historical context and political reality of the ostensibly multicultural, egalitarian crew, Melville insists in some degree of romanticization of the *Pequod's* men:

They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things – oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp – yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord did point to. [The ship was a hearse whose] wood could only be American" (415, 426).

This multicultural vessel, representative of a stratified and racist systems of industry, "allowed the United States to dominate the world market in whaling throughout much of the nineteenth century" (Powell 168). Indeed, it was a system that was peculiarly American.

Elizabeth Stoddard's *Temple House* similarly uses ship imagery and maritime industry as tropes to comment on the nature of race, power and freedom in mid-nineteenth century American culture. Argus Gates is a former ship captain, and his friend, neighbor and former first mate, Mat Sutcliffe, refers to Argus as a man who has "played maroon so long in his wreck [Temple House], that he has forgotten his relation to human beings; Mat says he "should like to split open the twirls of his heart with a marlinespike" (Stoddard 43). Throughout the novel, Temple House is described as a ship or shipwreck, or a ruin engulfed in rising sea water:

At sunset the atmosphere was spongy and rotten. Masses of vapor rolled up from the south, extinguishing a pale brassy band of light in the west; and a strange wind rose in the



upper air, and closed with night. Early in the evening Argus shook the iron bars of the shutters on the harbor side, and fastened them; he foresaw the storm, and would have shut out its fury for Roxalana's sake, who appeared perturbed and melancholy as if disasters at sea were threatened. (Stoddard 81)

Here, the house itself appears in danger of being taken in by the sea's brewing storm; Argus fastens the window as he would prepare a ship for rough weather. As a space that affords relative freedom for its inhabitants, and as a place that offers some release from conventional nineteenth century racist institutions for two of its non-white inhabitants, Chloe and Sebastian, the house itself serves as an important symbol throughout the novel. In this way, Stoddard's Temple House (the structure) becomes a multicultural vessel in ways that echo Melville's *Pequod*. In *Temple House*, however, perhaps more important than the ship imagery is the way that Stoddard uses home and domestic relationships and hierarchies to comment on race, freedom and slavery. Stoddard's use of the rhetoric of home and family to explore current issues of freedom and nation show her "embeddedness within the conventions of war-decade discourse, and to the novel's engagement of prewar, wartime, and postwar discourses of the nation" (Weinauer 238).<sup>25</sup> Regardless of the fact that "*Temple House* makes few references to historical events of any sort and no reference at all to slavery, the Civil War, or Reconstruction," Weinauer maintains that it is "a meditation on two of the most dynamic, urgent, and intricately connected issues of the postwar period: the meaning of freedom and the nature of national membership" (234, 235). Weinauer points out that the novel, which would appear to be a mere "story of friendship, desire, and social conventionalism" was

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<sup>25</sup> Weinauer references Abraham Lincoln's use of the phrase "house divided against itself cannot stand" in an 1858 speech to the Republican National Convention, and Frederick Douglass's use of the term the "great national family" (238).

Written in the wake of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment (1865) and the Civil Rights Act (1866), and amidst debates about the Fourteenth Amendment (passed by Congress in June 1866) – each of which worked to control and contain the ‘content’ of ‘freedom’ and to negotiate expanding definitions of U.S. citizenship – *Temple House* itself explores freedom’s content and the kind of (national) family that can be established on freedom’s foundation. (Weinauer 235)

This historical context provides a new lens through which to study Stoddard’s work. I will base my study of *Temple House* on Weinauer’s assertion that the novel should be read with these historical contexts in mind; however, I will focus more specifically than she does on the significance of mixed African American-Native American racial and cultural identities.

I will return to this idea of the house acting as a refuge and a relatively egalitarian system of domesticity later, but first I would like explain more fully how Chloe’s actions, and her racial and cultural identities, are described. Chloe initially works for Cyrus Brande, whose daughter, Virginia, is Tempe Gates’s childhood friend. Chloe is first introduced in the novel when Argus pays a visit to the Brandes’ house. Here, Stoddard describes her only as “a colored member of the family” (Stoddard 65). This description as “colored” indicates she is considered more black than Native, as so far in the novel Stoddard has not revealed to the reader that her “mother was a Gay Head Indian” (Stoddard 78). Further, throughout the novel, her speech is a black vernacular typical of nineteenth-century literature. When Mr. Brande asks his daughter if she spends much time at Temple House (an act he disapproves of) Chloe interjects to protect Virginia: “Not o’ nights, certain [...] I’m a sinner if she ain’t a-waitin’ too much on the missis for many visits” (Stoddard 67). By the time Chloe confides in Virginia that she’s “half Indian too” it is done as a way to “excuse [her] bad blood” (Stoddard 78). The manner in which Chloe describes herself as

“Half Indian *too*” indicates that she thinks of her Native “half” as secondary to her black “half.” In this same conversation, Chloe explains to Virginia that her Indian “blood” is what makes her hair straight (Stoddard 78), drawing further attention to her Native self as a mere afterthought, a trivial or peculiar physical expression.

Stoddard also discusses Chloe’s Native identity as a means of explaining away actions that seem bold, unbound by convention, or angry. When Cyrus Brande inquires if Virginia thought it appropriate to spend the night at the Gates’ home the night Sebastian (the “Spaniard”) was rescued from a shipwreck,

Virginia made no answer. Chloe, who remained in the room, fixed her eyes on the mild-voiced man, the paternal inquisitor, with an expression she derived from some Indian ancestor, who was in the habit of skulking behind trees with his tomahawk. She understood Brande no better than others did; but she disliked him, and thought him as hateful as she believed he was sincere. (Stoddard 102)

Chloe’s anger and fiercely protective instincts toward Virginia are described as part of her Indian identity. However, she does not always hold her tongue, as in the above scene. When, again, Mr. Brande is berating his daughter for spending too much time with the Gates family,

Chloe, unable to contain herself any longer, burst into the conversation. [...] “She has exposed herself for her fellow-creatures; don’t you see that, sar? It is in my Bible that a human being is a human being when he suffers, as well as a pagan heathen.” Mr. Brande smiled benevolently on the ignorant Chloe, and asked why she was not as quick in clearing the breakfast things away as she was with her tongue? (Stoddard 102-103).

Chloe’s relationship is certainly akin to that of protective mother. In this role, when she speaks out in defense of Virginia, her agency is associated with the “Indian half”: “Stoddard endorses

Chloe's freedom of speech and thought, which she associates repeatedly with her Indian ancestry" (Weinauer 251). When Virginia's mother's insanity drives Mrs. Brande to threaten Chloe's life, Virginia's deep affection for Chloe and concern for her well-being push her to ask Argus Gates to take her into his home, despite the fact that Virginia fears for her own mental well-being alone in the house with her tyrannical father. When Virginia asks Chloe how she would feel about working for another family,

Chloe promptly replied that wild horses couldn't tear her away from the place whose crosses she had carried so long. No new place, new miseries, shames, disgraces, for her, if she knew her Indian self. "Di missey think that Chloe would leave her own girl in the present nasty lurch?" The thought made her sick at the stomach. The thought also made her cry. She ran away by herself, bound up her head in a red handkerchief, put on a clean starched apron, and sat down, clasping her slender, coppery fingers, to indulge in the tears of civilization. Virginia, discovering her, was dismayed at her strange expression of grief: not a feature moved, not a sigh escaped, but globe-like tears chased each other down her cheeks, and dropped on her hands. "I know I am going," said Chloe solemnly. [...] "You were three years old, Missey, when I came here, twenty years ago. My baby had just died." (Stoddard 130)

Stoddard's problematic and stereotypical descriptions in the above passage firmly place Chloe's emotional outburst in the category of "Indian behavior." When in a rage over rumors that are spread about Virginia's conduct with a suitor, Chloe is described as demonic upon returning to the Brande's house: "She talks to herself, 'The Indian has got here first this time [...] but I suppose Chloe will be along, if I wait a few minutes for her.' [After finding Virginia, Chloe is] still possessed by her Indian demon" (Stoddard 315, 318). Chloe's emotional outbursts are

relegated to her Indian “half,” but so are her “Indian silence[s]” and unmoving face (Stoddard 158). In Brande’s house, Chloe’s racial identity is *both* a biological trait (her blood and hair), and a stereotypical explanation for behavior.

Once Chloe is removed from the Brandes’s house, and moved into the Gates’s house, Virginia becomes a more frequent visitor there; the reason is not only to see Chloe, but also because Virginia has always felt more comfortable in the sparse surrounding of the dilapidated old house, than in her own more plush prison. Under her father’s roof, Virginia says, “I am a slave [...] and have the blood and spirit of a slave” (Stoddard 221). Virginia feels more free with Chloe and at Temple House. She asks Chloe, “why am I more free with you, poor soul, than with anybody else?” (Stoddard 78). Perhaps, as Weinauer suggest, Stoddard uses Chloe “as a safe repository of rebellion, to use her to open up a space where resistance can be voiced and at the same time neatly contained by the character’s inescapable Otherness, her ineffaceable difference” (Weinauer 252). But, I think Chloe’s behavior has just as much to do with the freedom that the space of Temple House affords.

Chloe, as racial Other, also feels more free at Temple House. She tells Argus, “I like being here; can’t help myself, it’s the Indian in me that loves the God-forsaken independence in this house” (Stoddard 181). She is a good fit at Temple House; Argus tells her “You are fine woman, Chloe, and belong to a past generation of females possessing hips. [...] I don’t know that I object to the turning of the world which brings me Africa, and the lost tribes” (Stoddard 182). Here, for the first time, Chloe’s African ancestry is explicitly mentioned and associated openly with her character. It is as though in Temple House, both of her parents are recognized, when in previous passages almost all the references to Chloe’s ethnicity are regarding her “Indian” features or actions (only her speech and initial description as “colored” would indicate

otherwise). While Weinauer states that Chloe “highlights the intersecting forms of disenfranchisement experienced by African Americans and Native Americans in the mid-nineteenth century United States” (250), I believe that Chloe’s identity is on the whole described in “either/or” terms that do not fully acknowledge the complexity of her identity. It is true, as Weinauer asserts, that “it is Chloe whose racial identity most obviously situates her at the center of ante- and postbellum social and political debates,” but Stoddard herself refrains from adequately acknowledging Chloe as such a crucial character. Still, the text itself does engage in such a dialogue about freedom and liminality, and perhaps Chloe acts as a symbolic presence, as someone historically, doubly disenfranchised.

The history of mixed Native and African American communities in New England at this time provides another historical context through which to read this novel. Tiffany McKinney, in her essay “Race and Federal Recognition in Native New England”(2006), explains that by the beginning of the Civil War, New England Indian communities saw great increases in their populations as a result of intermarriage with, and the cultural adoption of, African Americans who found more freedom with the Native tribes than they had living among white communities (McKinney 58). For example, in many tribal communities, African Americans were granted rights to share in the use of community property, and had the right to vote in tribal elections (McKinney 58). McKinney specifically notes that this type of cultural intermixture and egalitarian structure was true of the Mashpee of Cape Cod (58), the tribe Chloe claims, though it is misspelled “Masapee” in *Temple House* (Stoddard 130). McKinney’s research tells us that “Indian communities with African American populations, [...] never questioned their Indian authenticity yet welcomed African Americans into their fold” (McKinney 58). By 1848, a

Massachusetts state report found that over 99% of the Native peoples in the state were “of mixed blood; mostly Indian and African” (McKinney 58).

Thus, Chloe’s cultural identity as both African American and Native American in Massachusetts in the mid-nineteenth century is not unusual; however, it is a form of cultural hybridity that many writers and audiences are probably uncomfortable swallowing because it challenges conventional thinking of race as being an “either/or” reality: that is, that one is (or is passing as) either black or Indian, not both.<sup>26</sup> In *Temple House*, “Chloe’s power is, thus, ultimately contained by the very thing that defines it: her status as a racially marked ‘other’” (Weinauer 252). Chloe, however, is not simply “other” – she is doubly Othered, or subject to “multiple sites of oppression,” a term used in black feminist theory.<sup>27</sup> Chloe’s dual racial identity highlights the dual “civil disenfranchisement of both African Americans and Native Americans, similarly denied (although through different legal and extralegal mechanisms) rights of citizenship and the protection of American law” (Weinauer 250). Both Chloe and Queequeg’s characterizations, while at times problematic, also demonstrate how they negotiate both black and indigenous stereotypes in order to achieve some degree of power and agency.

The space inside Temple House affords its inhabitants, regardless of race, more freedom than other characters in the novel not living at Temple House in ways that echo how the *Pequod* functions in *Moby-Dick*, though certainly Temple House affords its inhabitants more safety than Melville’s *Pequod* affords its crew. The relative freedom from social convention that the

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<sup>26</sup> The language for such cultural and racial hybridity is not easily accessible to nineteenth-century writers, and arguably the same is true now in the twenty-first century, despite the work of cultural theorists like Trey Ellis, Homi Bhabha, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Ellis’s “cultural mulatto” in “New Black Aesthetic” (1989), Bhabha’s “third space” in *The Location of Culture* (1994), or Anzaldúa’s “facultad” in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) can all function as effective theoretical frameworks to discuss mixed racial identities. Many scholars have successfully used such language as a way to read fictional and real people and their relationship to their own racial and cultural identities.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Patricia Hill Collins’s “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination” (1990).

inhabitants of Temple House enjoy is actually described as something rebellious and Native when Chloe tells Virginia the reason she was sent to “labor in this field” – Gates’s House – is because “they are Indians [...] in spite of white skins and learning” (Stoddard 168). Her cultural and racial identity, however, is what makes both Virginia and Argus feel comfortable and “free” around her, and allows her to feel at home in the “God-forsaken independence of [Temple House]” (Stoddard 181). Thus, after Chloe’s removal to Temple House, her sense of freedom and disregard for social convention, and those same qualities as contained and supported by the physical space the house grants, become conflated.

Ultimately, the two novels offer useful comparisons for the way in which American democracy functions in the lives of racial and cultural Others. In both novels, physical structures ostensibly separate or mark off black indigenous characters from the white European structures of conduct and commerce; the effectiveness of this physical separation differs greatly between the two novels. Temple House seals itself off from the town of Kent by a wall, as the town of Kent comes to represent decay, materialism, corruption: “Once a great seaport [...] her sails are passing sails, her hulls wrecked hulls rotting in the sand. The old piers have tumbled in and fallen apart; black seaweeds are rooted in their own decayed beds on the foundations; and patches of sorrel grow in the gravelly tops” (Stoddard 7). Because the house successfully offers relief from the prevailing modes of thought, Chloe and the other inhabitants are afforded greater freedom than they would have outside the protection of “Gates.” In contrast, Melville’s *Pequod* cannot seal itself off from materialism and commerce, as it acts as vessel for the capitalist machine of the American nation state; though removed from the physical space of the American land mass, it is not immune from the forces of commerce and racism. Queequeg does receive pay equal to that of his fellow shipmates, but he is subjected to the abuse and exoticization that is



even more severe than the conditions that exist on the terra firm of the United States. There are, however, some similarities between the two spaces. Temple House contains a quality of rebelliousness and freedom that Stoddard romanticizes as desirable, a “site of liberation and autonomy” composed of a “diverse group of ‘others’: laboring men and upper-class women, ‘foreigners’ and the native-born, Native Americans and African Americans” (Weinauer 235). Similarly the *Pequod* acts as a site of relative freedom and egalitarianism, a space composed of Americans that accurately reflects a multicultural diversity.

Chloe and the house, and Queequeg and the ship (and the nation that these structures symbolize) all work in similar ways to create an image of a egalitarian space where the Other is afforded more voice than he or she has in the current United States legal systems. However, both characters struggle along within those same racist national confines, and are persistently, self-consciously aware of them. Weinauer states of *Temple House* that it “functions as a [...] narrative that tries to imagine an ideal national household but which registers at the same time the [...] contradictions that continue to trouble that household and compromise its foundation” (236), and I believe the same could be said of Melville’s *Moby-Dick*. Both of the black and indigenous characters of Queequeg and Chloe demonstrate, “the gap between American ideals and American ‘reality,’ between national myth and the actual experience of nation-building, between the freedom the nation promises and the freedom it, in truth, offers” (Weinauer 242-243). Because of the intersection of their composite characterizations, the dual disenfranchisement that both characters represent reminds readers of colonization of and slavery in the South Pacific, African slavery, and American Indian removal and genocide. In her discussion of whiteness in *Moby-Dick*, Bonnie TuSmith states, “There is no paradigm – multicultural or otherwise – for this type of literary trope. [...] The works discussed here reveal

no master plan; this is evidenced by the differences in weight and value in each writer's treatment of albino symbolism" (99). While my discussion here has instead focused on the trope of the black Indian, TuSmith's assessment also applies to the non-discrete nature of these mixed-race characterizations. *Moby-Dick* and *Temple House* offer similarly complex examples of how characters who are described with both Africanist and Nativist rhetoric are constructed, and how their performances contribute to the American literary imagination of race.

## CHAPTER 4

## ON PRECARIOUS FOOTING:

## WILLIAM FAULKNER'S SAM FATHERS AND THE SPECTER OF SLAVERY

William Faulkner's character Sam Fathers is described in most critical accounts of Faulkner's work as an Indian, despite being both black and Native.<sup>28</sup> Fathers is not by any means the only Indian character in Faulkner's work. In fact, Indian characters (some of whom are the ancestors of Sam Fathers) populate several other stories by Faulkner: "Red Leaves" (1930), "A Justice" (1930), "Mountain Victory" (1932), "Lo!" (1934), *Go Down, Moses* (1942), and "A Courtship" (1948). This chapter, however, will limit its scope to the two texts that primarily explore Sam Fathers – "A Justice" and *Go Down, Moses* – because, even though he is ultimately and primarily read as an Indian, Fathers's characterization as both black and Native is unique in Faulkner's fiction. Sam Fathers in *Go Down, Moses* (1942) is the son of a Chickasaw chief, and in "A Justice" (1930) he is the son of a Choctaw Indian; in both accounts his mother is a black slave. Indeed, there is good reason for critics to read Sam Fathers as essentially Native; at the end of both "A Justice" and *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner essentially erases Fathers's African American identity in favor of the Native one. There are, however, important examples of how Sam Fathers uses his racial ambiguity and duality in order to assert himself and gain

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<sup>28</sup> Lewis Dabney's *The Indians of Yoknapatawpha* (1974) traces source material for Faulkner's Indians, including Sam Fathers. The following essays also address Fathers as an Indian (in a special issue of *The Faulkner Journal* (2002/2003): Patricia Galloway's "The Construction on Faulkner's Indians," Robert Woods Sayre's "Faulkner's Indians and the Romantic Vision," Gene Moore's "Faulkner's Incorrect 'Indians'?" and Peter Lancelot Mallios' "Faulkner's Indians, or the Poetics of Cannibalism." Also, Annette Trefzer's "Postcolonial Displacement in Faulkner's Indian Stories of the 1930's" (2003) provides very useful readings of Faulkner's construction of Indian identity in general, but largely ignores the significance of Sam Fathers as a both Native and black. Mark Gidley also provides a useful but very brief chapter in *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The McCaslin Family* (1990) that focuses on Sam Fathers primarily as an Indian stereotype.

some relative degree of freedom and agency. Fathers exists in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha county, Mississippi, in a post-bellum South still very much coming to terms with new definitions of freedom and progress. After briefly outlining the historical basis for this character, I will demonstrate how Fathers's characterization reflects the regional history of tension between African Americans and Native Americans and both enforces and subverts Indian stereotypes through the self-conscious denial of his mixed-race identity.

Though fictional, Faulkner's character and setting have a very real basis in American historical record. In 1866, three years after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and one year after the end of the Civil War, the United States government and the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations entered into a joint treaty with the United States which established "connections between tribal sovereignty and freedpeople's citizenship that set the stage for four decades of debate and discord over African Americans' status in the Native American nations" (Krauthamer 107). This treaty permanently ceded the land west of the Chickasaws' territory in return for \$300,000 that would be held in trust until the nations adopted legislation that granted citizenship to their slaves (Krauthamer 107).<sup>29</sup> The Indian nations had two years to comply with these conditions, or the Indian nations would forfeit the money to the United States to use to relocate the African Americans, who would then have presumably received citizenship in the United States (Krauthamer 108). The terms of the treaty reflected the lack of regard the United States government had for the national sovereignty of the Choctaw and Chickasaw; freedpeople in Indian Territory were pawns in this charade of a treaty. The terms of the treaty implied that

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<sup>29</sup> In her essay "In Their 'Native Country': Freedpeople's Understanding of Culture and Citizenship in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations," Barbara Krauthamer explains that "African Americans had lived in the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations as slaves since the late eighteenth century. Choctaws and Chickasaws purchased slaves from local white slaveholders and traders with the intention of exploiting slaves' labor to produce cotton for sale in the American market. [...] From the outset, human bondage in the two nations maintained clear distinctions of status and race within the nations" (Krauthamer 104).

Choctaw and Chickasaw freedpeople belonged in Indian Territory; however, immediately after the treaty was ratified, the leaders of the Indian nations informed the United States government that they would not adopt their former slaves, and requested that they be removed (Krauthamer 108). The 1868 deadline passed and the United States government failed to uphold the treaty provisions and relocate the slaves (Krauthamer 109). In the meantime, freedpeople of the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations were certainly aware that they were “on particularly precarious footing”: “although free, they lived from day to day without the protections and benefits of citizenship in either the Indian nations or the United States” (Krauthamer 108).

The failure of all three national governments to provide rights of citizenship to freedpeople left them in an even more vulnerable position than newly freed slaves outside of Indian territories. Freedpeople in both Indian nations organized, held meetings, and petitioned congress for affirmation of their cultural identity as both black and Indian, and for citizenship in their respective Indian nations (Krauthamer 110-111, 114). In 1885 the Choctaw Nation alone adopted and extended citizenship to its former slaves and their descendants (Krauthamer 115). However, by the turn of the century, this decision, and the pending status of freedpeople in the Chickasaw nation, was complicated by the Dawes and Curtis Acts which relied on complex and often discriminatory methods of determining Indian belonging and blood quantum. The end result is that many freedpeople in Choctaw and Chickasaw nations were not granted citizenship there because they lacked proper written documentation of their ancestry (as many were former slaves), or were not in the territory at the time the blood quantum rolls were established.

William Faulkner’s knowledge of this Choctaw and Chickasaw history is documented in Lewis Dabney’s *The Indians of Yoknapatawpha* (1974). Dabney suggests that Faulkner had extensive knowledge of, and in some cases owned, specific Choctaw biographies from 1900-

1904, and historical texts and archives about Native tribes in Mississippi from 1880 and 1905 (35-37). Letters to Malcolm Cowley in 1945 included maps he had drawn of Chickasaw-Choctaw lands, which show his interest in the politics of shifting geography (Dabney 34). Dabney attributes most of Faulkner's description of Indians to various Choctaw and Chickasaw traditions he had read about (albeit in addition to his reading of Cooper's romanticized and stereotyped Indians). Although Faulkner claimed on occasion that his Indians were pure fabrication (Dabney 11, 14), these facts about his life and reading collections suggest otherwise. Dabney also states that Faulkner had "very probably" heard of someone like Sam Fathers, but uses only Kenneth Porter's research on black Indians, a single vague reference by Langston Hughes, and oral accounts from family members who had heard of "mixed-blood communities in remote parts of the South, people with visible Indian traits who held themselves above the blacks" (26-28). Other texts that examine Faulkner's Indians fixate on determining what details of Native life and culture that Faulkner describes are accurate, and to what tribe they are particular.<sup>30</sup> In short, Faulkner's Indians, including Sam Fathers, are a composite of all the characters and traditions (both real and fictional) Faulkner had read or heard about growing up on what was formerly Indian land in Mississippi.

In the body of Faulkner's Indian narratives, Sam Fathers is uniquely characterized because he represents a critical intersection in southern American history – an intersection

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<sup>30</sup> Elmo Howell's "William Faulkner and the Chickasaw Funeral" (1965) finds Faulkner guilty of ascribing Choctaw practice to Chickasaw Indians, but ultimately concludes that Faulkner's creative license are attributed to his creative genius. Peter Biedler in "A Darwinian Source for Faulkner's Indians in 'Red Leaves'" (1973) finds interesting source material for Faulkner's Indians in Darwinian studies, and attributes such striking similarities to Faulkner's "widely diversified reading" (423). Duane Gage in "William Faulkner's Indians" (1974) similarly notes that Faulkner's "liberty with historical facts" does not interfere with the validity of his stories (33). James Krefft's "A Possible Source for Faulkner's Indians: Oliver La Farge's *Laughing Boy*" (1978) explores this 1929 novel as Faulkner's Indian inspiration. Howard Horsford in "Faulkner's (Mostly) Unreal Indians in Early Mississippi History" (1992) details at length several Native traditions (like matrilineality) that Faulkner gets wrong, and some that he gets right (certain games and ritual). Another historical point of reference, though not mentioned in any critical text of Faulkner's work, is the figure of Okah Tubbee (b. 1810), a black man born a slave in Natchez Mississippi, who would later claim Choctaw ancestry and work as an Indian performer and "medicine man" in cities along the Mississippi River (see Daniel Littlefield Jr.'s *The Life of Okah Tubbee* [1988]).

marking the complexity and interconnectedness of both the enslaved and removed. As his life story indicates, Fathers was acculturated in both communities, was born into slavery, lived as an outsider in a black community, and is resurrected by Faulkner as an Indian who is one-with-nature, only to be vanished again by the narratives' ends. Though "vanished" in this fictional account, Fathers's mixed-race is an enduring symbol of southern history. Critical work exploring the concept of mixed-race identity in Faulkner's work largely ignores Indian characters, in favor of discussions of the black or black-white ones.<sup>31</sup> My project aims to explore mixed Native and African American identity (largely outside the influence of whiteness) as embodied in the character of Sam Fathers. Although Faulkner initially acknowledges *both* black and Native identities of Sam Fathers, he ultimately masks him as primarily Native in his lapse into the rhetoric of the vanishing Indian myth. Faulkner's narrative of Sam Fathers essentially collapses the one-drop rule and recalls the politics of the 1866 United States treaty with Choctaw and Chickasaw nations in casting Fathers as an Indian, to perform the final tragic days of the Southern Native American.

In the tradition of John Marrant, the character of Sam Fathers engages in a form of racial performance (sometimes based on historical fact, and sometimes not). Faulkner constructs Sam Fathers as a character who acts in ways that work to instill and sometimes challenge racial stereotypes and address the significance of mixed racial and cultural identities. Performance with Sam Fathers comes into play in descriptions of his mask-like facial expressions that veil his true intentions from white people, and in his movement from the black community to the woods

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<sup>31</sup> Regarding scholarship that fails to incorporate Native identity into readings of race in Faulkner, I'm referring to Doreen Fowler and Ann Abadie's *Faulkner and Race: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha* (1988), Charles Hannon's *Faulkner and the Discourses of Culture* (2005), Erik Dussere's *Balancing the Books: Faulkner, Morrison, and the Economies of Slavery* (2003), Theresa M. Towner's *Faulkner on the Color Line: The Later Novels* by (2000), Arthur F. Kinney's *Go Down, Moses: The Miscegenation of Time* (1996).

(in *Go Down, Moses*), where he becomes a more stereotypical “natural Indian.”<sup>32</sup> While John Marrant’s transformation is characterized by drama and complete visual transformation from black to Native, William Faulkner’s Sam Fathers only briefly embodies both African American and Native American cultural identities before passing more completely from black to Native: “[T]he old man of seventy who *had been* a Negro for two generations now but whose face and bearing were still those of the Chickasaw chief who had been his father” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 158; italics mine). In “A Justice” and throughout *Go Down, Moses*, Fathers is a pivotal figure whose presence has been underexplored, and who performs for readers and a white author in ways that both challenge and perpetuate racial stereotypes.

In *Cities of the Dead* (1996), Joseph Roach explores the use of performance, costume and parade tradition in New Orleans and London in a way that proves especially useful in my analysis of Sam Fathers. One aspect of Roach’s project looks at white European use of Native costume in London parades, and the African American Mardi Gras tradition of crafting and performing in “Indian” costume. The performances Roach details, as well as Faulkner’s characterization of Sam Fathers, indicate nostalgia for the past. Sam Fathers, in ways reminiscent of Uncas in Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1896), acts as the vanishing Indian. Roach suggests that such a longing for the past, and for that which is gone, is a persistent habit of the colonizer: “I believe that the process of trying out various candidates in different situations – the doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins – is the most important of the many meanings that users intend when they say the word *performance*” (3). More specifically, with Sam Fathers, “the visibility of freed Native Americans obscures the existence

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<sup>32</sup> Anthropologist and linguist Barbra A. Meeks in “And the Injun goes ‘How!’: Representations of American Indian English in White Public Space” (2006) describes the development of this stereotype: “To complete the noble savage motif, we need only add the element of nature, or the primeval (precivilized, hence savage by default)” (108).



of enslaved Africans” (Roach 140). In other words, Sam Fathers stands in as the only available living Indian in Faulkner’s tales. In doing so, his African American identity is obscured and later forgotten. Faulkner’s other Indian short stories describe a more ancient past of Sam Fathers’s ancestors; for Faulkner, Sam Fathers is in the changing, modern, present, a time in which Faulkner imagines there are no “pure” Indians left.<sup>33</sup> This, in part, is an explanation for his mixed Native-African American identity.

Roach explains, however, that “fixed and unified cultures exist only as a convenient but dangerous fiction” (5). Jace Weaver (Cherokee) explains the fiction of the vanishing Indian myth:

Of course even the few rude, scattered tribes could not be allowed to survive the myth of conquest. To allow their survival would be to pose an impediment to American-European designs on the continent. Extinction is a superior means of creating indigeneity. If all the indigenes are dead, there is no one to dispute the claim. [...] Thus the myth of the vanishing Indian was born. (17)

The political motivation of the vanishing Indian myth is clear. If the Indian is extinct, the culture is preserved and made a static, romanticized ideal.

The descriptions of Fathers’s physical appearance and the narrative of his parentage show how the white characters attempt to type Fathers. “A Justice” is the first in-depth exploration of the character of Sam Fathers. Even though the bulk of this short story is more of a description of Fathers’s mother and father, readers get a sense here of how he appears to Quentin. A twelve-year-old Quentin initiates the story by going to Sam Fathers’s shop to listen to him talk. An older Quentin as narrator recalls this experience:

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<sup>33</sup> I estimate the time frame in *Go Down, Moses* from the mid-1800s (in “Was”) to the late 1930s or early 1940s (in the reference in “Delta Autumn” to World War II). Sam Fathers appears in “The Old People” and “The Bear” – both stories are set in the late 1880s to early 1900s – as Ike is first learning to hunt and Fathers begins to grow old.

There was a long, low house in the grove, not painted but kept whole and sound by a clever carpenter named Sam Fathers, and behind it the barns and smokehouses, and further still, the quarters themselves, also kept whole and sound by Sam Fathers. He did nothing else, and they said he was almost a hundred years old. He lived with the Negroes and they – the white people; the Negroes called him a blue-gum – called him a Negro.

But he wasn't a Negro. That's what I'm going to tell about. (Faulkner, "Justice" 343)

Quentin tells us that the white people said he was a Negro, but Quentin contends he was not; and the narrative that follows is Quentin's evidence that Sam Fathers was actually an Indian.

Quentin (as Ike does later in *Go Down, Moses*) simply replaces the title of "Negro" for Sam Fathers with the label "Indian." The complication of this simple "surrogation" (to use Roach's term) is that the reality is much more complicated, as even Quentin will reveal:

He talked like a nigger – that is, he said words like niggers do but he didn't say the same words – and his hair was nigger hair. But his skin wasn't quite the color of a light nigger and his nose and his mouth and his chin were not nigger nose and mouth and chin. And his shape was not like the shape of a nigger when he gets old. He was straight in the back, not tall, a little broad, and his face was still all the time, like he might be somewhere else all the while he was working or when people, even white people, talked to him. [...] And he wouldn't jump up and go back to work when Mr. Stokes or even Grandfather came along. (Faulkner, "A Justice" 344)

Sam Fathers possesses only the accent (a trace or surface vestige of the culture), but not the vocabulary or appearance of a black man, except for his hair.<sup>34</sup> Despite the fact that he lives among black people, Faulkner's character cannot be neatly described as a black man. To

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<sup>34</sup> This description recalls Jacques Derrida's discussion of "trace" as the absent part of the sign's presence. The trace itself, he says, "does not exist" because in the act of presentation it "becomes effaced" (Derrida 167, 125). In this example, the signifier is Fathers's description as a racial Other – not quite black or Indian.

Quentin, Sam Fathers talked almost like he would expect a black man to talk, but did not look or behave as other black men did. In Quentin's description of Fathers, Quentin's unease and anxiety with his inability to predict or control Fathers's behavior and appearance (an inability to fix or define race neatly) is apparent. The story that follows of Sam Fathers's family serves as explanation of these "inconsistencies."

In "A Justice" Sam Fathers relates the story of his birth to Quentin. Herman Basket, who told the story to Sam Fathers as soon as he was "big enough to hear talk," told Fathers that his first given name was "Had-Two-Fathers" (Faulkner, "A Justice" 345). When Doom, or Ikkemotubbe, returned to New Orleans with six more black slaves, he brought with him the woman who would be Sam Fathers's mother (Faulkner, "A Justice"). In "A Justice," Doom (Ikkemotubbe) is a ruthless Choctaw chief who owned the plantation Sam Fathers grew up on, and owned his mother until he sold them both. Sam Fathers's biological father, however, is a man named Crawford (initially Crawfish-ford, and referred to as "pappy" by Fathers), who has an affair with Fathers's mother, Doom's black slave (347). After Fathers finishes as narrator of his own family history, Quentin's voice regains control. In contrast to the beginning of the story, he is now (after recounting his Indian heritage) described primarily in terms of his (stereotyped) Indian qualities. However, Fathers is here characterized as a preserved, extinct specimen in a museum:

We went on, in that strange, faintly sinister suspension of twilight in which I believed that I could see Sam Fathers back there, sitting on his wooden block, definite, immobile, and complete, like something looked upon after a long time in a preservation bath in a museum. That was it. I was just twelve then, and I would have to wait until I had passed

on and through and beyond the suspension of twilight. Then I knew that I would know.

But then Sam Fathers would be dead. (Faulkner, "Justice" 360)

What it is that Quentin "would know" is the deeper understanding of the South's racial and cultural identity and his family's role in Yoknapatawpha's transformation from Choctaw and Chickasaw tribal lands, to slave-based plantation farming industries, and eventually to the doomed, commercialized, and deforested world that Faulkner foresees through Ike in *Go Down Moses*, and in *The Sound and The Fury*. By the end of "A Justice" Sam Fathers, like the old agrarian way of living, is essentially dead, but preserved and romanticized in memory. Here, the surrogate identity is a "cameo appearance" of something "forgotten but not gone" (Roach 31).

The physical descriptions of Sam Fathers throughout *Go Down, Moses* further complicate the trope of the mask and performance, and continue to illustrate ways that Faulkner both interrogates and perpetuates racial stereotypes:

[Sam Fathers was] a man not tall, squat rather, almost sedentary, flabby-looking though he actually was not, with hair like a horse's mane which even at seventy showed no trace of white and a face which showed no age until he smiled, whose *only visible trace* of Negro blood was a slight dullness of the hair and fingernails, and something else which you did notice about the eyes [...] not the heritage of Ham, not the mark of servitude or bondage; the knowledge that *for a while* that part of his blood had been the blood of slaves. (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 158, 160-161; italics mine)

Again, we see an anxiety in this description; the narrator is more comfortable asserting what Fathers was not (not actually flabby, and not actually black, despite appearances that would indicate both), than stating more explicitly the details of Sam Fathers's appearance. As with the example of the accent, Fathers's phenotypically African American markers manifest only in the

“trace” of his hair and fingernails. In this description, the unnamable “something else” is decidedly not the “heritage of Ham” (not blackness), but the knowledge that “for a while” (not presently), Fathers had possessed the blood of slaves. Sam Fathers lives among the black community either because in Faulkner’s narrative the Indian communities simply no longer exist, or because any Indian community that would have existed would not have been likely to accept him as a result of the tensions and division that arose after the 1866 treaty. In any event, Fathers seems to live there out of default; by Faulkner’s account, he does not appear to feel at-home among these black people. In these descriptions of Sam Fathers, just before his self-removal to the woods, he lives among black people, but is still not one of them: he “dressed like them and talked like them and even went with them to the Negro church now and then, [but] he was still the son of a Chickasaw chief and the Negroes knew it” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 163). Lewis Dabney notes, “In Sam Fathers, the Indian theme is used to dignify the man of color, and his black social identity is underscored” (15). Sam Fathers “enjoys” an elevation in status because of his Indian blood.

Sam Fathers’s facial expressions also work to establish for him a certain degree of negotiated power, and these mannerisms are bound to his identity as an Indian. He wears a sort of mask which reveals very little of his actual emotions or thoughts: “Sam looked at neither [Major de Spain or Cass], standing just inside the room with that face which showed nothing, which showed that he was an old man only when he smiled” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 167). Fathers’s unmovable mask of an expression – his “Indian face above the nigger clothes” – that apparently looked at nothing but saw everything is a description returned to repeatedly throughout Faulkner’s depiction of him in this novel (*Go Down, Moses* 166). Perhaps most

significantly, Fathers uses this tool when he tells (rather than asks) McCaslin Edmonds that he is moving to the woods year-round:

“I want to go,” he said. “I want to go to the Big Bottom to live.”

“To live?” the boy’s cousin [Cass] said.

“At Major de Spain’s and your camp, where you go to hunt,” Sam said. “I could take care of it for you all while you aint there. I will build me a little house in the woods, if you rather I didn’t stay in the big one.”

“What about Isaac here?” his cousin said. “How will you get away from him? Are you going to take him with you?” But Sam still looked at neither of them. [...] “I want to go,” he said. “Let me go.”

“Yes,” the cousin said quietly. “Of course. I’ll fix it with Major de Spain. You want to go soon?”

“I’m going now,” Sam said. He went out. And that was all. (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 166, 177)

It is at this transitional move from town to the woods that Fathers effectively takes up his Indian lineage and puts it into more concrete practice. In this exchange, Sam Fathers uses an immovable, stoic face and persona to gain his freedom. His remove to the woods comes directly after the death of Jobaker, the last of the full-blooded Choctows in *Go Down, Moses*, and Sam Fathers’s friend. When Jobaker dies, “Sam not only replaces Jobaker as high priest and chief of the Chickasaw wilderness, but he also sets himself free. [...] Life as a black man has been lifelong imprisonment for Sam. Now, at last, he can be an Indian” (Cooley 132). Only as a vanishing, last-standing Indian, living “exclusively in the woods” can Sam Fathers demonstrate his “true Indianness, so to speak” (Gidley 127). Further, John Cooley suggests:

In leaving the plantation for the wilderness, Sam imagines that he has set himself free from the warfare within him and from the conflict between civilization and wilderness that has always surrounded him. He believes that he is living, at last, the role for which he was born, forgetting or ignoring the corruption that role represents. (132-133)

In assuming his new role, Sam Fathers gains power in his removal to the Big Bottom because his knowledge of the woods and hunting far surpasses that of the white characters. They come to depend on him as their guide.

The same self-assured disregard for the white men's inclinations surfaces again, once in the woods, in the scene in which Major de Spain discusses whether or not Old Ben (the bear) or a panther killed a fawn: Sam Fathers sat "inscrutable, as if he were just waiting for them to stop talking so he could go home. He didn't even seem to be looking at anything [but said:] It was Old Ben" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 204-205). Again, on the same hunting trip, Sam Fathers "stood watching them as they unleashed the hounds – the Indian face in which [Ike] had never seen anything until he smiled" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 207). Faulkner's evocation of the stoic, speechless, unmovable Indian here recalls a stereotype that is as comfortable in American mythology as the vanishing Indian (as in James Fenimore Cooper's Uncas and Lydia Maria Childs's Hobomok). As Mark Gidley points out, Sam Fathers is a testament to the cultural power that such stereotypes possess (127). Examples of some stereotypes in material and popular culture are of Indians as "wild, savage, heathen, silent, noble, childlike, uncivilized, premodern, immature, ignorant, bloodthirsty, and historical or timeless" (Meek 119), and as "primal ecologist," the savage, the innocent, or the hunter (Gidley 127). While Faulkner does not engage many of these types (silent, noble, premodern, hunter), and (I will argue later) intentionally challenges some of the others, in using any such types, there is "a perceptible

modulation toward simplification, elegy, and nostalgia” (Gidley 128); however, in Faulkner’s text, Sam Fathers uses his mask (the stereotyped, expected image) as a tool to assert his agency to white characters. Roach reminds us, “Genealogies of performance also attend to ‘counter-memories,’ or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences” (26). The potential for the “one-drop rule” to silence Fathers’s Native identity is effectively muted.

Other ways that Faulkner characterizes Sam Fathers as performing the role of an Indian are in the two scenes that Fathers speaks in his “Native” language: when he speaks to the Buck-spirit, and just before deciding to die. First, the boy (Ike) recalls hearing this language that Sam Fathers and Jobaker spoke “in Sam’s shop – the two old men squatting on their heels on the dirt floor, talking in a mixture of Negroid English and flat hill dialect and now and then a phrase of that old tongue which as time went on and the boy squatted there too listening, he began to learn. Then Jobaker died” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 166). In this description, Sam Fathers’s language is a hybrid form, a synthesis of southern dialect, African American Vernacular English, and the “old tongue,” presumably Chickasaw. Later, in front of Ike, Sam Fathers speaks to the Buck “in that tongue which the boy had learned from listening to him and Jobaker in the Blacksmith shop” when he says, “Oleh, Chief,” [...] Grandfather” (Faulkner, *Go Down Moses* 177). By linking this language to something used with and perhaps learned from Jobaker, Sam Fathers’s use of it identifies him as both Native and black. Lewis Dabney even suggests that the phrase “Oleh, Grandfather” in *Go Down, Moses* and “Red Leaves” is combination of West African and Caribbean languages – some form of a greeting or respectful address (40). In these examples, Sam Fathers’s language can be read as an integration of both African and Native cultures. Sam Fathers again uses a language other than English when he is wounded in the



process of killing Old Ben: “Boon turned him over, his eyes were open and he said something in that tongue which he and Joe Baker had used to speak together” (Faulkner 232). In the same scene, Sam Fathers also speaks to Major DeSpain “in that old tongue he and Joe Baker spoke” (Faulkner 232). The now dying Sam Fathers, as he was brought back to his “dark little hut [...] spoke again in the tongue of the old fathers; then he said clearly: ‘Let me out. Let me out’ [...] ‘Let me go home’” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 234). Faulkner’s distinction between what he “clearly” spoke in English and what neither the reader nor the omniscient narrator can comprehend in the *other* tongue is suggestive of his attitude toward the language and the character as Other, and sometimes both Native and African American.

Further, the characterization of Sam Fathers’s language resists simple, racist depictions of Native speech prevalent in literature and film from Faulkner’s time, partly because Faulkner himself often resists flatly placing Fathers in an either/or category (either black or Indian). In her essay ““And the Injun goes ‘How!’: Representations of American Indian English in White Public Space” (2001), Meeks analyzes film, television, even a greeting card to analyze what she calls “Hollywood Injun English” (“HIE”), and concludes that the style is standard, homogenized and “covertly perpetuates a racialized and racist image of Native North Americans” because it “reproduces a static, monolithic imagery of Native American voices” as “dysfluent” and “Other” (95). In these popular culture representations of Indians, Meeks finds that “the four grammatical markers used in HIE are lack of tense, deletion (of various grammatical elements), substitutions, and lack of contraction” in ways similar to children’s speech (Meeks 99-100). These linguistic performances can also act to demonstrate the “character’s limited cognitive abilities or unfamiliarities with English” (Meeks 103). In her research and examples, such conclusions are compelling and accurate. However, Faulkner’s representation of Sam Fathers’s language (in

above dialogue) largely resists the awkward pauses, omissions, and ignorance of verb tense quite obvious in (for example) *The Three Stooges* movies from 1936 and 1940 that Meeks details. Faulkner resists the token words and phrases she describes (Meek 113), most notably “How,” when he instead uses this hybrid word “Oleh” in *Go Down, Moses*.<sup>35</sup> I do not, however, wish to suggest that what Faulkner does is without any racist connotations. Although in some instances Sam Fathers is complex and multiracial, he is certainly more stereotypically silent than the white characters in *Go Down, Moses*. In other instances in *Go Down, Moses*, Sam Fathers does exhibit a slow, “ponderous” speech, which Meeks suggests is another way that Native characters are constructed or imaged to appear “timeless or primitives, as nonmodern” (94, 101).

While the composition of Fathers’s racial and cultural identity is constructed, his relative freedom is real; Sam Fathers possesses more freedom than a typical black man or black Indian (perhaps read as black because of the power of phenotype) would have as in late-nineteenth, and early-twentieth century Mississippi.<sup>36</sup> As stated in my earlier discussion of the 1866 treaty between the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations and the United States government, black freedpeople in Indian territories lived in a state of dual disenfranchisement – they were denied rights of citizenship from both the United States government and the two Indian nations for at least several decades after Emancipation. Sam Fathers, however, renegotiates for himself his own sense of freedom within the McCaslin/Edmonds dynasty. As McCaslin explains to young Ike: “His cage ain’t us, [...] Did you ever know anybody yet, even father and Uncle Buddy, that ever told him to do or not do anything that he ever paid any attention to?” (Faulkner, *Go Down,*

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<sup>35</sup> In the short story “Red Leaves,” a Native character, Three Basket, does use the word “Yao” in ways similar to the stereotypical “How” that Meeks and others describe.

<sup>36</sup> Faulkner demonstrates the disenfranchisement of black men, even of mixed race, in the character of Lucas Beauchamp, grandson to patriarch Carothers McCaslin. He was disinherited because his link to the McCaslin legacy and land was through his mother, Tennie, who was Carothers McCaslin’s slave. In *Go Down, Moses*, the chapter “The Fire and the Hearth” details Lucas’s obsession with inheritance and inclusion in the McCaslin family.

*Moses* 162). As an Indian, Sam Fathers can sometimes choose his position in the world despite what whites wish he would do instead. Despite his position as a former slave of the McCaslin/Edmonds family, and because (in part) of his Native identity, Fathers chooses to work when he needs to, and live where he pleases.

The space that Sam Fathers claims in Faulkner's text also claims for him valuable knowledge that he passes on to Ike. In most of the depictions of Sam Fathers's education of young Quentin (in "A Justice") and young Ike (in *Go Down, Moses*), Sam is described stereotypically in terms of his Indian identity (an instinctual hunter at one with nature), just outside the black community and stereotypical phenotype; however, Sam Fathers's experience as an African American man and a former slave subtly but significantly inform his body of knowledge and the wisdom he chooses to pass on to these white male heirs. In "A Justice," Sam Fathers tells Quentin the story of his fathers and his birth; it is a story central to American history and racial identity in its certain demonstration of complex racial identities that complicate dynamics of power and freedom. In order to retain ownership of the black woman and baby boy, Doom decides that the baby (Had-Two-Fathers/Sam Fathers) will stay with the black woman and her husband, and be kept by fence from Crawford (Faulkner, "A Justice" 358-359). As we discover later (in *Go Down, Moses*), Doom eventually sells the slaves (including Sam Fathers) and his land to Carothers McCaslin (160). At the close of "A Justice," Quentin remembers,

I was just twelve then, and to me the story did not seem to have got anywhere, to have a point or end. Yet I obeyed Grandfather's voice [and returned home], not that I was tired of Sam Fathers'[s] talking, but with that immediacy of children with which they flee temporarily something which they do not quite understand; that, and the instinctive promptness with which we all obeyed Grandfather.... (Faulkner, "Justice" 360)

When he asked what Sam had told him, Quentin replies, “Nothing, sir [...] we were just talking” (Faulkner, “Justice” 360). This “just talking” is central to Quentin’s understanding of his family and racial identity in the South, in general. Later, in *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner describes Sam Fathers as a “a wild man [...] all his blood on both sides, except the little white part, knew things that had been tamed out of [white] blood” (Faulkner, *Go Down Moses* 161). The knowing that Sam Fathers possesses in these descriptions is attributed to both his African American and Native American experience in the American South. As Joseph Roach points out, “The slave-holding propensities of the Five Civilized Tribes (so-called by whites in part because they held slaves) emphasize the double, inverted nature of the Indian as a symbol for African Americans; the nonwhite sign of both power and disinheritance” (205). As a former slave, Sam Fathers knew of the captivity and bondage upon which the entire economic system was based, and as a Native American Sam Fathers knew about forced removal and dispossession of land, language and identity; his life is a testament to the ramifications of the treaty of 1866. Both experiences simultaneously speak to both the significant and arbitrary nature of race as it relates to culture, politics and power.

Sam Fathers details his knowledge of the past in greater detail in *Go Down, Moses*. Just as Quentin did, Ike paid rapt attention to Sam Fathers’s stories:

The boy would just wait and listen and Sam would begin, talking about the old days and the People whom he had not had time ever to know and so could not remember (he did not remember ever having seen his father’s face), [...] And as he talked about the old times and those dead and vanished men of another race from either that the boy knew, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become part of the boy’s present, not only as if they happened yesterday but as if they were still

happening, the men who walked through them actually walking walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted. (Faulkner, *Go Down Moses* 164-165)

This description in “The Old People” describes the past becoming a concrete part of the present. Instead of only situating Faulkner in a particular Southern tradition, or a uniquely modernist narrative tradition, I would like to look at this passage in particular as representative of Native worldviews (or at the least non-Eurocentric worldviews) of time and space. Wai Chi Dimock explains that historians, scientists, and literary critics alike “divide history into numbered periods and speak of them as if they were objective units [or a] numbered slice of time, as if that slice were an air-tight container” (“Non-Newtonian” 916). This worldview, she argues, is counter to the way memory, history and the construction of race and nationhood operate. She states simply, “experience is not bound by seriality” (“Non-Newtonian” 920). Donald Fixico offers another, more concretely Native worldview in his *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* (2003). Fixico argues that many Native perceptions of reality are centered on cyclic and circular models of understanding reality, not linear, fixed ones. With this in mind, I would like to offer the above passage as an example of Faulkner using a more complicated and realistic description of Sam Fathers’s character, world, and “vanished people” than he does elsewhere in the novel. Again, Sam Fathers’s knowledge of and connection to the past and the “old people” affords him power and makes Ike’s family’s claim to the land “trivial and without reality as the now faded and archaic script in the chancery book on Jefferson which allocated it to them” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 165). Ike decides it was “he, the boy, who was the guest here and Sam Fathers’[s] voice the mouthpiece of the host” (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 165).

Sam Fathers's hunting skills are also inextricably and primarily linked to his Native cultural identity. From that unnamable "something" Fathers had learned from his "vanished and forgotten people," he was able to teach a ten-year-old Ike how to be more than just a "mere hunter" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 175). After helping Ike kill his first deer, Sam Fathers "marked [Ike's] face with the hot blood which he had spilled and he ceased to be a child and became a hunter and a man" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 171). In shepherding Ike into manhood he also becomes his healer and spiritual leader: Ike wonders, "Had not Sam Fathers already consecrated and absolved him from weakness and regret too?" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 175). In these and other descriptions, Faulkner describes Fathers as a stereotypical "primal ecologist," to use Gidley's term again (127). In the woods, Sam Fathers had become the embodiment of his racial, ethnic, and cultural inheritance – an inheritance he receives culturally and racially from his ancestors and symbolically from Jobaker. Faulkner suggests that, in the woods, he becomes the Indian he is not allowed fully to be while living among black people as merely a "former slave." As he dies, Sam Fathers is described as an Indian, the last of his kind:

When the "sawmill doctor" came, "He lay there – the copper-brown, almost hairless body, the old man, the wild man *not even one generation from the woods*, childless, *kinless, peopleless* – motionless, his eyes open but no longer looking at any of them, while the doctor examined him and drew the blankets up and put the stethoscope back into his bag and snapped the bag and only the boy knew that Sam too was going to die" (Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* 236; italics mine).

In this description now of *Ike's* cognizance of Sam Fathers's impending death, we learn that the transmission of knowledge from Sam Fathers to a next generation is complete. Here, race (biological) is irrelevant; cultural knowledge and understanding is paramount. Sam Fathers

teaches Ike “human kinship with the animal kingdom [and] ultimately unity of all things” (Gidley 126). Gidley even suggests that the lessons Sam teaches Ike are rooted in Faulkner’s reading of Luther Standing Bear (Sioux) (126).<sup>37</sup>

In these final scenes, Sam Fathers’s identity as only an Indian clearly signals Faulkner’s oversimplification of his complicated racial and cultural identities. Though admittedly problematic and racialized, and suggestive of Faulkner’s misperception and misrepresentation (intentional or not), Faulkner does at times offer complex, multiracial depictions of one often overlooked aspect of southern identity. Sam Fathers stands at times as a composite “specter of the others” against which, and sometimes according to, white characters “invent themselves” (Roach 273). Faulkner admitted his own bias in the survival of the black race over the Native by stating in a 1955 interview that the black man “has a force, a power all his own that will enable him to survive. He won’t vanish as the Indian did, because he is stronger and tougher than the Indian” (qtd in Trefzer 76). This statement and his depiction of Sam Fathers reflect conflicted attitudes toward Native identity that simultaneously romanticize/glorify and count as inferior America’s indigenous people. Thus, Faulkner reveals an anxiety and apprehension about hegemonic definitions and attitudes toward racial categories – an anxiety made more problematic and complex by his evocation of both African American and Native American identities in a single character, and his authorial decision to obscure one and underscore another.

Joseph Roach explains anxiety such as the one exemplified by Faulkner as arising from an inability to “erase [the] fear that [the] surrogated victims somehow manage to succeed them after all” (273). In light of this, Faulkner’s partial erasure of Fathers’s African American identity

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<sup>37</sup> Luther Standing Bear’s autobiography *My People the Sioux* (1928) outlines his traditional upbringing, experiences at the Carlisle Indian Boarding School, and reflects on the Ghost Dance uprising at Pine Ridge. In it, he is critical of European exploitation of natural resources, and outlines his kinship with natural world as a central tenant to his own traditional worldview.

could be motivated by an anxiety about the “stronger and tougher” black man succeeding the white man. Or, the erasure could be the manifestation of the often irresistible pull of the image of the romanticized “vanished” Indian. Even at the brink of modernity, Faulkner felt compelled to resurrect the already “vanished” Indian in order to have him tragically die all over again as a symbolic manifestation of the dying, natural world, the Big Bottom the white characters can both lose and find themselves in. Both “A Justice” and *Go Down, Moses* offer a “different kind of reading in which differences between Indians, whites, and blacks on the colonial frontier are not stable and interchangeable but merging and blurring and indeed becoming ‘mottled’” (Trefzer 76). This “mottled,” mixed racial identity that is made manifest in the character of Sam Fathers asks Faulkner’s audience to question the process through which race is defined, and to question which mythologies and stereotypes mold and motivate such processes and definitions.



## CHAPTER 5

## BLACK NATIONALISM AND NATIVE SEPARATISM UNHINGED:

TONI MORRISON'S *SONG OF SOLOMON*

The relationships between Native Americans and African Americans are central to several of Morrison's works. Virginia Kennedy, in her essay "Native Americans, African Americans, and the Space That Is America" (2007), asserts that in "Morrison's fiction, African Americans and Native Americans bump into each other, come across each other, and interconnect with each other. They share experiences and bloodlines because, as these fictions assert, they are together in the American landscape" (Kennedy 198).<sup>38</sup> Most specifically, Kennedy focuses on Native presence in *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987), and *Paradise* (1999). Kennedy convincingly asserts that these three novels reveal "the shared experiences of Indians and blacks together in the physical space of America [...] suggesting a powerful resistance to the exploitation of bodies, and of the earth, for material gain" (199). Kennedy's essay is important, and no other text looks at the body of Morrison's work in this way;<sup>39</sup> however, it is only a brief overview of the references and significance of Native identity in Morrison's work. My project is to take up the challenge Kennedy sets for other scholars to delve

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<sup>38</sup> In *Beloved*, a Cherokee man is central in guiding Paul D to escape slavery by instructing him in his journey North. In *Paradise*, the convent (which is central to the identification and development of both the convent women and the townspeople in Ruby) is formerly a school for Arapaho girls. Also in *Paradise*, "8-rock families" (thus named because their very dark skin is comparable to "a deep deep level in the coal mines" [Morrison, *Paradise* 193]) trade "state Indians" for land; and Menus Jury has a relationship with a "redbone girl" (another name for a black Indian) from Virginia, and is thus denied homeownership in Ruby. The themes of racial and cultural isolation and purity at the points of contact between Native and African Americans in *Paradise* are especially illuminating and complex, and warrant further study elsewhere.

<sup>39</sup> The only texts I have found (in addition to Kennedy's) that do examine Morrison in light of the Native presence in her work are: Paul Pasquaretta's and Sharon P. Holland's essays in *When Brer Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature* (2003). None of these essays, however, relies upon Native scholarship to the extent that I will.

deeper into the significance and meaning of Morrison's sometimes veiled, and sometimes explicit, references to the interactions between African Americans and Native Americans throughout American history.<sup>40</sup>

Since the scope of my study is to look specifically at single characters that embody through "costume" and performance a singular and unique mixed-race identity and experience (and not more abstract or tangential points of contact, as in her other novels), this chapter will focus primarily on Milkman and Pilate (Milkman's aunt, his father Macon's sister) in *Song of Solomon*, even though the references throughout Morrison's work are myriad, evocative, and warrant much more scholarly discussion. In the body of her work, Morrison often "forces the reader to acknowledge the dimensions of racially imposed identities manipulated with such power by the dominant culture throughout American history" (Kennedy 216). Although *Song of Solomon* is typically described as "African American" or just "American" literature,<sup>41</sup> I'll demonstrate that Pilate and Milkman embody hybrid identities, negotiating between and learning from both African and Native branches of his family tree (see fig. 1).

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<sup>40</sup> A relevant historical example of this is in *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (2005), in which Claudio Saunt focuses on two members of the Grayson family, a prominent Creek family who "traces its origins to the late 1700s," who had children with partners of African descent – one born around 1780, another around 1819 (3, 5). Saunt's research, similar in content to the work that Milkman undertakes, is an effort to discover certain omissions in family records and histories of these African Americans and their mixed-race descendants. The importance of Saunt's project is underscored in his assertion that the Grayson's is "an American Indian story, but it is an American story too" (5). The Graysons are not unique since, as Saunt states, "over the course of the nineteenth century, race drove a wedge between family members" (Saunt 4) regardless of the details of racial, tribal or national identification, and corresponding (or not) phenotypical markers. Saunt's research suggests (and is corroborated by other historians) that such practices and family secrets were not peculiar to this family, or even to the Creeks. For research about such relationships among the Cherokee see Katya May's *African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations, 1830s to 1920s: Collision and Collusion* (1996), Theda Perdue's *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866* (1979), Daniel Littlefield, Jr.'s *Cherokee Freedmen: From Emancipation to American Citizenship* (1978), and Tiya Miles's *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (2005).

<sup>41</sup> For discussions of the novel as an African American male journey to discover African roots only. See Trudier Harris's *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1991), and Michael Awkward's "'Unruly and Let Loose': Myth, Ideology, and Gender in *Song of Solomon*" (1990), Morrison's interview with Danielle Taylor-Guthrie in *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (1994), and Morrison's essays "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984), and "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" (1989).

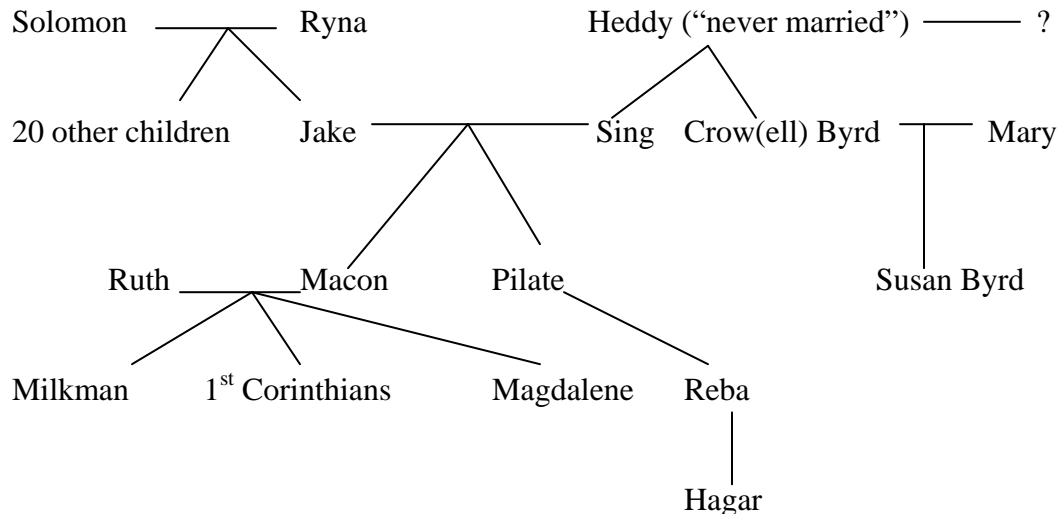


Fig. 1: The Family Tree of the Dead Family

In this reading, I assert that much could be learned from the type of cultural exchange that, for example, Morrison performs in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the American Literary Imagination* (1992). In her analysis of “white” texts for their “Africanist” presence, Morrison begins to do this more expansive reading.<sup>42</sup> Using scholarship from both African American and Native American scholars, I aim to expand notions of what makes a text “Native,” or “African American,” or “American” by focusing on Milkman’s identity as both African American and Native. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison insists that an “Africanist” presence is, in fact, the most significantly defining force in American Literature; similarly, Craig Womack insists that:

<sup>42</sup> Her term “Africanist” refers to the “denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these peoples” (Morrison, *Playing* 6-7). In her exploration of this term and phenomenon, Morrison engages texts by Hemingway, Melville, Twain and Poe.

Tribal literatures are the *tree*, the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American of American Literatures. We *are* the canon. Native people have been on this continent at least thirty thousand years, and the stories tell us we have been here even longer than that [...]. Without Native American Literature, *there is no American canon* (7).

In the same way that Morrison proposes interrogating white texts for an “Africanist” presence or “black surrogacy” (Morrison, *Playing* 14), I suggest interrogating African American texts (like Morrison’s) for a Native presence.

One passage from *Song of Solomon* that acutely exemplifies the sort of “Nativist” presence (a term I use as a parallel to Morrison’s “Africanist”) is in Ruth’s realization of the role she had come to serve – that of a colonized “Native” body:

He was no longer her velveteen toy. He became a plain, on which, like the cowboys and Indians in the movies, she and her husband fought. Each one befuddled the values of the other. Each one convinced of his own purity and outraged by the idiocy he saw in the other. She was the Indian, of course, and lost her land, her customs, her integrity to the cowboy and became a spread eagled footstool resigned to her fate and holding fast to tiny irrelevant defiances. (Morrison, *Song* 132)

I do not think that Morrison is subject to or agent of the same type of anxiety that she accuses white writers of in their evocation of “Africanist” imagery; however, in this passage, there is certainly the same “dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing” (Morrison, *Playing* 33). Ever self-aware of the loaded imagery she crafts, Morrison herself employs “Absolute power” as a major theme in American Literature, “called forth and played against and within a natural and mental landscape conceived of as a ‘raw, half-savage world’” in part because it is “peopled by nonwhite indigenous population”

(Morrison, *Playing* 45). For this reason, *Song of Solomon* contains the “Nativist” in ways similar to the way Hemingway engages the “Africanist.”

While I’m sure some scholars on both “sides” would object, I suggest that we read *Song of Solomon* as a Native text (though not at the exclusion of reading it as “African American,” or “American” – whatever those terms mean to an individual reader) because of its engagement, challenge, and discussion of Native identity.<sup>43</sup> To this end, Weaver offers a term that proves especially useful here in describing more aptly the worldview that Pilate exemplifies – “communitism.” Weaver defines his term by explaining:

I would contend that the single thing that most defines Indian literatures relates to this sense of community and commitment to it. It is what I term “communitism.” [...]. It is formed from a combination of words ‘community’ and ‘activism’ [...]. Literature is communitist to the extent that it has a proactive commitment to Native community, including the wider community. (43)

This “wider community” is certainly pivotal to the narrative that Morrison weaves in *Song of Solomon*. Although most of the scholarship about this novel would suggest otherwise, Morrison resists simply engaging Milkman in an African or African American journey for his roots. Her project in this novel is not so one-sided. Milkman’s ancestors are not *only* African; they are *both* African and Native American. And her novel is deeply rooted in this multiplicitous reality. Milkman ultimately develops into a self-actualized character, after embracing the “both/and” nature of his identity. In the course of his journey, Milkman is able to shed the “costume” and trappings of his earlier life (most notably his watch and shoes), the Eurocentric ways of thinking that accompany them, the stifling ties to his father and Guitar, and comes to embrace something

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<sup>43</sup> My assertion rests, in part, on Weaver’s assertion that “Native literatures are dialogic texts that both reflect and shape Native identity and community” (41).

closer to Pilate's worldview. At the novel's end, dressed in wings, equipped with song, the knowledge of *both* the flying African, *and* his Native ancestor, Sing, he flies.

In my desire to discuss *Song of Solomon* in ways that move beyond the conventional discussions of Afrocentrism, and the presence of African myth and oral tradition that *do* suffuse the narrative, I need to use different theoretical frameworks and tools than have usually been applied to the novel to unpack its Native presence. Both Gilroy and Anzaldúa offer terms and worldviews that can begin to help readers look at *Song of Solomon* in multinational and multicultural ways. In *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Gilroy calls for a "transnational and intercultural perspective" that transcends national and rigid cultural boundaries like "language, religion, skin colour, and to a lesser extent gender" (Gilroy 15, 28). In his dismantling of "pure and homogenous" notions of identity, he calls for "better theories of racism and black political culture than those so far offered by cultural absolutists of various phenotypical hues" (Gilroy 31, 223). Gilroy's theoretical grounding paves the way for the type of multicultural reading of *Song of Solomon* I aim to offer.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the most specific connection between Gilroy's text and my reading is his assertion that "the Africans [that European settlers] enslaved, the 'Indians' they slaughtered, [...] were not [...] sealed off hermetically from each other" (Gilroy 2). Thus, my reading of *Song of Solomon* extends Gilroy's argument to suggest that the Atlantic is not only black, but at once black *and* red.

Additionally, Anzaldúa's explanation of "la facultad" in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) provides useful lens through which to read Morrison's text anew. Anzaldúa explains that "those caught between the worlds [...] develop this faculty [...] an acute awareness

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<sup>44</sup> I use the term "multicultural" with full awareness of the debate surrounding multicultural studies and ethnic literature, and aim to resist a "boutique" approach as described by Stanley Fish's "Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech" (1997), in support of simply more honest and accurate dialogues about the intersections of culture as described by Ronald Takaki in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (1993) and *A Larger Memory: A History of Our Diversity, With Voices* (1998).

[...] the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the structure below the surface” (60). Although Milkman’s extremely egocentric and Eurocentric worldview delays such an epiphany until the final chapters of the novel, Anzaldúa’s description of power from marginality is an especially useful way to explore Milkman as a mixed-race character. John Brenkman, in “Politics and Form in *Song of Solomon*” (1994), notes that “[Milkman] is doomed not to find himself because his alienation stems in the first place not from a lack of independence but from being cared for without ever being called upon to care for anyone else” (65). However, as he discovers the power of community, he learns that his identity as part Native, part African American, then knowingly occupies a powerful “third space” as described by Homi Bhabha (1994). Virginia Kennedy also uses the term “third space” to describe the intersection of Native American and African American communities as a place where “agency and determination are employed to define an authenticated self and a place in a multiethnic community rather than have it imagined by a restrictive dominant narrative” (Kennedy 1996). Milkman can develop the acute awareness of “*facultad*” only after discovering that he is “between the worlds.” The reality he discovers (that he is both black and Native) is indicative of a more comprehensive sense of American and African American identity than he had known existed.

Milkman journeys from cultural and personal isolation to a more accurate understanding of his dually rooted community of ancestors. Indeed, this dichotomous theme of isolation and community is present throughout much of Morrison’s fiction. Specifically, in *Song of Solomon*, the tension between these two ideals is personified by the contrast between the cultural isolationists (Guitar and Macon), and the community-minded ancestor (Pilate), and their influences on Milkman. As Guitar (his best friend from childhood) and Macon (his father) work

to pull Milkman into a world of materialism and destruction, Pilate's worldview leads him to deeper understanding of community and survivance. To help delineate these contrasting influences on Milkman's journey, I would like to adjust my terms by introducing a third, perhaps most important theoretical framework to expand the very notion of community and to emphasize its significance – that of contemporary Native scholarship. In exploring Morrison's text as something that occupies a "both/and" multicultural space, I think it is of paramount importance to bring explicitly into the discussion *both* African American Literary criticism and Native American Literary criticism. From their separate departments (often physically segregated in separate buildings), Native scholars Craig Womack (Creek) and Jace Weaver (Cherokee), and African American scholars Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Houston Baker, Jr. all call for a new paradigm shift in literary theory by using theory and praxis derived from their own culturally rooted worldviews. However, these men do not really look to use these frameworks and paradigms to read primary texts outside their "departments." In essence, my close reading of *Song of Solomon* will do just that.

Macon Dead and Macon's sister Pilate are descendants of an African American father, Jake, and a Native American mother, Sing (her tribal identification is never mentioned).<sup>45</sup> This "biological" mixture, however, does not automatically make Milkman or Pilate "part Indian" because "simple essentialized identifications based on race are not adequate [when] what matters is one's social and cultural milieu, one's way of life" (Weaver 6). Since Pilate's mother died "before she was born" it is impossible to say that Pilate was directly taught any aspects of Native culture or ideology by Sing. At the risk of engaging in some essentialist "knowledge in the

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<sup>45</sup> Susan Byrd remembers Jake (the first "Macon Dead") as "Black Jake. Black as coal" (321). Macon recalls his mother as "Light-skinned, pretty. Looked like a white woman to me" (54). The folks in Danville, Pennsylvania remember Sing as "Good lookin', but looked like a white woman. Indian maybe. Black hair and slanted-up eyes" (234). Circe says she was "mixed. Indian mostly" (243). A man named Varnell in Shalimar, Virginia remembers her as "light-skinned, with straight black hair" (284).



blood” assertion, I propose that because Pilate has “a justifiable claim to Indian blood [and is] at least somewhat socially and culturally definable as Native American,” that she be included in this cultural milieu (Geary Hobson, qtd in Weaver 6). Pilate acts as ancestor, with connection to both African and Native worldviews, and she works to educate Milkman of the importance of these traditional values.

Before I discuss further Pilate’s role as both the Native and African ancestor, and its central importance to Milkman’s sense of understanding and flight, I would like to first establish the contrast that both Guitar and Macon provide. Both Guitar and Macon operate as isolating and anti-communitist forces in the narrative; they seek to establish societies and cultures premised upon destruction and retribution, instead of continuance and sustainability. Guitar’s monocultural, absolutist worldview is deeply rooted in the history and Afrocentrism of 1970s America.<sup>46</sup> An excerpt from William Katz’s book *Black Indians* (1986) is especially helpful in contextualizing Guitar’s racial and cultural absolutism with the issue of mixed-race:

When black Americans have pursued their genealogy, they have focused on their African roots and sought a meaningful black heritage. Children of black awareness of the 1960’s have rarely cared to mention an Indian ancestry because this might be seen as a denial of their African origins and the value of blackness. All this is part of the racial nightmare we have inherited. (17-18)

The racial discourse of the Black Power movement allowed “little room for [the] complexity” of mixed race (Phillips 373).

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<sup>46</sup> John Brenkman’s “Politics and Form in *Song of Solomon*” (1994) thoughtfully contextualizes Morrison’s narrative with the African American history that the novel implicitly organizes around (assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Black Panthers) and the debates between Gates and Baker regarding the definition of the Black Aesthetic and literary tradition.

Guitar's absolutist conceptualization of race leads him quite logically to the Seven Days, a group whose mission is to kill a white person for each black person killed. In this ideology, there is certainly no room for Pilate's "deep concern for and about human relationships" or her final desire to have "known [and loved] more people" (Morrison, *Song* 149, 336). The Days, Guitar explains,

[D]on't initiate anything; they don't even choose. They are indifferent as rain. But when a Negro child, Negro woman, or Negro man is killed by whites and nothing is done about it by *their* law and *their* courts, this society selects a similar victim at random, and they execute him or her in a similar manner if they can [...]. [T]hey do it any way they can, but they do it. [...]. To keep the ratio the same. (Morrison, *Song* 154-155)

Guitar is the Sunday man, which indicates his assigned day to seek retribution for murders committed on the same day of the week. When the challenge is set before him to kill in retaliation for the four little black girls who were murdered in their Birmingham church, Guitar knows he needs more money to do it right (Morrison, *Song* 173). Guitar's greed and myopic perception of community drive him to attempt to murder Milkman, and to kill Pilate in the process. Thus, he demonstrates the divisive power that his culturally exclusive, essentialist ideals generate by only furthering destruction and death among his "own people."

Similarly, Macon's persistent focus on material gain consumes his life and casts a pall over his children and wife. At twenty-five, with two rental properties already to his name, he had felt entitled to approach Ruth's father, Dr. Foster, for permission to court his daughter; he was convinced that material property afforded him a certain "magic" and confidence, otherwise unattainable to black men (Morrison, *Song* 22-23). Morrison, however, reveals that his perceptions of the sources of his power had nothing to do with Dr. Foster's decision to allow him

to see her; Dr. Foster had, in fact, simply “begun to chafe under [Ruth’s] devotion” (23).

Macon’s magic is false and empty. His greed, like Guitar’s, is also a source of malevolence to his community. He ruthlessly collects rent from tenants whose only other option is homelessness. Morrison’s insistence that Macon’s knowledge and actions are fruitless, while Pilate possesses deep wisdom and understanding, is obvious. Instead of teaching his son about his own history, Macon’s “wisdom” consists of: “Money is freedom [...]. Own things. And let those things you own other things. Then you’ll own yourself and other people too” (163, 55). Even as Macon insists to Milkman, “Pilate can’t teach you a thing you can use in this world,” young Milkman is persistently misled and confused by his father’s teachings (Morrison, *Song* 55). Macon’s orders to “Get the gold” that he thinks Pilate took, though completely misguided, do eventually send Milkman on his quest to Virginia (172). And in this quest, Pilate’s teachings prove useful, in this world and beyond. The Afrocentrism and greed represent absolutist, essentialist ideals that are counter to the dually-centered cultural values that Pilate represents and passes on to Milkman.

Pilate’s influence on Milkman stands in sharp contrast to Macon and Guitar’s, and it is important to note that Pilate stands alone as the keeper of community-based, non-Eurocentric values. In contrast to the influence Macon and Guitar exert on Milkman, Pilate believes that “progress was a word that meant walking a little farther down the street” (Morrison, *Song* 27). Pilate represents a belief in the return, continuance, and connectedness of all things, while Macon’s “excessively rigid, materialistic, Western values and an attendant linear conception of time” threaten to doom Milkman to a “life of alienation from himself and others” (Smith 278). Fixico writes in *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* (2003) that: “‘Indian Thinking’ is ‘seeing’ things from a perspective emphasizing that circles and cycles are central to the world and that all things are related within the universe” (1). Pilate ensures the circular return of the

family's "blood" and ancestral knowledge by seeing to Milkman's conception, survival and learning (even when she's unaware of the clues she's providing him). To Pilate, Milkman's birth is crucial to the family's survival; she tells Ruth, "[Macon] ought to have a son. Otherwise this be the end of us" (Morrison, *Song* 125). When Macon tries to kill Ruth's unborn child, Pilate fixes him with a voodoo doll, then watches over Milkman in his crib like he was "her own" until Macon throws her out (Morrison, *Song* 132, 126). Pilate's deep investiture in Milkman's life is not just to insure his survival; it is to assure hers as well since Pilate's cyclical worldview is rooted in the belief that the present is necessarily dependent on both the past and the future.

Valerie Smith explains:

Macon predicates his behavior on a linear conception of time. To his mind, future successes determine identity and justify one's actions in the past and in the present. Macon's futuristic, linear vision of time and of identity is evidenced by his failure to consider his past as part of himself [...]. [H]e cares only about his relationship to his son. To his patriarchal mind, it is in that connection that the most important genealogical transfer occurs. [...] In contrast to Macon's, Pilate's vision of time – indeed, of the world – is cyclical and expansive. Instead of repressing the past, she carries it with her in the form of her songs, her stories and her bag of bones. She believes that one's sense of identity is rooted in the capacity to look back to the past and synthesize it with the present. (280-281)

Indeed, Pilate's sense of the circularity of time informs a worldview both distinctive from Macon's and from Western, Eurocentric thinking in general.

A claim that Pilate resists Eurocentric thinking is not unique. What I want to demonstrate is that she incorporates both Native and African values. I have previously footnoted important

texts that look at Morrison's use of African ideologies and worldviews, and that for the most part, they thoughtfully explain and justify the intricacies of making any general claims about pan-African identity. Similarly, Native scholars similarly warn against blanket remarks about pan-tribal beliefs. Weaver offers a comprehensive look at this issue by explaining that "Although the rich diversity of Native cultures in the Americas makes it impossible to speak in a general, universalizing way about 'things Indian,' many believe that one can speak broadly of a worldview common to the indigenous peoples of the hemisphere" (26). He lists notable Native writers from a variety of tribal communities and experiences in an effort to offer useful, general descriptions of what this common worldview may be comprised of. He says that it is often defined by a search for identity (most notably by Lewis Owens), a cyclic rather than linear conception of time (by Vine Deloria and others), a central attachment to the ancestor and traditional values (by Georges Sioui), a persistent value placed in maintaining harmony and balance in all things (by James Treat, A. LaVonne Ruoff Brown, and Ake Hultkrantz, for example), and the importance of family and community, honest work, oral tradition and humor (by Blair Schlepp and David Rausch) (Weaver 26-28). Weaver's review of Native ideologies and values attempts to arrive at an understanding of what and where Native beliefs differ significantly from Eurocentric ones. His list proves useful here especially when delineating the differences between Pilate and Macon. Further, it points to specific examples of where Morrison engages both Native and African worldviews in her description of Pilate's actions.

The remainder of this chapter will delineate such discussions of community (family, ancestor, and family tradition), and oral tradition (including song, myth, and naming traditions). I begin with Pilate's significance as "ancestor" to Milkman and to the greater community and family. In her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984), Morrison tells us "If

anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything" (344). In this essay she delineates the significance of the ancestor figure in her work, and "In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate is the ancestor" (344). More specifically, Morrison implicitly claims that Pilate is the *African* ancestor, since her novels reflect the way "Black people looked at the world" ("Rootedness" 342). Pilate is likened to the Dead family's African ancestors, as Macon tells Milkman, "If you ever have a doubt we from Africa, look at Pilate" (54). Because of the ostensibly Afrocentric content of her work, Morrison urges critics to judge her novels based on "the success of their accomplishment within the culture out of which I write" rather than based on "criteria from other paradigms" ("Rootedness" 342). Despite this, Ashley Tidey suggests that Morrison would also "caution us against privileging an Afrocentric interpretation as somehow 'superior' or perhaps more 'authentic' for her African American novel" (62). To privilege one interpretation over another, would at the very least, limit the expansive, multicultural, and complexly participatory readings that Morrison's work invites. The African American community out of which Morrison writes is not "sealed off hermetically" from the influence of and reference to Native characters (Gilroy 2). In reality, Morrison's text offers a context and community of characters that embody "different cultural codes [that] re-create the structures of human life – self, community, spirit, and the world as we perceive it" (Weaver 33). The different cultural codes that Pilate, and eventually Milkman, embraces are deeply rooted in a sense of community, and in the knowledge that community is a source of survival. For African American and Native communities alike, "Five centuries of ongoing colonialism [...] has led to an erosion of self and community due to the dislocation resulting from cultural denigration, enslavement, forced migration, and fostered dependency" (Weaver 34). The white men's murder of Macon and Pilate's father certainly led to

the dislocation of the Dead family. Despite this dislocation and the complicated journey that young Pilate and Macon took after their father's death, Milkman is able to retrace their journey, and find familial roots in both Danville, Pennsylvania and Shalimar, Virginia.

Even though Milkman's journey begins as a quest for gold, the bitter disappointment at finding nothing in the cave in Danville is slowly replaced by his hunger to learn more about his ancestors. Once in Virginia, he goes to talk to Susan Byrd, his cousin, to find out more about this light-skinned grandmother: "I'm trying to locate anybody who might have known my grandmother. Her name was Sing" (Morrison 287). But instead of finding the healing and life-sustaining power of community here, Susan Byrd "sounded arch and Milkman got the distinct impression that this lady did not like the color of his skin" (Morrison 287). In contrast, Susan's friend Grace exclaims: "'Relatives! You all are relatives! [...]. Well I'll be!' Grace's eyes were lit and dancing [...] 'You've got to visit my class, Mr. Macon. [...] See, Mr. Macon, what your friends hid from you? I bet she'd hide you too'" (Morrison 290). Together, both Grace's and Susan's reactions to Milkman's presence here reflect two differing perspectives regarding the intermarrying of African Americans and Native Americans: disdain or surprise.<sup>47</sup> The community of ancestors that Milkman discovers he is a part of share a complex history.

In the essay "Blood Politics, Racial Classifications, and Cherokee National Identity" (2002), Circe Sturm offers the historical perspective that at the turn of the century, Native communities reproduced "hegemonic notions of blood, color, race, and culture" as well "racial ideologies that were the basis of federal Indian policy" (224, 236). Similarly, Perdue, in her *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society* (1979), explains that European models of slavery

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<sup>47</sup> Sharon Holland offers another perspective: "In terms of this study of African-Native presence in literature, I do not feel that this is a legacy suppressed so much as taken for granted. However, finding a space, let alone a subjectivity, that embraces both African and Native identity is also an endeavor to develop an understanding of literature as a process of both emancipation and sovereignty, as we are seeking the history and lives of a people whose experience crossed the barriers of enslaved bodies and lands" (260).

engendered racist attitudes among the Cherokee toward blacks. Both Sturm and Perdue confirm that Susan Byrd's racist attitude toward Milkman could, more specifically, be the result of the 1866 Treaty that forced southeastern tribes to adopt their black slaves as citizens in exchange for tribal sovereignty (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4). Susan is clearly a product of "racist attitudes and policies of the dominant white community [that] have served to alienate these groups from each other to prevent them from recognizing the similarities of their experiences" (Pasquaretta 279). When Milkman inquires about his grandmother Sing and her husband Jake, Susan initially reports that the man her aunt Sing married was "not anybody we heard of" because gossipy Grace is present (Morrison 290). When Grace suggests that Sing would have started passing once she was up North, Susan refutes this by saying (*somewhat* embarrassed as the words are coming out) that any grandmother of Milkman would surely have been "too dark to pass"; but we know from other characters' observations that Sing was very light-skinned, and mistaken for white by some (Morrison 290). Grace also reveals that the relatives that Susan has left Susan cannot even visit because they are passing for white, which indicates that despite Susan's disdain for Milkman's skin color, *she* is "too dark to pass" (Morrison 291). This entire confusion is suggestive of the inherent problematics of essentialist racial classifications, and points clearly to my refrain that racial categories are both arbitrary and confusing, *and* vitally crucial to many people's definitions of identity and self.

After he leaves Susan's the first time, Milkman considers that he has found the wrong Sing because Susan's Aunt Sing went to Boston, not Danville, as Milkman had been told (292). After he leaves Susan's the first time, he thinks of the inconsistencies in her story: "Why would she go off to a northern private school on a wagon? Not a carriage or a train, but a wagon – full of ex-slaves. Maybe she never got to Boston. Maybe she didn't pass. She could have changed



her mind about school and run off with the boy she ate pecans with” (293). A second visit to Susan’s confirms that she’d left out details:

Of course I know who she married [...] Jake, that black boy her mother took care of...Black Jake. Black as coal...I don’t know where they ended up. North, I guess. We never heard. [...] I don’t think he had [a last name]. He was one of those flying African children [...] one of Solomon’s children. Or Shalimar. Papa said Heddy always called him Shalimar. [Heddy was] my grandmother. Sing’s mother and Papa’s too. An Indian woman. She was the one who took care of Jake when his father left them all. She found him and took him home and raised him. She didn’t have any boy children then. My father, Crowell, came later [...]. She didn’t have a husband, Heddy. I didn’t want to go into all of that with Grace. You can imagine what she’d do with that information. You’re a stranger so it doesn’t matter. (Morrison 321)

By calling him a “stranger,” Susan again reveals her own racism (he is an outsider to whom she condescends primarily because of his skin color). She is unwilling and unable even to recognize Milkman as a relative. Pasquaretta explains that Susan’s continued and “hesitant betrayal of a Native bias against blacks as well as her reluctance to speak before her gossipy friend Grace Long suggests her own unwillingness to recognize publicly her African relatives” (281). Despite her reluctance, Susan reveals secrets of their shared histories to Milkman; she tells him that their family history is not an uncommon one: “You know colored people and Indians mixed a lot, but sometimes, well, some Indians didn’t like it – the marrying, I mean. [...] I don’t know to this day if [my grandfather], was white, red, or – well – what” (Morrison 322). Since Susan has already revealed her racism, it is possible here to consider that her “or what” is black or just somewhere “in between” black, white and Native. Regardless of the blood quantum, she

indicates that her grandfather's phenotype was such that he could pass into and out of different cultural communities. She tells him that "Sing's name was Singing Bird. And [her] father's name was Crow at first. Later he changed it to Crowell Byrd. After he took off his Buckskin" (Morrison 322). Crow Bird, Susan's grandfather, may have passed as a white man, just by taking his Native clothing off. Despite all that Susan had revealed to him, she tells him as he is leaving: "This is a dull place [...]. There's absolutely nothing in the world going on here. Not a thing" (Morrison 325). In fact, *everything* had gone on here, and with Susan's story, and the song Milkman later learns in Shalimar, he pieces the puzzle together.

From Pennsylvania, Milkman heads south. What he learns in Virginia, as well as what he learns in Pennsylvania, is dependent upon him listening to oral songs, stories and legends. Orality, in both Native and African American communities, is of central importance. Geneviève Fabre describes Morrison's focus on orality as related "specifically to Afro-American history and myth": "Sounds, words, upon which Milkman stumbles, will be his guides: a moan like a woman's voice, a children's song, names of people, his people, names of places named after his people, offer him the final clues he needs to reconstruct the whole message, to resurrect dead lives and fading memories" (113). To reconstruct the message, and piece together the clues of who his relatives are, Milkman has to become an agent in the tradition of orality as a means of preserving family history:

Milkman took out his wallet and pulled from it his airplane ticket stub, but he had no pencil to write with, and his pen was in his suit. He would just have to listen and memorize it. He closed his eyes and concentrated while the children, inexhaustible in their willingness to repeat a rhythmic, rhyming action game, preformed the round over and over again. And Milkman memorized all of what they sang. (Morrison, *Song* 303)

Through listening to and memorizing the song, Milkman learns where Jake, Ryna, and Heddy are positioned in his family tree; the descriptions “black” and “red” also tell him how to identify these ancestors racially and, perhaps, culturally:

Jay the only son of Solomon [...]

Whirl around and touch the sun [...]

Left that baby in a white man’s house [...]

Heddy took him to red man’s house [...]

Black lady fell down on the ground [...]

threw her body on the ground [...]

Solomon and Ryna Belali Shalut /

Twenty one children and the last one Jake! /

O Solomon don’t leave me here /

Cotton balls to choke me /

O Solomon don’t leave me here Buckra’s arms to yoke me /

Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone /

Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home. (Morrison, *Song* 301-304)

This image of the Flying African is central: it occurs in the novel’s opening with Mr. Smith’s flight/suicide, in the unfolding of the story of Solomon’s flight back to Africa, and in Milkman’s final flight.

Julius Lester (1969) and Virginia Hamilton (1984) are among those who commit this oral tradition to written word.<sup>48</sup> Molefi Kete Asante asserts that in this “word magic” (like the tale of the Flying African) that the storytellers weave, “crafts, secrets, ceremonies and rites of passage”

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<sup>48</sup> In Lester’s *Black Folktales*, an entire group of slaves flies back to Africa after a witchdoctor uses a spell; in Hamilton’s *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*, a man flies away and leaves the others who do not yet know how to fly.

are immortalized (491). In an interview, Morrison clearly situates her narrative as one reliant upon such black narratives of flight: “it is about black people who could fly [...]. [Flying] was one of our gifts” (Taylor-Guthrie 122). But Morrison not only uses an oral narrative as the novel’s thread; she also relies on oral structure as a means by which to tell her story:

By entrusting her narrative to many voices (and basing its structure on many stories), Morrison acknowledges the debt that any black writer has to oral tradition, the true legacy of black people. She reminds us that the story telling tradition, so strong in black culture, is still alive today. [...] Names are an essential part of the legacy, and names have stories which, incongruous, preposterous as they are, must be cared for. (Fabre 108-109)

But, an oral tradition so crucial to cultural survival is not unique to African and African American aesthetics.

Since this is a text with characters and histories rooted in multiple cultures, we must look at orality in this text as a multicultural method and motif. Weaver offers a Native perspective in his assertion that “the oral tradition is very much alive and imbued with power to create identity and community” (20). He quotes Paula Gunn Allen, a Laguna/Sioux poet and critic, to emphasize further the centrality of the oral tradition to Native identity: “The tribes seek – through song, ceremony, legend, sacred stories (myths), and tales – to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of majesty and reverent mystery of all things, and to actualize ... those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance of dignity” (qtd in Weaver 38). Womack also offers that “through imagination and storytelling, people in oral cultures re-experience history. This concept of ancestral memory relates to nationalism in that sovereignty is an intersection of

the political, imaginary, and literary. [...] [P]eople formulate a notion of themselves as an imagined community through stories” (Womack 26, 60). Thus, the song that Milkman learns to sing by simply listening to children and committing it to memory becomes “a useful tool rather than an ethnographic artifact” (Womack 60). This story of Solomon, his great-great grandfather, gives Milkman the tools to access the knowledge of his past. When he finds Susan Byrd, she tells him: “He flew. You know, like a bird” (Morrison 323). Even though this ancestor is African, the *means* by which Milkman accesses the knowledge of him was Native (through Susan Byrd): “She talked on and on while Milkman sat back and listened to gossip, stories, legends, speculations. His mind was ahead of hers, behind hers, with hers, and bit by bit, with what she said, what he knew, and what he guessed, he put it all together” (Morrison 323). Susan Byrd, his Native-American grandmother’s niece, helped him piece together the family tree.

A crucial part of this piecing together for Milkman is coming to terms with what parts of his person are holding him back. Milkman’s growth and understanding of the value of the knowledge of his ancestors is possible only because he slowly sheds the costume of his former self, the self that wanted the gold his father thought Pilate had taken. In Pennsylvania, he first sees his garments as a hindrance; he observes his watch, as if for the first time, as “heavy, overdesigned” (Morrison, *Song* 238). In his search for the cave, he finds his Florsheim shoes a liability in his journey, so he removes them (Morrison, *Song* 249). Wading through the water, his watch becomes damaged – “splintered” and “bent” (Morrison, *Song* 250). In the disappointment of finding nothing in the cave, Milkman’s suit reflects the farce of the journey’s initial goal to find material wealth. In contrast with the initial image of a sharp beige suit that displayed his money to “strangers,” after failing to find the gold, his tie now hung open, his suit

was ripped, and shoes tied and slung over his shoulder, as he hitched a ride from another stranger (Morrison, *Song* 154).

The disintegration of his costume continues once in Virginia. The men on the front porch of Solomon's General Store greet him with hostility because of his appearance, his car, and his attitude: "His manner, his clothes were reminders that they had no crops of their own and no land to speak of either. [...] They looked at his skin and saw it was as black as theirs, but they knew he had the heart of the white men who came to pick them up in the trucks when they needed anonymous, faceless labor" (Morrison, *Song* 266). Virginia Kennedy observes, "In Virginia [...] Everything that has monetary worth – his expensive clothes, his car, his wallet, his watch – becomes the weight that keeps him from gaining their confidence" (208). Despite the tension that his clothing and attendant attitude create, one of the men in town, Omar, invites Milkman on a hunting trip, where Milkman realizes:

His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use. And endurance. Eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch – and some other sense that he knew he did not have: an ability to separate out, of all the things there were to sense, the one that life itself might depend on. [...] What did [the other men] hear that made [them know] something had happened some [...] two miles away? (Morrison 277)

A sensory connection to the land, this native soil is crucial to his survival. In the woods, "Milkman hears the primal language of a long-forgotten relationship between humans and the natural, physical world" (Kennedy 209). The men he is with already own this knowledge, while Milkman struggles to catch up:

The men and the dogs were talking to each other. In distinctive voices they were saying distinctive, complicated things. [...] All those shrieks, those rapid tumbling barks, the long sustained yells, the tuba sounds, the drumbeat sounds, the low liquid *howm howm*, the reedy whistles, the thin *eeee*'s of a coronet, the *unh unh unh* bass chords. It was all language. [...]. No it was not language; it was what there was before language. Before things were written down. Language in the time when men and animals did talk to one another. [...] And he was hearing it in the Blue Ridge Mountains under a sweet gum tree. (Morrison 278)

Using words descriptive of musical sounds and instruments, Morrison paints an image of a communication that predates European contact and written word. It could be argued that Morrison participates in Philip Deloria's game of "Playing Indian"; however, I believe that Morrison uses such (perhaps romanticized) descriptions of Milkman's newly found connection with nature in order to establish for the reader a dual history that connects both to a Native understanding of American soil (especially the Cherokee in the Appalachian/Blue Ridge mountains) that predates European contact and notions of language and knowledge, as well as to an African American sense of rootedness to the land of the South (as a more direct connection to Africa).<sup>49</sup> Just as an understanding of his past and ancestry ultimately provides for Milkman a kind of spiritual saving, this very visceral understanding of his heritage offers him a more literal means of survival, as he catches Guitar's wire just before it cuts his throat: "he sank his fingers into the grass [and] tried to listen with his fingertips, to hear what, if anything, the earth had to

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<sup>49</sup> For a detailed discussion of this hunting scene as connected to Milkman's Native-American identity, see Paul Pasquaretta's "African-Native Subjectivity and the Blues Voice on the Writings of Toni Morrison and Sherman Alexie" (280).

say, and it told him quickly that there was someone standing behind him” (Morrison, *Song* 279). This escape from death, however, is only temporary.

Excited to tell Pilate that she has really been carrying her father’s bones all these years, and eager to relate to his family a history he is now proud of, Milkman returns home. On his journey back to Michigan, he notices that

[F]all had already come. Ohio, Indiana, Michigan were dressed up like the Indian warriors from whom their names came. Blood red and yellow, ocher and ice blue. He read the road signs with interest now, wondering what lay beneath the names. The Algonquins had named the territory he lived in Great Water, *michi gami*. How many dead lives and fading memories were buried in and beneath the names of the places in this country? (Morrison 329)

These descriptions, more explicitly “Native” than his hunting experience, show Milkman at a place of deeper understanding about himself, and geography and American memory. Virginia Kennedy explains:

Milkman’s new relationship to the land reaching from Virginia to Michigan [...] has its source in the blood and history of his ancestral identity. [He] acknowledges a heritage of dispossession and survival that is shared by African Americans and Native Americans. It is also a question that resuscitates stories the dominant narrative attempts to bury alive. (210)

With the unearthing of the truth about the past, Pilate now knows she has to bury her father’s bones back in Shalimar. Milkman and Pilate make the journey south in Macon’s Buick because Pilate “wouldn’t set foot in an airplane” (Morrison, *Song* 334). Once in Shalimar, Pilate and Milkman climb to the top of Solomon’s Leap. After placing Sing’s snuffbox in Jake’s new grave,



Pilate stands; then, “it seemed to Milkman that he heard the shot after she fell” (Morrison, *Song* 335). Guitar had followed Milkman to this precipice, and the bullet meant for Milkman finds Pilate instead. Milkman’s immediate urge to “force the life back in her” shows the depth of compassion, and now grief, he feels for her (Morrison, *Song* 336). Her journey, as well as Milkman’s, has come full circle.

As he sings over Pilate’s body, “Milkman burst the bonds of the Western, individualistic conception of self, accepting in its place the richness and complexity of a collective sense of identity” (Smith 283). Pilate’s final request is for Milkman to sing for her, and despite the fact that he “had no singing voice,” he “could not stop the worn old words from coming louder and louder as though sheer volume would wake her” (Morrison, *Song* 336). His persistence there, and the final realization that he loved her so deeply, demonstrates that Pilate’s tutelage had succeeded: “Milkman finally comes to understand himself in relationship to his ancestors and the land of their struggle” (Kennedy 208). Milkman’s final leap unites the “flying Africans and the singing birds,” [and] “his African grandfathers and Indian grandmothers [and he’s] no longer weighed down by the rootless material vanities that informed his original quest for gold” (Kennedy 210). Negotiating the multicultural space that reflects his Southern roots, Milkman learns: “If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it” (Morrison, *Song* 337).

Milkman’s fate is left to the interpretation of Morrison’s audience; and Milkman’s racial and cultural identities similarly resist easy interpretation. His journey is not a linear process, with a clear beginning, definite end, and neat resolution: Milkman attains “wisdom generated by developing a series of answers [...] that doesn’t try to fix ethnicity absolutely but sees it instead as an infinite process of identity construction” (Gilroy 223). James Brooks, in his introduction to *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (2002),

describes his encounter with a woman who identifies herself as Native and African American:

“If there exists a ‘multiplicity,’ [...] arbitrary and shifting distinctions between blood and culture, heritage and history, insiders and outsiders, Indian and African, such multiplicity allowed her to occupy several identity stances at once as she searched for answers” (6).

Similarly, Milkman’s journey allows him to shift and negotiate his Native identity and African American identity in his research.

While Morrison surely seeks to create a narrative that is centered on an understanding of and pride in black identity, she also allows that “Black survival depends upon forging a new means to build alliances above and beyond petty issues like [...] skin colour” (Gilroy 28). So the novel is at once about black family, community, and identity (as Morrison insists that it is), and about moving beyond essentialist notions that race and culture are defined in strict and finite terms to allow for the simultaneous inclusion of Native ancestry. Milkman’s perception of his identity as a black man is shifted to include a larger family, and a more inclusive sense of identity. The costume Milkman sheds by the novel’s end is one of Eurocentric trappings that have previously prevented him from thinking in more holistic, multidimensional ways: the watch shackles him to linear time, the beige three-piece suit binds him to a dream of material wealth, and his Florsheim shoes abrade his skin and remove any hope of connecting with the earth and its knowledge of the past. In the absence of these garments, Milkman is only aware of his wings. At the novel’s end, the space that stands between Milkman and his next connection with the descendants of Solomon and Sing diminishes to thin air.

## CHAPTER 6

## THE FIRST BLACK INDIAN:

CLINTON IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD*

In *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (1993), Jack Forbes references an ancient history between Native Americans and African Americans:

Nyan, an African sky-spirit, along with the African earth-mother, the African river-mother, and Anancy the Spider-trickster met the Great spirit, the Father Sun, and the other spirit-powers of the Americas. [...] Thus the spirit-powers of the Black Africans are said to have established a close cooperative relationship with the spirit-powers of the Americans. (Forbes 6)<sup>50</sup>

In addition to this spiritual communion, Forbes also presents evidence that suggests physical contact between people from Africa and the Americas before European colonization began. In his reference to pictures of boats, murals, sculptures, written accounts of voyages across the Atlantic, and certain clothing and weapons, Forbes paints a picture of a world already dynamic and multicultural before Europeans invented names for these already existing people and places (Forbes 11-15). Leslie Marmon Silko draws on evidence of such shared histories, both spiritual and corporeal, in *Almanac of the Dead* to construct a narrative in which contact between African and Native peoples both before and after European contact is central to the coming revolution of indigenous, tribal peoples to retake the Americas.

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<sup>50</sup> Originally collected in Jan Carew's essay "Children of the Sun" in *Caribbean Folk Tales and Legends*, edited by Andrew Salkey (1980).

In doing so, *Almanac of the Dead*, more so than any other novel discussed so far, exemplifies an “explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective [that is in] opposition to [...] nationalistic or ethnically absolute approaches” (Gilroy 15). In her diverse and multicultural landscape of characters and places, Silko shows her readers that cultures are not “sealed off hermetically from each other” and do not “always flow into patterns congruent with the borders of essentially homogenous nation states” (Gilroy 2, 5). In her narrative that prophesies the resurrection of indigenous people as they reclaim land of the Americas, Silko relies upon characters with Native American, Mexican, Spanish, European, African and Asian roots, as well as people of various physical ability including amputees and paraplegics, as the catalysts of this revolution. In the community formed by these seemingly disparate peoples, Silko defies the Eurocentric narrative of history and creates a new definition of multiculturalism that recognizes each separate culture as sovereign, while demonstrating that, for justice or political reversal to take place, there must be collaboration and a sense of a “community of difference” among the characters. She responds to both Native and non-Native scholars, but ultimately re-imagines what multiculturalism is through her characters and her use of revolutionary ideals.

For the purposes of my project, Clinton (who Silko characterizes as the “black Indian” and “the black veteran with one foot”) is the most compelling and revealing character because, through him, Silko explores the interstices of African and Native routes of contact (Silko 404).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Silko creates another black Indian character in *Gardens in the Dunes*, Big Candy. He is described as a “big [...] black man,” but says of his ancestry, “my grandma was a Baton Rouge Indian (209). Silko elaborates only once on his racial and cultural identity: “Candy’s mother had been born into slavery, and after emancipation she continued to reflect on her position as a slave and then as a free woman. Dahlia [Candy’s mother] was six feet tall and weighed three hundred pounds, so when she talked, people listened, even her employer and his wife. ‘Wage slave,’ she called herself and the others; no, they couldn’t be bought or sold anymore – now human beings were worthless, and anything worthless was left to starve. At night in their cabin, Dahlia loved to tell the stories she heard as a girl about the Red Stick people who adopted the escaped African slaves. Even before Indians ever saw an African, the old Red Stick dreamers described them and said they had powerful medicine that the people here could use. So they welcomed the fugitives when they appeared, and it wasn’t long before the Red Sticks were given some of this medicine, which allowed their warriors to move through the swamps as silently and swiftly as smoke. Heavy

Using Clinton as a mouthpiece and springboard for her ideas about how nation, blood and culture interact to form one's identity, Silko shows her readers how multicultural worldviews rooted in a sense of tribal, indigenous ideologies can transform complacency into revolutionary action. The majority of the existing literature that addresses these issues in *Almanac of the Dead* falls into two interrelated categories: texts that describe the novel as a manifesto of tribal worldviews (including ecological criticism and relationships to Marxism), and texts that read the novel as resistance literature foretelling an eminent indigenous revolution.<sup>52</sup> No critical text to date engages Silko's novel as a multicultural manifesto driven by Clinton's educational agenda and symbolic presence as the black Indian, as I aim to do.<sup>53</sup>

To distinguish my discussion of Silko's novel from existing literature about it, I will use Rosemarie Garland Thomson's models of applying disability studies to literature to interpret Clinton's disability and "corporeal difference" as another "form of ethnicity" (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 6).<sup>54</sup> Clinton's body, marked as disabled and costumed in the attire of the American military forces that caused his trauma, demands that readers reconsider the ability of the "disabled" body and the official history of war and conflict in the name of American freedom.

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casualties were inflicted on the French soldiers by only a handful of warriors, and later they routed the British. Of course, the swamps' quicksand and fevers were their powerful allies" (217).

<sup>52</sup> Essays that discuss the novel's occupation with tribal worldviews, Marxism, and ecology include Ann Brigham's "Productions of Geographic Scale and Capital-Colonialist Enterprise in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2004), Channette Romero's "Envisioning a 'Network of Tribal Coalitions': Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2002), Rebecca Tillett's "Reality Consumed by Reality: The Ecological Costs of 'Development' in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2005), and Maggie Ann Bowers's "Eco-Criticism in a (Post-) Colonial Context and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2004). Essays that discuss the novel as a foretelling of revolution include Edward Dauterich's "Time, Communication, and Prophecy: Prodigious Unity in *Almanac of the Dead*" (2007), David Mogen's "Native American Visions of Apocalypse: Prophecy and Protest in the Fiction of Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor" (2005), and Yvonne Reineke's "Overturning the (New World) Order: Of Space, Times, Writing, and Prophecy in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (1998).

<sup>53</sup> In "'If You Know I Have a History, You Will Respect Me': A Perspective on Afro-Native Literature" (1994), Sharon Holland begins the important work of reading Clinton's identity as a black Indian; however, she divides her attention between Nettie Jones's *Mischief Makers* (1989) and Silko's novel, and also references briefly Michael Dorris's *Yellow Raft in Blue Water* (1988) and Alice Walker's *Temple of My Familiar* (1989).

<sup>54</sup> Michelle Jarman's "Exploring the World of Different in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2006) begins the work of reading Silko's texts in the context of disability studies (and I will refer to this piece in detail later), but she largely overlooks Clinton's central role in the discourse of disability in the novel.

While there exists a significant body of criticism regarding the human tissue and body trafficking and disease and medicine in *Almanac of the Dead*, there is little written about it using disability studies as a lens.<sup>55</sup> In the same way that Clinton's identity as the black Indian in Silko's text act as trope for shared histories of American oppression, so does his disability.

Before exploring the concept of disability and the symbolic importance of Clinton's body, I would like first to contextualize my use of the term "multiculturalism," because the word incites controversy in both Native and non-Native circles of academic discourse. To do so, I would like to offer some background for the movement and explain where and how Silko situates herself within it. Christopher Newfield and Avery F. Gordon trace the origin of multiculturalism in the collection, *Mapping Multiculturalism* (1996):

Multiculturalism's most general goal in the 1970's was to reorganize education for the benefit of minority students. Its proponents saw it as an idea that supported other everyday work toward antiracist social and cultural life. [...] It did not envision revolutionary change, but did seek to dismantle white-majority control of schools and the use of white backgrounds and values as the sole yardstick of excellence. It sought to recover lost knowledge and thereby produce new understanding of U.S. history and social life. At its broadest reach, multiculturalism imagined the building of racial democracy through popular pluralism. (Newfield and Gordon 77)

While many Native writers take issue with any project that groups Native Americans as a "minority," one would be hard-pressed to describe the goals of such a project, as Newfield explains it, as intentionally malevolent or divisive. However, I do not believe that Silko merely

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<sup>55</sup> For examples of human and body tissue trafficking, see Jane Olmstead's "The Uses of Blood in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (1999), Hsinya Huang's "Writing Fever, Writing Trauma: Tropical Disease and Tribal Medicine – The Columbian Exchange in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2005), and Ann Stanford Folwell's "'Human Debris': Border Politics, Body Parts, and the Reclamation of the Americas in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (1997).

extend this project into her fiction; she makes a clear distinction by envisioning the means of her project not through “pluralism” but through indigeneity. Further, she *does* envision revolution through these means. Although Silko’s vision of justice differs from this (white) version of multiculturalism, she does demonstrate in her text an agreement with the project of dismantling the biased majority’s official record of history and exposing their agenda to perpetuate colonialism.

While Silko resists a neat alignment with the US version of multiculturalism, she also challenges strict separatist Native attitudes toward multiculturalism. M. Annette Jaimes Guerrero articulates the concern of many Native scholars in her statement that “liberal education policies [...] encourage assimilation” because “Multiculturalism favors treating American Indians as ethnic minorities, rather than descendant of indigenous peoples and members of tribal nations” (56). In other words, it denies an already existing national identity. What is at stake in assimilating into multicultural programs is what Native scholars like Jace Weaver and Craig Womack refer to as cultural sovereignty. I propose that Silko demonstrates that a version of multiculturalism can and does exist that gives voice and sovereignty to Native beliefs, while still creating a space for all the other voices. In her construction of *Almanac of the Dead* she does exactly what Womack terms “Red Stick Literary Criticism”: Silko

emphasizes Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty, and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and, finally, roots literature in land and culture. This criticism emphasizes unique Native worldviews and political realities, searches for differences as often as similarities, and attempts to find Native literature’s place in Indian country, rather than Native literature’s place in the canon. (Womack 11)

Silko responds to Womack's call, but not at the expense or exclusion of any non-Native voices or characters.

Silko's characters are widely diverse, whether it is by sexuality, physical ability, or racial identity, and because of this diversity they remind readers of the myriad and enduring memories the human body holds and exhibits.<sup>56</sup> Silko reminds readers of the primacy of bodily memory in her refrain "Only the body remembered" (Silko 338). By being marked bodily, visibly or beneath the skin, Silko often suggest that these characters are somehow more easily integrated into or accepting of the ideology of the revolution. Consistent with Anzaldúa's description of "facultad" in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), some characters in Silko's novel have access to unique perspective because of their somatic difference; this is true of Sterling ("marked" by race), the gay eco-terrorist, Trigg (a paraplegic), and Clinton ("marked" by both race and disability). However, Silko resists simply saying that race determines political agenda; it is about race only in so much as race in this country often determines experience. Michelle Jarman writes: "Silko positions a heterogeneous worldview that posits variation and an understanding of difference as central to species and individual survival. [...] these bodily representations often disrupt the assumption that any specific corporeal hybridity guarantees one's ability to understand, accept, or value difference" (149). Even when the characters are marked by disability, as a racial "Otherness," or by trauma, they do not always act with wisdom and insight in the efforts to subvert the dominant political power of modern-day Destroyers. Since I am focusing specifically on the character of Clinton, I aim to explore how his bodily identity informs his political ideologies in complicated and suggestive ways. Physical markers such as clothing

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<sup>56</sup> For further reading on queerness in Silko's novel, see Dorothea Fisher-Hornung's "'Now We Know That Gay Men Are Just Men After All': Abject Sexualities in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" (2007), Tara Prince-Hughes's "Worlds in and Out of Balance: Alternative Genders and Gayness in *Almanac of the Dead*" (2000), and Janet St. Clair's "Cannibal Queers: The Problematics of Metaphor in *Almanac of the Dead*" (1999).



(Clinton's uniform), visible disability (his prosthetic foot), and his racial identity (as both Cherokee and African American, but identified phenotypically as "black") make Clinton a crucially significant character to examine in terms of how race (biology) and culture (experience) coalesce and conflate to form identity.

The characters in Silko's narrative act as "links in a revolutionary chain" and are as "diverse as her landscape" (Holland 268). Amidst the multicultural voices, Clinton appears in Part Three of the novel, titled "Africa." This section "appears not as a departure from the other voices in the novel so much as a disruption of the categories of 'blackness' and 'Indianness'" (Holland 268). His identity as a black Indian, however, is not his only somatic difference – both his uniform and his disability also mark him as Other. His dress consists of military uniform, which reflects both his past (as a Vietnam Vet) and his present and future (in Rambo-Roy's Homeless Army). Essential to his identity and survival, he has to wear the uniform everyday, "Otherwise there would just be trouble for him" (Silko 404). Clinton and his fellow homeless vets are identified by Roy by their "full Green Beret uniform"; Roy refers to the army only as the "Green Berets" (Silko 404, 409). This group mentality among the "Green Berets" arises from their communal experiences both in war and on the streets.

In *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (1986), John Hellman explains that during the Vietnam War the Green Beret was a division of the United States military that was a combination of the "Peace Corpman and the soldier" (44). He asserts that in the propagandist pro-war rhetoric, the Green Beret became the "quintessential symbol" of a renewal of American freedom and democracy and "personified the virtues of civilization and savagery [and] the wild and of the domestic" (Hellman 44-45, 48). In 1960s material and print culture, imagery of the Green Berets personified "a rebirth of America's central mythic hero" (Hellman 46). The John

Wayne film *The Green Berets* (1968) is one such example. In “Apocalypse Then: Hollywood Looks Back at Vietnam,” Peter McInerney describes the film as a “professedly propagandistic prowar film” (23). However, by the time the movie was released, recent failures of U.S. policy made it an “anachronism” because of the way that it relied (unsuccessfully) on American mythology of concepts of war and heroism (McInerney 23). In the costume of the Green Beret, Clinton draws attention to the farce of the war as a project to ensure democracy and freedom. However, it is also a subversive symbol in the way that it unites Clinton with other disenfranchised war veterans, and simultaneously mocks the mythology of the Green Beret as a symbol of American war-time heroism.

The war experience that he shares with the other members of the Homeless Army unites the veterans together in the same way disability can unite the disenfranchised. Thomson, in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Literature* (1996), explains that the disabled often have “no shared cultural heritage” as other minority groups do; only the shared experience of stigmatization created commonality” (15). Thomson reframes “‘disability’ as another culture-bound, physically justified difference to consider along with race, gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality” (5). Thomson reads disability as “a form of ethnicity [and thus] entirely culturally determined” (*Extraordinary* 6-7). Thus, Clinton’s “extraordinary” (a term Thomson uses instead of “disabled”) body is indeed a “sign invested with transcendent meaning” (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 11).<sup>57</sup> Silko characterizes Clinton as “the black veteran with one foot [and] the top of the line, the best kind of prosthetic foot you could buy” (404). This description places focus “on a body feature to describe [the] character, [a technique which] “throws the

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<sup>57</sup> Thomson explains that “the ways that bodies interact with the socially engineered environment and conform to social expectations determine the varying degrees of disability or able-bodiedness, of extra-ordinary or ordinariness” (*Extraordinary* 7).

reader into a confrontation with the character that is predetermined by cultural notions about disability” (Thomson 11).

However, Silko subverts cultural notions of disability. Clinton’s disability and the sense of Otherness to which it contributes actually allow him to subvert narratives of history and offer in their places indigenous, tribal voices and perspectives. Clinton is Ahab-like in his one-footed disability and in his ability to overthrow dominant Eurocentric paradigms. He “achieves agency and a move toward sovereignty because he can see himself in solidarity with other oppressed peoples” (Holland 270). Clinton understands that “Vietnam had been a trap for people of color” and he attempts to “warn his people, honest black folks who still believed all the lies fed to them about the United States of America” (Silko 407). Because of his experience in war, Clinton believes that it is “important for people to understand that all around them lay human slavery, although most recently it had been called by other names” (Silko 411). In Silko’s characterization of Clinton, “we will see that the disabled figure operates as the vividly embodied, stigmatized other whose social role is to symbolically free the privileged, idealized figure of the American self from the vagaries and vulnerabilities of embodiment” (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 7). His war injuries, both physical and psychic, physically manifested in his prosthesis, and act as a persistent reminder of his experience and memories.

Clinton understands slavery because of his experience in war, because of his knowledge about American history, and because of his heritage. Clinton and the rest of his family “had been direct descendant of wealthy slave-owning Cherokee Indians” (Silko 415). He learns by listening to his Aunts and Grandmother that:

Clinton’s branch of the family that was Indian always bragged that they were the first black Indians [...] in Tennessee. [...] The black Indians went so far as to paint a black

Indian in a warbonnet on the front wall of their house. The black Indians of the family had stories about the very first black Indians [who] lived in high mountain strongholds where they launched raids on the plantations and settlements below. (418)

For Clinton, the most crucial connection in American identity is the connection between African Americans and Native Americans; knowledge about these two groups becomes central to his role as educator in the coming revolution. Clinton's amputated foot is symbolic of the amputation that slavery enacted for both Native Americans and African Americans as it cut off cultural ties to land, language, and all the knowledge that goes with them. The knowledge about his family sparks his interest in these connections he reads about in his Black Studies classes in college. There, he learns about the complicated dynamics of African and Native peoples that the Europeans enslaved:

To read the white man's version, Africans were responsible for the plantation slavery in the New World. But African slaves only replaced the Native American slaves, who died by the thousands. Before the European slave-buyers had arrived, African coastal tribes had practiced only local war-hostage slavery. Prisoners of war worked until their ransoms were paid. (Silko 406)

Clinton understands that African Americans and Native Americans "stood in" for each other at various points in history as the enslaved Other to the imagined white American self.<sup>58</sup>

The historian Jack Forbes tells us that black Africans began to be imported in significant numbers to the Caribbean in 1510; though the "initial slave population was American, in the second stage, it became African and American. In the third stage it became increasingly

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<sup>58</sup> This echoes an earlier discussion in Chapter 4 (p. 58) regarding "the doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins" looking for the authentic Other (Roach 3). Roach writes "this process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric. [...] [S]urrogation rarely if ever succeeds" (2).

Africanized in certain regions [...] while other areas saw the continued enslavement of Americans” (62-63). Clinton learns that, once captured, many African slaves were taken to Hispaniola, where they

[H]ad escaped and hid in the mountains where they met up with survivors of indigenous tribes hiding in remote strongholds. In the mountains the Africans had discovered a wonderful thing: certain of the African gods had located themselves in the Americas as well as Africa: the Giant Serpent, the Twin Brothers, the Maize Mother, to name a few. Right then the magic happened: the great American and great African tribal cultures had come together to create a powerful consciousness within all people. All are welcome – everyone had been included. (Silko 416)

Once the “white man had heard rumors about the union of African and Indian spirits” they were outlawed (Silko 417). Forbes confirms Silko’s reference to new religious practices being forbidden: “Needless to state, the imperial powers often attempted to keep black and red people apart, the better to divide and conquer” (61). As slaves, Africans and Indians had often worked together to overthrow their oppressors.

In his Black Studies classes, Clinton also learns that this connection between African and Native Americans pre-dated European slavery: “in the realm of the spirits [...] great American and great African tribal cultures had come together to create a powerful consciousness within all people” (Silko 416). Clinton comes to believe that the nature of this spiritual union, however, had changed in the New World: “In Africa the spirits behaved much more gently and peacefully. On American soil these spirits had been nurtured on bitterness and blood spilled since the Europeans had arrived” (418). As relief watchman for Roy, guarding Trigg’s warehouse, Clinton begins recording “broadcasts” on his cassette recorder, which are rants and lectures

about such topics. He anticipates that their broadcast “in the reborn United States [would] be dedicated to the children born to escaped African slaves who married Carib Indian survivors. The first broadcast would be dedicated to them – the first African-Native Americans” (410). In his second real broadcast, Clinton states, “Slavery joined forever the histories of the tribal people of the Americas with the histories of the tribal people of Africa [when] Damballah, great serpent of the sky and keeper of all spiritual knowledge, joins the giant plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl” (428-429). These broadcasts “were meant to disrupt this aging dichotomy with a form of empowerment fostered generations before the appearance of Europeans on the continents of the Americas” (Holland 271). Clinton confirms his intent: “The powers who controlled the United States didn’t want the people to know their history. If the people knew their history, they would realize they must rise up” (Silko 431). For Clinton, knowledge about links between the spirits of Africa and the Americas means that the spirits will help in the coming revolution, and that the spiritual forces would assure their victory over their oppressors.

Silko describes a specific embodiment of African and Native spirituality in the Americas in her discussion of Mardi Gras. Clinton recalls the following lecture from a college class:

French colonials, terrified of poisonings and slave uprisings, but more terrified of the spirits, had asked the black Indians to lead the great opening Mardi Gras parade to acknowledge the people who had been in that place the longest. The white man needed the black Indians to quiet the anger of the spirits. [...] Black Indian guards and scouts walk ahead of the Mardi Gras parade. The tribal queen is very black, but her face is painted intricately and she wears the feathers of the Kushada Indians. The medicine man strides beside her. Black Indian marchers in tribal costume and feathers are everywhere.

[...] Black Indians dance with wild abandon. The dances are tribal. No outsider knows where Africa ends or America begins. (419-421)

The lecture addresses the symbolic and actual cultural importance of Mardi Gras Indians. In his book, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996), Roach explores the “performance genealogy of the Mardi Gras Indians [...] destined for consumption by whites” (200). He states:

Such diverse claims for the origin of Mardi Gras Indians provide a crux for the construction of collective memory out of genealogies of performance. The tangle of creation narratives – the romantic reaching back to extracolonial encounters between black and red men and women, the Afro-Caribbean ties to Trinidad, Cuba, and Haiti, the links to West African dance and musical forms, the social hypothesis stressing fraternal African American bonds in the face of oppression, the presence of a strong spirit-world subculture [...]. I believe that each story contributes its own grain of truth – the trace of a once powerful surrogation. (Roach 194)

The multiple threads and stories connecting African and Native cultures in this performance tradition reveal a complex and multiply rooted American history. The black Indian on parade “performs the gestures and actions, he sews the feathered and beaded costumes, and he sings the songs, all of which constitute living artifacts, spirit-world messages passed on through the medium of his performance” (Roach 198). Just as Clinton performs on air in radio broadcasts, and on the pages of Silko’s text, the Mardi Gras Indian reveals the “historic juncture of Africans and Amerindians” (Roach 200). The union of these people and their spirits certainly threatened the power that European and Euro-American masters held over their slaves; this is why the “black Indian” is such an important aspect of the revolution Silko foretells.

Roach's discussion of performance offers an opportunity to make meaningful connections between the performance of a racial identity and disability. In her essay "Staring Back: Self-Representations of Disabled Performance Artists" Thomson explores disability performance art as "a genre of self-representation, a form of autobiography, that merges the visual with the narrative" (334). While Clinton does not engage in any overt "disability performance," I propose that he "performs," symbolizes and visually recalls the "primal scene of disability" that Thomson describes in some performance artists' works ("Staring" 334). Symbolically, Clinton acts out the "extracolonial encounters between black and red men and women" (Roach 194) and the national "encounters" between the United States and the Viet Cong. In the performance artists that Thomson describes and in Clinton's actions, "self-display also provides a medium for positive identity politics" ("Staring" 335). Clinton's body and voice perform to create a narrative of survival and resistance.

In his reading and ranting, Clinton muses on the nature of nationalism, blood, culture and identity. He recalls learning about great cultures of Africa, but does not want to return there like Garvey because "blacks had been in the Americas for centuries now, and Clinton could feel the connection the people had, a connection so deep it ran in his blood" (Silko 414-415). In her assertion that Clinton's connection to the Americas ran in his blood, Silko re-imagines what America looks like. Clinton, as much as any other (white) American, belongs to this land. Instead of being cut off from his ties to the land (a severance made manifest in the amputation of his foot), Clinton's "corporeal difference" allows him to access deeper connection to his roots (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 5-6). The deep spiritual, and corporeal (blood) connection he feels with the land called the "Americas" is why he so fervently seeks to educate its peoples. Holland observes that Clinton is "self-emancipated by the knowledge of his own history, [and] is



obsessed with viewing that history in its full manifestation – both its tangible and intangible elements” (271). Clinton’s obsessive reading, research, rants and broadcasts instill in the reader “a sense that history can be a self-determining factor in a people’s emancipation” and reflect a “reality that constitutes contemporary America” (Holland 274). By the novel’s end, Clinton resolves to continue his mission outside the national borders of America. Clinton resolves to go to Haiti to learn more about the spirits from there (where Silko tells us on her “Five Hundred Year Map” the first black Indian was born) and to educate the indigenous people still there. In Clinton’s decision, Silko expands notion of where national borders are located. His insight into his own complicated identity as an American propels him across conventional borders in order to fuel the revolution.

The ideology of this revolution is that the land must be reclaimed to be protected, not owned, because no one owns the land. The trajectory of this revolution is consistent with Weaver’s description of “resistance literature” as something that “presupposes a people’s collective relationship to a common land, a common identity, or a common cause” (11).<sup>59</sup> In *Almanac of the Dead*, the Wacah “proclaimed that all human beings were welcomed to live in harmony together [...] but the result would be the same: tribal people would retake the Americas [and] ancestral land all over the world. This is what the earth’s spirit wanted: her indigenous children who loved her and did not harm her” (Silko 709, 712). The revolutionary leader Angelita LaEscapia helps outline for us the nature of the revolution to take back the land as one that engages Marxism, but remembers where Marxism came from. While she admits that “at least Engels and Marx had understood the earth belongs to no one,” they had come to this

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<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the concept of “resistance literature” as described by Weaver, reaches a climax here in Silko’s text; however, the project of asserting a “collective relationship to a common land, common identity, common cause” (11) is arguably present in Marrant’s *Narrative*, as well as Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.

understanding by reading about certain Native American communal societies [and had] misunderstood a great deal” (Silko 749, 519-520).

Silko is careful though not to turn Marxism into the revolution’s ideology. Angelita “was no Marxist; she had her own ideas about political systems, and they had nothing to do with white men from Europe” (Silko 521). With Clinton, too, Silko states, he “swears he was no Marxist. African and other tribal people had shared food and wealth in common for thousands of years before the white man Marx came along and stole their ideas” (Silko 408). What is missing from Marx is a desire to respect the earth and to respect the memory of the dead (Silko 521, 523). Silko links her revolutionary ideals closer to the idea of “communitism” – Weaver’s term which is a “combination of the words ‘community’ and ‘activism’” and indicates a “commitment to the Native community, including the wider community” (Weaver 43). Her text recalls a long history of revolution outside of Western political control: “Indigenous American uprisings had been far more extensive than any Europeans wanted to admit, not even the Marxists, who were jealous of African and Native American slave workers who had risen up successfully against colonial masters without the leadership of the white man” (Silko 526). Leaders in this revolution understand the historical nature of revolution, as a natural phenomenon by which power (when unbalanced) becomes redistributed.

In order to achieve this goal of reclamation and redistribution, Angelita and others put “decolonization before multiculturalism” to “counter [...] the myth of the intellectual superiority of ‘Western civilization’ at the expense of indigenous peoples, our cultures and contributions to modern society, and our sophisticated *traditional* knowledge bases” (Guerrero 49-50). Guerrero, and (I argue) Silko through her fiction, conceptualize “from an indigenous world-view of balance with and within the natural order, what some activist scholars are calling Indigenism,” which is a

more integrated worldview of life and its relationship with nature (Guerrero 50, 60-61).

Although Silko focuses on and gives preference to this indigenous ideology as the basis of her revolution, she is careful to integrate it with Western notions of communism and African ideals of tribal community to make certain that it is seen as a global concept and a world view, not exclusively an isolated Native phenomenon. Early in the novel, Sterling's reflection on events in history sets up the crucial importance of Native and African contact in the coming revolution.

[P]eople he had been used to calling "Mexicans" were really remnants of different kinds of Indian. But what remained of what was Indian was in appearance only [...] They had lost contact with their tribes and their ancestors' worlds. [...] He needed to get his mind off such thoughts – Indians flung across the world forever separated from their tribes and from their ancestral lands – that kind of thing had been happening to human beings since the beginning of time. African tribes had been sold into slavery all over the earth. (Silko 88)

He sees what happened to his people within the context of the global "Reign of the death-eye dog," but in a way that does not lessen the specific events of his people's history and past.

In speaking to the crowd of followers, Angelita contextualizes what the white man Marx has to do with their revolution: "Today I am going to tell you what use this white man Marx is to us here in our mountain village" (Silko 517). She lists moments in history where the slaves and workers have risen up to overthrow their masters:

1526 – U.S.A. – Pee Dee River, South Carolina; Indian and Negro slaves rise up. [...]

1791 – Haiti – The first successful slave rebellion in the New World. In 1801, slaves and the first "black Indians" hold off Napoleon's brother-in-law and twenty-five thousand French troops. [...]

1819 – Florida – Spanish Territory is “annexed” by the U.S.A. to wipe out nests of hostile Indians and runaway slaves who use Florida as a base camp for guerilla raids on plantations across the border. (527-530)

In these specific examples, Silko reveals moments in history where African Americans and Native Americans act in collaboration against the white man for reclamation of the land and their freedom. But it is not the racial identities of these revolutionaries that are the criteria for their participation in the uprising; it is instead their belief in this ideology. As long as one is willing to join in this community of thought, one can join the revolution regardless of race. Silko places higher value on cultural worldviews, than biological racial definitions.

Silko returns in earnest to Clinton and his ideologies in the novel’s sixth and final section: “One World, Many Tribes.” The first “Book” in this final section is “The International Holistic Healers Convention.” At this convention, we meet several characters, in addition to Clinton, who discuss the important role that the “black Indian” will play in the revolution and in a more holistic understanding of American history. In his lecture, Wilson Weasel Tail speaks in the language of Ghost Dance: “Sixty million dead souls howl for justice in the Americas! They howl to retake the land as the black Africans have retaken their land!” (723). Another conference participant, the Barefoot Hopi,

emphasized the similarity between the tribal people of Africa and the tribal people of the Americas. [...] The Hopi said black Africans talked about the price they had paid in blood to take back the land; the spirits had been furious and had demanded blood in retribution for the sacrileges the people had allowed against the spirits. Their lands had been reconsecrated to Ogoun and Damballah with European as well as African blood. The Hopi had got promises from a dozen African nations; if the natives of the Americas

rose up, the African nations would not remain neutral [...] In Africa and in the Americas too, the giant snakes, Damballah and Quetzalcoatl, have returned to the people of Africa, and they speak to the people of the Americas; they speak through dreams” (733-734).

In one of the final sections entitled “Rise Up!” Clinton returns and realizes another truth:

“millions of black Indians were scattered throughout the Americas. Africans in the Americas had always been ‘home’ because ‘home’ is where ancestor spirits are. From the gentle giants, Damballah and Quetzalcoatl, to the Maize Mother, and the Twin Brothers and Old Woman Spider, Africa and the Americas had been possessed” (742).

In the final pages of the novel, Silko repeats the information contained in Clinton’s “black Indian” broadcasts and Angelita’s speech – the historical accounts that connect African and Native Americans in resistance against their common oppressor. Clinton makes notes from a book given to him by the Barefoot Hopi:

1526 Dee River, South Carolina: Negro slaves rise up, flee to live with Indians.

1663 Gloucester County, Virginia: Indians aid black and white slaves. [...]

1690 Newbury, Massachusettes: Mysterious white man from New Jersey leads Indian and black slaves to French Canada. [...]

1708 Newton, Long Island: Indian and black slaves rebel and kill seven whites.

1709 Counties of Surry, James City, and Isle of Wight in Virginia suffer rebellions of Indian and black slaves. [...]

1712 New York City: Indian and Negro slaves kill nine white men during uprising. [...]

1727 Louisiana: Captured Indian slave reveals secret outlaw village of “Natanapelle” where runaway black and Indian slaves live. [...]

1730 Louisiana: French arm adult black slaves to fight Chonachee Indians, but blacks

conspire with Indians against white men. [...]

1791 Western Virginia: Indians defeat General St. Clair and unrest stirs among black slaves while militia is gone fighting Indians.

1793 North Carolina: Cherokee Indians fight whites and black slaves threaten to rise up. [...]

1819 Florida, a Spanish territory is “annexed” by the U.S. to wipe out nests of hostile Indians and runaway slaves who use Florida as a base camp for guerrilla raids on plantations across the border. (743-745)

By these final sections of the novel, it is clear that Clinton becomes more than just educator of his Homeless Army; he acts as educator for Silko’s readers by finding and repeating bits of history omitted in most history books.

Through Clinton, Silko relentlessly insists on the importance of a fuller knowledge of history as a means of survival. In general, her claim is that all sorts of uprisings throughout the history of the Americans have been deleted from official history books; her specific claim, though, is that the connections between African and Native peoples are especially important because of what they say about the nature of slavery, race, and culture in the formation of America, the nation state. In the midst of this Native American “Convention,” Clinton realizes something key to his understanding of the relationship between these two peoples:

Clinton knew racism had made people afraid to talk about their Native American ancestors. But the black Indians would know in their hearts who they were when they heard Clinton talk about the spirits. The people had to be reminded that the spirits were all around, and the tribal people torn from Mother Africa had not been deserted by the spirits. Rather the people had deserted the spirits; overwhelmed by their losses, the

people had no longer prayed or believed because they blamed the spirits for their slavery on alien soil. (Silko 746)

He sees that the connection had been there all along, but the people had lost faith in it through ignorance. This is why he thinks education is central.

On his way to Haiti to complete this mission, Clinton reflects on the impending revolution and the revelations that history had taught him:

Nothing could be black only or brown only or white only anymore. [...] This was the last chance the people had against the Destroyers, and they would never prevail if they did not work together as a common force. Clinton had promised the Barefoot Hopi he would spread the word among the brothers and sisters in the cities. He would tell them to prepare; a day was coming when each human being, man, woman, and child, could do something, and each contribution no matter how small would generate great momentum because they would be acting together. [...] All hell was about to break loose. (Silko 747, 749)

The sheer power of education and the number of people it would then mobilize to action would spur this revolution. To Clinton, this revolution must begin with the black Indians. Silko places certain importance on the power of blood, and bodily memory, but she is careful not to essentialize identity to only these corporeal realities. Thomson reminds readers that “by first theorizing disability and then examining several sites that construct it [...] the complex ways that disability intersects with other social identities” indicate a more complex, life-affirming and revealing reality (Thomson, *Extraordinary* 5-6). Clinton teaches us that it is what one does with these memories, spiritual connections, and national ties can result in further destruction, or in regeneration. Womack confirms that Silko’s narrative is ultimately an optimistic one:

As the European order dies off because of its moral and spiritual bankruptcy and capitalism's inability to sustain itself, this is not the end of the world as we know it, to quote REM. Silko's metaphor is not entropy but a redistribution of energy. As things European fall back to earth, indigenous consciousness takes over. Ancestral spirits spiral and swirl around the world's indigenous populations, urging them to rise up, and the continent begins a return to more communal ways of being. [...] Silko's work is quite optimistic rather than the dark vision that has been described by the critics [...].

[V]oluntarily or by force, the land will regain its indigenous integrity. (Womack 253, 256)

Silko's agenda is one of overthrowing dominant Eurocentric paradigms in favor of indigenous ones; she situates her narrative as a multicultural text that challenges both Eurocentric paradigms and Native American notions of separatism.

This agenda, however, is not at odds with multiculturalism or Native scholarships. Through embracing a both/and ideology and model of thinking (as exemplified by Clinton's multi-racial identity), Silko suggests that "it is the displacement of Eurocentrism and its replacement by an indigenous worldview that must guide the radical work that some multiculturalism claims to want" (Guerrero 56). For Silko, the revolution to reclaim the land of the Americas both figuratively and spiritually must be rooted in multicultural participation. Black and Indian contact, however, does not only serve as a metaphor for multiracial American origins (though on one level it does do this); it also reminds the reader of the historical importance of a specific, understudied, dimension of American identity. Valerie Phillips, a speaker at the "Eating Out of the Same Pot" Black Indian Conference held at Dartmouth College in 2000, reminded listeners that



Africans and Indians are fundamentally tribal people, indigenous to the earth. Their blending only strengthens what they already are, if they remain true to their essence. Blacks and Indians who uncritically persist in looking at each other through the white man's eyes only undermine themselves. We strengthen ourselves by seeing the past clearly, changing our present, and consciously building our future on a solid, indigenous foundation. (383)

Silko envisions multiculturalism not as a melting pot, but as a community that relies upon both a unity of ideals and heterogeneity of experience and history for its survival. Through Clinton's performance, both symbolically and in fact, Silko acknowledges the power of understanding and living one's own, multiply rooted history.

## CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD A BLACK INDIAN POETICS AND POLITICS

I chose the texts previously discussed because of the diversity of perspectives they represent – eighteenth-century to twentieth-century texts by black, Native, and white men and women. However, I also chose them out of some degree of necessity because they are the few texts in American literature that explore in depth black Indian characters. That is not to say, however, that they are the only ones.<sup>60</sup> Many of the references in literature, however, are just that – references. In poetry and brief fictional prose descriptions of place and personal identity, references to black Indians serve as metaphor – sometimes as a shorthand for an expression of American fetishization of blackness and Indianness, and sometimes as a figurative means to identify a traumatic and significant moment in American history. Black Indians often appear as mere traces, ghosts, vestiges of a past ancestor, or as a passing mention made in order to debunk or reinforce the perception that there is some privilege to be gained by choosing one or the other depending upon the cultural context and circumstance. Even in *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (1986), which is one of the first texts that draws public attention to black Indians, William Loren Katz discusses them as a sort of curiosity, or novelty, citing famous ones like Langston Hughes and Frederick Douglass in the first pages of the book, which gives it the appearance of a sort of “Who’s Who” among African American visionaries, who happen to be “part-Indian” (10).

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<sup>60</sup> Other texts in American literature that engage the image of the Black Indian include Carson McCullers’s *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1955), Michael Dorris’s *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* (1988), Alice Walker’s *Temple of My Familiar* (1989), Nettie Jones’s *Mischief Makers* (1989), Sherman Alexie’s “John Coltrane Blowing” (1992) and “Red Blues” (1993). Texts mentioned in other chapters include Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), *Paradise* (1997), and Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999).

In contrast, Zora Neale Hurston in “How It feels to Be Colored Me” (1928) declares “I am colored but offer nothing in the way of extenuating circumstances except the fact that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother’s side was *not* an Indian chief” (35). Here, Hurston suggests that even though everyone she knows claims Native ancestry (as Hughes did) she refuses to be preoccupied with the subtle nuances of her racial identity. In contrast, Angela in Jessie Redmon Fauset’s novel *Plum Bun* (1929) is a young woman obsessed with her racial identity, which is briefly complicated in the following passage:

Gratitude was no strong ingredient in the girls’ nature, yet very often early she began thanking Fate for the chance which had in that household of four had bestowed on her the heritage of her mother’s fair skin. She might so easily have been, like her father, black, or have received the *mélange* which had resulted in Virginia’s bronzeness and her deeply waving black hair. But Angela had received not only her mother’s complexion and her soft cloudy chestnut hair, but she had taken from Julius the aquiline nose, the gift of some remote Indian ancestor which gave to his face and his eldest daughter’s that touch of chiseled immobility. (Fauset 14)

Here, the description suggests the Native phenotype as an asset, a gift that Angela proudly claims, a trait that may allow her to more easily pass as white (which she does for most of the novel). In these early twentieth-century texts, there is stark difference between the degree to which these African American “characters” want to be associated with Native American identity.

The diversity of thought increases later in the twentieth-century, as writers like Michelle Cliff, Lucille Clifton, Sherman Alexie, and Joy Harjo begin to assert a poetic aesthetic that references black Indian identity as a trope to debunk paradigms of race and power. Cliff’s poem “Within the Veil,” reminds her readers:

Color ain't no faucet  
 You can't turn it off and on  
 I say, color ain't no faucet  
 You can't turn it off and on  
 Tell the world who you are  
 Or you might as well be gone.

Now, the white man makes the rules  
 But we got to turn them down  
 Yes, baby, the white man makes the rules  
 But we got to turn them down  
 Can't abide this shit no longer  
 We got to swing this thing around.

[...]

Some of us part Indian  
 And some of us part white  
 Yes, sisters, some of us part Indian  
 And some of us part white  
 But we still can call you sisters  
 Even if you judge our skin too light. (1-12, 68-72)

Cliff tells readers that race is not a switch one turns on or off, and entreats them to subvert the racial codes and definition that read it as such. Even if we are “part Indian,” she says, “we still can call you sisters.”

Clifton similarly expands definitions and racial codes by engaging the trope of the black Indian in her poem “study the masters.” She writes:

like my aunt timmie.  
 it was her iron,  
 or one like hers,  
 that smoothed the sheets  
 the master poet slept on.  
 home or hotel, what matters is  
 he lay himself down on her handiwork  
 and dreamed. she dreamed too, words:  
 some cherokee, some masai and some  
 huge and particular as hope.  
 if you had heard her  
 chanting as she ironed  
 you would understand form and line  
 and discipline and order and  
 america.

Clifton’s Aunt Timmie, part Cherokee and part Masai (Kenyan), challenges the conventional knowledge of the “master poet.” The hybrid language she chants contains and conveys the true wisdom of “form and line / and discipline and order and / America” (14-16). Clifton reminds readers, as she does in the poem that opens my Introduction and serves as the inspiration for my title, that black Americans and Native Americans share a history of oppression and survivance in the Americas.

For Native American writers Alexie and Harjo, the black Indian underscores the significance of music within both African American and Native American cultures. In his story “Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock,” Alexie writes:

Usually I listened to the blues. Robert Johnson mostly. The first time I heard Robert Johnson sing I knew he understood what it meant to be Indian on the edge of the twenty-first century, even if he was black at the beginning of the twentieth. That must have been how my father felt when he heard Jimi Hendrix. When he stood in the rain at Woodstock. (Alexie 35)

Alexie reappropriates the legendary and mythic figure of Robert Johnson, a man said to have sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads for his guitar-playing ability, and in doing so reflects the feeling that the plight of the Indian “on the edge of the twenty-first century” is not unlike the plight of black people in the early 1900s. Similarly, Joy Harjo asserts, “I’ve always believed us Creeks (‘Creek’ is the more common name for the Muscogee people) had something to do with the origins of jazz. After all, when the African peoples were forced here for slavery they were brought to the traditional lands of the Muscogee peoples. Of course there was interaction between Africans and Muscogeans!” (Harjo 52). In her assumption that the geographic proximity of two cultures necessarily means cultural contact and collaboration, Harjo defies the notion that only the “conquered” culture changes. For Alexie and Harjo, such cultural overlaps and co-mingling signify the repeated patterns and motifs in American history and fuel the capacity for art to become a means of cultural and physical survival.

Most recently, Zelda Lockhart's novel *Cold Running Creek* (2007) depicts the life of Lilly, who is born to a black slave and her French-Choctaw master.<sup>61</sup> Lockhart brings to life the history of slavery in Choctaw tribes. Lilly is taken from her mother shortly after her birth by the mistress of the plantation, Raven, who is a full-blooded Choctaw whose tribe was removed to Oklahoma and whose immediate family was killed in the process. Raven is in denial about the fact that her husband is the father of this child, so she raises Lilly as her own and tells everyone that she was abandoned by a family of Choctaw on their way to Oklahoma. Lilly is raised as the pampered heir of the plantation, ignorant that of the fact that she is by law a slave, until the family secret is betrayed. Lilly is taken by neighbors for payment of a debt on the eve of Mississippi's involvement in the Civil War; she lives as a slave until Mississippi is emancipated by Union soldiers. She does not discover her biological mother's identity until the novel's final pages, and she assumes that her enslavement was an act of retribution because of her father's opposition to Mississippi's role in the war. Lilly is unable to reconcile herself to her lot as a "colored" sharecropper, and eventually marries a successful black man, only to be disillusioned and still unsatisfied with her status as an Indian without a country: "If I was Negro, or a woman, or white, I would have been able to enjoy the changes around me, or rebel against them, but I was an Indian, and there wasn't no bunch of folks to band with and make a cause" (Lockhart 242). Without her Choctaw family and tribe, Lilly feels she has no identity or purpose. After the discovery of her mother's identity, she sees family all around her for the first time – in her children, her neighbors, and her husband. Lockhart's novel is a testament to a tumultuous time in American history when tribe, family and blood lines became obscured by racism and a thirst for

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<sup>61</sup> Lockhart's first novel, *Fifth Born* (2002), won a finalist award for debut fiction from the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Legacy Foundation. I have written a review of *Cold Running Creek*, which will appear in the forthcoming issue of *Obsidian III: Literature in the African Diaspora* 7.2 (2007).

freedom. The novel successfully complicates the racial identity of black Indians in a way that will hopefully garnish more critical attention for this newly emerging American author.

More than just a novelty, or some little known aspect of American history, interesting mainly because they have been overlooked, black Indians occupy a space in American literary studies that, when closely read, explains pivotal moments in the collective American experience. In these texts and in the work that I have discussed in each of my preceding chapters, there is a variety and complexity of meaning within each character and poetic description. Echoing Bonnie TuSmith's assessment of racial characterization, "There is no paradigm [no master plan] – multicultural or otherwise – for this type of literary trope," I similarly assert that there is no monolithic way to encapsulate the trope of the black Indian (99).

I am among a group of scholars who are beginning to identify a new body of American literature, and to map out a corresponding tradition of poetics, rhetoric, and imagery unique to the history of black Indians. The work I have chosen is merely a part of this project that I hope that others will extend. When viewed as a body of work, part of a larger tradition, studies of black Indian American literature can achieve (at the very least) three objectives. First, they can illuminate subtle intricacies of slavery and removal that are often glossed over in traditional retellings of American history (including the one-drop rule, blood quantum doctrines and rolls, narratives of collaborative uprisings, histories of racism among and between the two groups, and delineations of how and why racism operates outside of explicit comparisons to white identity). Second, they can complicate and extend conversations about racial passing, because passing between black and Native identities or claiming one over the other is more complex and less predictable than passing from black and/or Native to white (which is what existing scholarship on passing addresses). The logical assumption made in passing as white is that whiteness has



obvious social, economic advantages. One cannot make such assumptions about passing between black and Native because privilege shifts depending on one's social, political, cultural center. Further, passing studies of black Indians simply do not exist; such research would usefully extend scholarship on passing in a larger sense because it offers a unique and complex reading of how one's internal racial identity (self-definition often based on both biology and culture) interacts with, contradicts, reinforces, and informs one's perceived racial identity (phenotype). Finally, as I have done in my discussion of "costume" and "masking" in these texts, studies of black Indian American literature can extend already existing scholarship on performance of race, and race as social construction. The way that black Indians have been "performed" in the text I have chosen reflects stereotyped, romantic (exotic) notions of black Indians (as in Marrant, Queequeg, Chloe), and complicates those notions by resisting them (as in Sam Fathers, Milkman, and Clinton).

Black and Indians can be examined as simultaneously whole and rich in history and culture, *and* naturally affected by and connected to each other. This specific detail of the narrative of American identity is of special importance because of the political nature of race, slavery, and removal and the roles these connections play in contemporary American culture. Racism continues to be the source of oppression, violence and ignorance in the Americas, and expanded attention to these two (literary) histories has the capacity to provide insight into the origins of and continued reasons for such issues. Scholars' continued examination of the histories and literatures dealing with both Native and African American identity will reflect a problem with the Western, Eurocentric need to divide and order hierarchies of racial, national and cultural identities and thus to create unnecessarily oppositional realities.

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