THE PRESENCE AND USE OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ORAL TRICKSTER TRADITIONS IN ZITKALA-SA’S OLD INDIAN LEGENDS AND AMERICAN INDIAN STORIES AND CHARLES CHESNUTT’S THE CONJURE WOMAN

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by
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ABSTRACT

THE PRESENCE AND USE OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ORAL TRICKSTER TRADITIONS IN ZITKALA-SA’S OLD INDIAN LEGENDS AND AMERICAN INDIAN STORIES AND CHARLES CHESNUTT’S THE CONJURE WOMAN

My dissertation examines early Native American and African American oral trickster tales and shows how the pioneering authors Zitkala-Sa (Lakota) and Charles W. Chesnutt (African American) drew on them to provide the basis for a written literature that critiqued the political and social oppression their peoples were experiencing. The dissertation comprises 5 chapters.

Chapter 1 defines the meaning and role of the oral trickster figure in Native American and African American folklore. It also explains how my participation in the Native American and African American communities as a long-time storyteller and as a trained academic combine to allow me to discern the hidden messages contained in Native American and African American oral and written trickster literature.

Chapter 2 pinpoints what is distinctive about the Native American oral tradition, provides examples of trickster tales, explains their meaning, purpose, and cultural grounding, and discusses the challenges of translating the oral tradition into print. The chapter also includes an analysis of Jane Schoolcraft’s short story “Mishosha” (1827).

Chapter 3 focuses on Zitkala-Sa’s Old Indian Legends (1901) and American Indian Stories (1921). In the legends and stories, Zitkala-Sa is able to preserve much of the mystical, magical, supernatural, and mythical quality of the original oral trickster tradition. She also uses the oral trickster tradition to describe and critique her particular nineteenth-century situation, the larger historical, cultural, and political context of the Sioux Nation, and Native American oppression under the United States government.
Chapter 4 examines the African American oral tradition, provides examples of African and African American trickster tales, and explains their meaning, purpose, and cultural grounding. The chapter ends with close readings of the trickster tale elements embedded in William Wells Brown’s *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter* (1853), Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Martin R. Delany’s *Blake, or the Huts of America* (serialized 1859 – 1862).

Chapter 5 shows how Charles Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman* rests upon African-derived oral trickster myths, legends, and folklore preserved in enslavement culture. Throughout the *Conjure* tales, Chesnutt uses the supernatural as a metaphor for enslaved people’s resistance, survival skills and methods, and for leveling the ground upon which Blacks and Whites struggled within the confines of the enslavement and post-Reconstruction South.

Native American and African American oral and written trickster tales give voice to their authors’ concerns about the social and political quality of life for themselves and for members of their communities. My dissertation allows these voices a forum from which to “speak.”
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving, supportive, and patient husband, Jerome Byrd; my deeply cherished seven children, Awanju, Jayson, Nelson, Mingo, Sonya, Darase, and Mabari; my wonderful parents, Raymond and Wilhelmena Tennyson; and my fantastic sisters, Allison and Karla. Thank you all for believing in, encouraging, and supporting me. I could not have done this without you. You have cheered me on every step of the way. I love and appreciate all of you. I am standing on the shoulders of our beloved and accomplished ancestors. I am flying high because you are the wind beneath my wings. Thank you.
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CHAPTER 1

THE TRICK BEHIND NATIVE AMERICAN

AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ORAL TRICKSTER STORYTELLING

My dissertation is a long story; and, here is the story…

My dissertation is an analysis of Zitkala-Sa’s *Old Indian Legends* (1901) and *American Indian Stories* (1921) and Charles Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman* (1899) in relation to the Native American and African American oral trickster traditions that preceded them. First, I examine the meanings in Native American and African American oral trickster traditions. Then, I focus on Zitkala-Sa and Chesnutt, the first Native American and African American authors to publish collections of short stories and autobiographical narratives which have oral trickster lore embedded in the texts.

This pairing of authors and works makes sense, for the original literature of the United States is the Native American Oral Tradition and related to it is the transplanted African American Oral Tradition beginning when Africans brought their trickster stories with them upon their arrival to American shores. Both Native American and African American literary traditions begin with oral histories, legends, tales, stories, myths, songs, chants, and speeches which were sung, told, and re-told across the history and landscape of early North America. Today, a growing body of researchers is addressing the literary, historical, and cultural relationship between Native American and African American people that resulted from extensive contact, and which gave rise to their traditions showing mutual influence. ¹

Of course, while there are significant similarities within the two traditions, there are also notable differences; for, each sought, separately, to impart the tenets of its culture
to its people. The foundational cultural, social, and political principles of Native Americans and African Americans had their origins arising from two separate religious and spiritual belief systems, land bases, societal formations, individualized struggles with European conquest and domination, and strategies for resistance and survival. However, while it is tempting to analyze the two traditions based primarily upon their differences, as has most commonly been the perspective of theorists and researchers, it becomes clear, by examining their literary trickster traditions the two traditions also have commonalities that cannot be ignored.

The important area of difference is that nineteenth-century Native American cultural, social, and political concerns all originated on American soil, and African American cultural, social, and political concerns were transplanted from Africa and transformed into an additional body of considerations that had to be addressed when African Americans arrived in America. One similarity between the two groups, that drives the purpose of my dissertation, is that both groups used oral and written trickster literature as a way to articulate their concerns to each other and then to a wider reading audience. Despite Native Americans’ and African Americans’ differences of race and gender, Zitkala-Sa and Chesnutt use of the trickster literary tradition to bring light to bear on their people’s struggle to be autonomous and free.

Zitkala-Sa’s writing is a reflection of her personal relationship to the late nineteenth century’s challenges facing the Great Sioux Nation and the other American Indian nations. Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman* tales are a testimony to the racial violence, terror, and confusion of the post-Reconstruction period. By using the Native American and African American trickster tale tradition in their writing, Zitkala-Sa and
Chesnutt bear witness to their personal commitment and that of the members of their communities to the continued triumphant nineteenth-century Native and African American people’s struggles for sovereignty, autonomy, freedom, dignity, and justice.

After the analysis of the use of the Native American and African American trickster traditions by Zitkala-Sa and Chesnutt, I examine the use of the trickster traditions in the works of Ojibwe writer Jane Schoolcraft’s short story “Mishosha,” and African American writers William Wells Brown’s *Clotel: or, the President’s Daughter*, Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, and Martin R. Delany’s *Blake; or the Huts of America*. Through examining Native American and African American oral trickster literature and the selections of these authors I have chosen for the dissertation, I have discovered important cultural, social, political, and moral messages embedded in the texts. A series of life and academic experiences have assisted me with the ability to “see,” “hear,” and translate the messages that are contained in the texts.

**Tricksters Are Everywhere**

Through reading multicultural fairy tales as a child and young adult, I was introduced to and fell in love with the trickster literary tradition. From this exposure, I learned that classic tricksters never accept the world the way they are born into it; they are compelled to re-shape the world the way the gods, kings, queens, or communities in which they live dictate that the world ought to be. Tricksters are an integral part of their communities; they are us, personified. Folklore traditions give us trickster beings that exist in all shapes, sizes, and abilities and provide a vital political and social service to their societies. Tricksters struggle their way through storytelling chaos and “mess up” so
their folk-world neighbors who listen to their stories can learn from their mistakes—after all, “a fall in the pit sharpens the wit.” Socially, it is much more convenient to laugh at trickster’s stupidity, short-sightedness, and character flaws than have the community snickering at our shortcomings. As Barbara Babcock-Abrahams points out, “every society has some form of institutionalized clowning” (154).³ Tricksters take the fall so we don’t have to; and, as a result of their independent behavior patterns, they “give us the encouragement and the tools that will help us forge our own path” (Rosenberg xxiii).

Tricksters “challenge the status quo” when society needs adjusting or fixing and they “disrupt perceived boundaries” when those limits are constricting (Smith 2).⁴ Tricksters set out to corral wayward elements and herd them back into the social and political fold, often a violent undertaking, since warnings and self-correction usually do not work to alter entrenched behavior patterns. They are “mess-makers” who “[t]emporally and spatially…confound the distinction between illusion and reality” (Babcock-Abrahams 155). When Tricksters “confound” the foundations of community life, they are signaling us that we need to evaluate our life choices, (re)find a centered clarity of purpose, and ideally, if we can remember and internalize tricksters’ lessons, do this (re)balancing process on a continuous and constant basis. The chaotic process of transformation can be internal, (re)making a better self, or it can be highly politicized activity if tricksters are called up to combat duty by a distressed nation or oppressed community. Either way, internal or external (re)cycling, tricksters aptly embody a concept generally credited to Heraclitus that “There is nothing permanent except change.”
Obsessed with Trickster

My trickster literature reading obsession began in elementary school with Grimm’s *Fairy Tales*. The stories of Hans Christian Andersen and the children’s version of the tales of the *Arabian Nights* soon followed. I felt the adrenaline rush of mortal fear for Scheherazade and kept thinking, “Do not end your stories!” I didn’t want the stories to end as much for my joy in reading them as for wishing Scheherazade long life and happiness. I was surprised to discover *The Chinese Fairy Book*’s “The Frog Princess” story was very different from “The Frog Prince” in Grimm’s collection. “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Hansel and Gretel” were truly frightening; I remember thinking, “Don’t tell the wolf where you’re going, Red Riding Hood!” and “Don’t eat the house, Hansel!” As I was growing up, I read every fairytale collection available on library shelves.

To my delight, upon reaching high school, the nuns assigned Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, and several of Shakespeare’s plays in English classes; Rome’s mythic foundation story of Romulus and Remus and Roman myths in Latin classes; the violent, morally ambiguous behaviors of Old Testament figures in Religion classes; and Reynard’s stories, Norse, and Celtic myths were required reading in French classes. Once I mastered the intricacies of The Three Estates, ablative absolutes, pluperfect subjunctives and could distinguish between que, qui, vous and nous, I realized that I had landed in trickster folklore heaven all over again.

No matter what languages the characters—divine, human, or fantastical—were speaking or what their countries of origin, my childhood reading and later experiences with reading trickster literature in English, French, and Latin made me realize that
tricksters have many universal properties in common across global cultural lines. They are intelligent—though they act stupid when it suits them; uncontrollable—unless they wish to feign cooperation for a purpose. Tricksters are aggressive—or passive-aggressive as a diversionary tactic; feisty—or deceptively friendly, and often ruthless—or single-mindedly relentless. They can be vengeful—though they often choose to defer retaliation for another day—and immoral beings that possess their own sense of trickster justice dispensed by any means necessary. They are lustful, violent, and deceitful, use magic, witchcraft and spells, or they are incredibly self-sacrificial. Ironically, the “heroic” trickster types can cause horrendous chaos as they pursue completing their causes to right wrong. As Donna Rosenberg points out in Folklore, Myths, and Legends, tricksters “often wear the masks of virtue,” and so it takes close reading to ferret out their veiled tricks (xvii). Universal tricksters cause violence, mayhem, and disruption in the name of trying to create order that never appears. The chaos is what goes for noble in the trickster world, for in the pursuit of balance, exitas acta probat.

By the end of second-year English, French, and Latin classes, I was a bit scandalized once I could translate or was exposed in English to trickster characters’ rotten antics. Finally, I understood the playful twinkles in the nuns’ eyes as they assigned our literature readings. Murder, kidnapping, sexual escapades, boiling witches brews and incantations, lying, double-dealing, back-stabbing, people cursing gods, gods cursing people, and gods cursing gods—the trickster chaos never ended (thank goodness). Who knew that reading folklore stories in English class or translating what seemed like endless lines of Middle English, French, and Latin could be so much fun? This began my happy descent into wider trickster chaos.
African American Tricksters in My Life

When I was a freshman and sophomore in college in the late 60’s and early 70’s, there weren’t any African American Studies courses available for black students to take. I realized that I could not formally educate myself concerning African American politics, history, or sociology and I felt robbed. Once I realized courses on the African American experience were not available, the lack of formal African American studies courses created a particularly acute sense of loss for me because I had attended private Catholic lower schools in places like Tom’s River, New Jersey; Quonset Point, Rhode Island; and Nantucket, Massachusetts. I was usually the only non-white student in my classes, and due to the de facto segregation practices of the era, I was left out of all social activities like sleep-overs, birthday parties, and interfamily visitations and outings that my co-students enjoyed with each other. This situation was also true when I attended Philadelphia’s Cardinal Dougherty high school in the mid-to-late 1960s. The schools I attended did not provide intellectual or social experiences that nurtured an African American perspective.

By the time I arrived in Philadelphia as a teenager, I had very little academic information about the African American experience, apart from the token chapters in class history books that were devoted to defining African Americans as the slaves that toiled in the cotton fields of the Old South. After suffering twelve academic years of near total silence or learning gross historical inaccuracies concerning the history, culture, and traditions of African Americans, I arrived in college. It was at Temple University that I was introduced by the students to the fact that there was more to African American history than just the days when African American people were enslaved. The problem
was that during this time, few universities in America, including Temple University, were offering formal courses in African American studies. I discovered that activist black students had taken up the cause of educating themselves and also forcing Temple University to institute a black studies program.

The small population of black students (about 600 out of 25,000) formed Temple University’s Black Student League for solidarity and educational support under the leadership of Clifford Jeffries, the first president. To remedy the problem of the lack of formal classes in the African American tradition, The League held study group sessions and recommended a “liberationist” reading list of books, even buying and distributing them to members. The list contained, but was not limited to, such titles as, Elijah Muhammad’s Message to the Black Man in America (1965), Franz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth (1965), Malcolm X’s The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1966), Claude Brown’s Manchild in the Promised Land (1966), Lerone Bennet’s Before the Mayflower: a History of the Negro in America, 1619 – 1966 (1966), Harold Cruse’s The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (1967), and Stokley Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton’s Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (1967). Reading these texts for the first time was like experiencing a lightning bolt of intellectual, cultural, political, and spiritual enlightenment. The joy they gave me left me giddy…and wanting more. However, “more” was not initially available at my university and books on African American history, culture, and folklore were rare, especially by African American authors. I participated in student and faculty demonstrations and “sit-ins” at Temple, designed to draw attention to the fact that African American students wanted black studies courses. Eventually, in 1971, Temple University became one of the first
university’s in the country to develop an African American studies program, the Afro-Asian Institute. One of the initial courses was “The Black Experience,” taught by Jerome Byrd. I took “The Black Experience” in spring 1971. Thus, I became one of the earliest students in the country to take a university level course in African American studies.\(^7\)

During my quest for academic books on the African American experience, I made frequent trips to the Free Library of Philadelphia searching for history and cultural books that didn’t yet exist but would eventually trickle out over the next twenty-five years. I discovered... *The Book of Negro Folklore*, *The Best of Simple*, *American Negro Folklore*, and *American Negro Folktales*.\(^8\) I curiously cruised through the books a bit while I was sitting in a cavernous marble reading room in the downtown FLP main branch. What, ho?! My favorite trickster type entities popped right up from the pages and started talking to me! I belly-laughed so hard at their trickster antics, I got cramps in my sides, and the head librarian tried to shush me with a frown. Her efforts didn’t work. A whole new set of tricksters with African or African American names and black life challenges crawled inside of me, took up permanent residence, and planted a—sometimes bittersweet, always contemplative—smile on my soul. I made significant memory space for the stories of Anansi, Lion, Monkey, Elephant, Leopard, Rabbit, Bear, Tortoise, John, and Langston Hughes’ Jesse B. Simple.

After leaving college in the 70’s, I got married and raised a family. When the “Read me a story, Mommy” litany began, I remembered the African American trickster tales that had so captivated me while I was investigating all things African American. I found the original texts and also *A Treasury of Afro-American Folklore* which was chock full of adult-level African American folklore readings.\(^9\) I took the books home and read
my favorite stories—usually outrageous Anansi the Spider, Rabbit trickster tales, and Aesop’s Fables—aloud to my young children so often at bedtime that I, and they, learned scores of stories “by heart.” After a short time, I had to exaggerate my storytelling delivery techniques to hold the children’s attention since they knew the plots and dialogue so well.

Next, I ditched the books since I had memorized the stories. Holding books and the physical act of looking down to read them disconnected me from my audience; I lost eye contact and a “spiritual” connection. The book was annoying and got in the way of my storytelling techniques. I discovered that if I physically “acted out” the action, changed my voice’s pitch, tone, and volume for each of the characters, and punctuated key denouement moments with exclamations, my efforts elicited excited laughter and delightful responses from the children. They contentedly went to sleep and I felt a warm glow when story time was over. My African and African American trickster buddies ran around my children’s bedroom and helped me through my toddlers’ formative years.

I was a housewife, a domestic engineer as we say today. My husband and I decided he would work and I would homeschool our children until first grade. So, every morning, I would present academic lessons to the children with the promise of “a story” session as a reward for their hard work; but, I had to work harder at finding (there were so few books), memorizing, and rehearsing African American trickster stories once I had made that promise. My African American neighbors found out about my “story hours” and asked if their children could join mine on Saturdays. Suddenly, I had a children’s group. Why trickster stories? They had morals that were “teachable moments” which was important to me as a parent and human being, and I was good at getting the children to
laugh heartily whenever I told trickster stories. That made the moral’s explanation at the end a pleasant activity.

When my oldest son, Wan, aged to first grade, I enrolled him in the local public elementary school, John B. Kelly. But, my husband and I decided to change our plans and enrolled his younger brother, Jay, in kindergarten at the same time. The decision to put Jay in kindergarten changed my storytelling life. Jay’s kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Reis, asked parents to volunteer in her classroom. I said, “I’ll read the children stories if that is all right with you.” The first time I visited, I read a book to the children. After telling stories from memory and acting them out, reading them felt strange, like someone had strapped me into a storytelling straitjacket. The children didn’t behave like my at-home “classroom” audience, either. The kindergarten children sat on a rug and politely, but passively, listened. They weren’t raptly attentive, loudly laughing, or making animated responses to my every move. It was as though someone had flipped a storytelling switch to “off.” I didn’t like the feeling, at all. I asked Jay’s teacher if it was all right if I “told” the children an African American folktale I knew. This was 1979 and no one was retelling and acting out from memory African American trickster stories in classrooms in the School District of Philadelphia, the 4th largest school system in the country at the time.

I came to Mrs. Reis’s classroom and told African American trickster stories on a regular basis. Very soon, word spread to other teachers in the school and they asked me to tell stories to the older children. Teachers and principals from neighboring schools heard about my “presentations” from their colleagues, obtained my phone number, and called me to ask me to “perform” for them at their schools. It turned out that often so
many teachers wanted their classes to participate that school administrators asked me to perform in their auditoriums for hundreds of students. One story turned into five stories; ten minutes lengthened to thirty minutes, then to an hour. Stage performances for hundreds of listeners called for me to refine my techniques to capture and captivate large audiences. I developed storytelling delivery styles that I had to adjust for age range, audience size, venue, microphone or no microphone, and, well, racially coded cues.

I’d spent hours in the Black Student League office in college, then later sitting around in fellowship with Cultural Nationalists discussing books, vegetarian diets, the merits of natural childbirth and nursing children, and wearing African-inspired clothing. I also raptly listened to lively stories people told around dinner tables. Of course, as a result, I heard many stories about real-life experiences African Americans were having coping with life in an America that they felt rarely recognized black people’s true talents and contributions or rewarded black people at the level they deserved. When employment discussions came up, I often heard the term, “last hired; first fired” in conversations of this nature. I also heard many John and the Master tales which highlighted some African Americans’ opinions about the historical inequities African Americans endured during enslavement and on through to the time of the dinner table discussions. Among others, I heard family stories about my relatives’ lives in enslavement, their birth on reservation lands, their attendance at normal schools, and their experiences of being Free People of Color in Louisiana. They told stories of my ancestors moving to the North, some being born in Cuba and emigrating to Virginia by jumping ship from a fishing boat. Many men in my family served or are serving in the U.S. military, on police forces and as fire-fighters. They were often the “first ones” hired on jobs and sometimes unjustly fired. My
great-grandparents and grandparents were highly educated and teaching school in the 1920’s and 1930’s; but family members were also discriminated against and denied opportunities for which they were qualified. I listened to stories about how family members were refused service, shown back doors, or were so white-looking, they “passed” at work and obtained jobs other blacks were denied. All of the stories about my family demonstrate the power, resilience, resourcefulness, and determination my relatives possessed and possess. It is just that they were or are successful, including me, in spite of the difficulties they, and I, have faced…just because of the color of our skin.

I and all the successful people I know who have discernible pigmentation in their skin have developed a particular trickster skill-set they have used to be successful in America. No one trying to “make it” through the system uses the exact same tools, but a trickster tool box is required to maneuver around the challenges that have been in place since enslavement days. As I mentally sifted through my African American trickster oral “presentation” material to decide which stories I wanted to tell, I made a decision back then. If I looked out and saw white people in the audience, I nixed John and the Master tales in favor of Anansi the Spider and Aesop. That is still true.

By 1987, I started working outside of the home and was teaching full-time elementary school classes in a black independent school, the Lotus Academy, that I had helped found in 1974 with a group of African American African-centered educators. I taught there from 1987 – 1993 and continued to perform on evenings and weekends throughout the Delaware Valley. I become a rather well-known oral trickster storyteller and spoken word poet, reciting the works of poets such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Eloise Greenfield. I also recited original poetry I had
begun to write for shows. All throughout the 90’s and early 2000s, I often arranged to be backed up by musicians Byard Lancaster on sax, Leonard “Hub” Hubbard on bass, and Alfie Pollard on keyboard as I recited poetry. When poets have live jazz musicians backing them up when they deliver their work, we call it “Jazzoetry.” Byard would also call me to join his jazz group for some of his Philadelphia gigs. I continued to tell trickster folktales during the same period. I made many guest appearances on stages and for television and radio outlets where I was invited to tell a story and talk about the meaning and importance of storytelling in African American culture and traditions.\textsuperscript{10}

Linda Goss, Kimmika Williams (Williams-Witherspoon) and I were a few of the early female performing storytellers or “Spoken Word” artists in Philadelphia. I learned that Goss published \textit{Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African-American Storytelling}.\textsuperscript{11} Back then, I only focused on her story collection. But, now, I notice in \textit{Talk}, that Goss includes “Animal Tales and Lore” by Houston Baker. In Baker’s article, he explains that “Black animal tales…resemble the animal tales of other lore in their employment of the trickster, but the social condition of the folk producing them gives an added dimension, a certain psychical component which the slave narrative surely supplied and which his slave audience readily recognized” (100).\textsuperscript{12}

I didn’t tell \textit{John and the Master} tales because I worried that everyone in my audiences did not have the African American “social condition[ing]” experiences that would make the racial or cultural cues “funny” or even appreciated. I am realizing now that the thematic aspects of the \textit{John and the Master} trickster tales are a vital component of the African American literary and historical experience. The theme of the historic struggle African Americans have had and the steps they have had to take, past and
present, in order to survive and thrive in America are woven into the written texts of most African American authors. I still don’t think I can indiscriminately tell *John and the Master* trickster tales in all public performance forums. However, thanks to acquiring an academic vocabulary to explain their nuances, I can teach *John and the Master* trickster tales to mixed-race classes in some college settings. College environments give me the time to “unpack” the meanings of trickster tales and “place” them in an American historical context.

**Native American Tricksters in My Life**

I had banner performance years by 1988, but August 1989 also marked another one of those life-changing moments. My parents called me and asked me if I wanted to go with them to a “Pow Wow” that was being held that weekend in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park. They had seen it advertised in the newspaper. “Sure,” I said. We strolled around the pow wow grounds and that is when my parents went into more detail concerning our Chitimacha and Cherokee Indigenous heritage. Our indigenous ancestry was a well-known piece of information inside our family, but my parents went more deeply into the names, dates, reservation locations, and life stories of our Native American relatives. My maternal Native American ancestors were Eastern Band Cherokees who lived in southern Virginia, and on the paternal side, my ancestors were Chitimacha people from Charenton, Louisiana. They chose to move away from tribal lands and relocate to Pittsylvania County, Virginia, or New Orleans, and other surrounding parishes of Louisiana. However, the elders always discussed what life was like for the members who had lived on tribal lands. Since my maternal great-grandparents lived to be 92 and 89, I was able as a teenager to hear the stories of their parents’ lives.
While thinking about the stories my family members told about the lives and experiences of the Native American members in my family, I looked around at the Pow Wow grounds with a deeper interest. After that, we went home and I contemplated my future. What was on my mind was that I wanted to go back to college and earn a Master’s degree. I wanted to earn the academic credentials that would allow me to pursue a career in English. I wanted to teach people to understand and respect the meanings in the Native American and African American trickster stories and poetry I loved to tell and recite.

When the following August 1990 arrived, this time I saw the Pow Wow advertisement. My parents were previously committed, so I went to the event by myself. I pulled my hair back, braided it into a long pony tail, plopped a baseball cap on my head, hopped into some jeans and a blouse, and rode the bus to Fairmount Park. I could hear the drums pounding the earth from several blocks away, so I knew when the bus had gotten close to my stop. I was shocked to encounter a crowd that must have been close to 3,000 people. I had to elbow my way to the front to get near the roped-off circle. I secured a spot right up on a rope, leaned comfortably on a tree, and waited for the dancing to start. Dancers in native dress began to appear and line up at the entrance to the circle’s opening which was right next to me. Suddenly, I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned around to see a tall Native elder, a man dressed in full native clothing and wearing a feathered headdress on his head. I stammered an apology. I thought I was blocking his walk-way to the opening. That wasn’t it at all. The man asked me in a very annoyed tone why I wasn’t dressed in “regalia” and ready to dance. At my puzzled look, he pointed to a woman and said, “Native clothing.” Huh? I explained that I, uh, “Don’t do that. I’m black.” He gave me a very long, penetrating look and said, “Oh, so you are proud of your
African American ancestry, but you are ashamed of your Indian heritage.” His comment was dry and didn’t end with a tonal rising indicating a question. I was stunned speechless.

For the second time in my life, I experienced a culturally-rooted “robbed” feeling, similar to the one I had when I discovered my college didn’t have any African American courses. The man said, “Wait here.” He left and came back with a brochure that explained the existence of the United American Indians of Delaware Valley (UAIDV), Philadelphia’s Urban Indian Center.\(^{13}\) “We have meetings every month. You need to come to the center and learn about your heritage.” It took six months before I went to a community meeting. My father asked me to go, saying “Please go to honor our Indian heritage.” So, I went.

UAIDV’s meetings were held in a four-story building at 225 Chesnutt Street on the fourth floor. I learned over time that 200 people always packed the top floor space and between the business part, the potluck dinner afterwards, and people still socializing after the meal, the meetings lasted five hours. Two things happened to me: Native People (with federal and state documentation and community recognition) welcomed me—they had noticed me at the August Pow Wow—and they kept asking me what had taken me so long to come. It took a year, but the second thing that happened was that the women taught me how to make Southern Traditional dance regalia and to dance Southern style. I danced in full regalia for the first time at the August 4, 1991 intertribal Pow Wow held on Belmont Plateau in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After that first time, I have danced at many Pow Wows all over the United States.

In my spare time, I continued to go to the FLP to study. I started checking out and reading history and cultural books about the Native American experience. I came across
Allan MacFarlan’s *American Indian Legends*, Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz’s *American Indian Myths and Legends*, Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, and Peter Nabokov’s *Native American Testimony*.14 “Ay yee!” I recognized another set of tricksters when I saw them. Raven alighted on my shoulder, Coyote nipped at my heels and made me laugh, Manabozho haunted, but transformed my dreams, small Grandmother Spider accomplished the impossible, and Iktome proved he needed serious counseling. All the tricksters in Indian Country had something to say to me, and I paid attention to them. The events in *Bury* and other post-Contact Native American history books were painful to read. However, American history books helped me put into perspective the reasons why the words of Native Americans in *Testimony* were bitter about the genocide of their people, the loss of the land, and colonization of their communities. Studying the early history and civilizations of Native American people and how America was transformed after the arrival of Europeans gave me insights into the meanings contained in Native American trickster tales, pre- and post-Contact.

During my studies, I came upon interesting Native American trickster tales. I memorized the story lines of “Coyote, Iktome, and the Rock” (337), “Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun” (154), and “Old Man Coyote Makes the World” (88) and added them to my trickster storytelling bank. I spent long nights filled with reading and reflection, thinking about the stories I had heard in my life about my Native relatives’ struggles to make a decent life for themselves. I contemplated the words of the elders in Nabokov’s *Testimony* collection and attempted to come to grips with the searing picture of oppression painted in *Bury* and other history books I was reading. I called Peter Nabokov on the phone and asked him if he minded if I read “No Dawn to the East” aloud.
at performances (Appendix I). His answer was, “I give you permission to use anything in my book, Namorah.” I related it all to the meaning of trickster legends and tales and my experiences added to the power and force with which I delivered my storytelling sessions. In the section, “Trickster’s Turn,” in *Our Stories Remember*, Joseph Bruchac writes that “although Trickster may fool others, those who listen to a Trickster story are not fooled” (99).¹⁵ I use all of my experiences to listen to the messages contained in trickster lore, first, and then to share.

Over the next few years, I faithfully attended UAIDV community meetings and events, traveled to reservations, and met many great folks. I listened to fantastic native storytellers and talented Pow Wow MCs and I danced at many intertribal Pow Wows. As I traveled around, I noticed that besides keeping the Pow Wow moving along according to schedule, many MCs were great trickster joksters and storytellers. Daniel J. Gello explains in “Pow Wow Patter,” Pow Wow MCs are “deeply grounded in native tradition” and “the constant joking is also a means of broaching Indian identity” (42). I could hear through the vibrancy of the storytellers’ voices and see, evidenced in transmitted facial emotions, how Native American stories, like African American ones, are still alive and are not just print-frozen on the pages of book collections. Eventually, I began to tell my favorite Native American stories along with the African American ones when I told stories in public venues.¹⁶ However, I was and am still careful not to tell private, sacred stories in public. Even for stories printed in books for public distribution, I still ask permission of tribal nations to tell their stories.¹⁷

I returned to Temple University and finished the master’s degree in English Literature in 1998. During that time, private groups, colleges and universities, and public
Institutions continued to ask me to tell African American or Native American trickster tales. Sometimes, people requested both storytelling traditions at the same folklore session.

In spring 2001, after I had earned a Master’s degree and been teaching adjunct English courses for four years, the Director of Temple University’s Master’s in Liberal Arts program at the time, Richard Beards, asked me to teach the first graduate course in Native American Studies offered at the university. I decided that I would design a survey course. I called it *Native American Literature: A Survey of Writings by and about North American Native American People*. I opened the first seminar session by singing a few rattle and drum songs I had learned as a member of Kanahoochie, the Native American Women’s Singing Circle. We were a group of indigenous women who met every Wednesday night for several years at UAIDV. Pura Fe, one of the singers in the Native American Grammy Award-winning Native women’s group, *Ulali*, lived in Philadelphia and met with us weekly to teach us singing and drumming. At the same time, I was serving as the Secretary of the UAIDV’s Board of Directors and was one of the few women elected by the community to sit on the board. In addition to my administrative duties, I was charged with advocating for the welfare of the center’s women and children. One of the ways that I fulfilled that trust was to introduce a children’s tent at our Pow Wows.

I noticed that hundreds of children, native and non-native, attended, danced, sat quietly for hours in chairs or on blankets with their family members, or ran around the Pow Wow grounds playing tag. As I was dancing one afternoon in the blazing August sun, I had an idea. In my mind’s eye, I saw a huge tent that was solely devoted to serving
the children who came to Pow Wows, and the main thing I saw going on in the tent was storytelling and singing. UAIDV members approved the *Children’s Circle*. The “children’s” tent was always crowded with hundreds of adults who were as attentive and participatory as their children to the stories and songs. Over the years, storytellers told stories about Spider Woman, Raven, Coyote, Stone Boy, Great Rabbit, Nanabozho, and many other mythic characters.

For 15 years, I was the yearly guest storyteller at the Arch Street Methodist Church’s annual Native American Heritage Month service that collected money to send to the Lakota community on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Native people dressed in traditional regalia and came from all over the Delaware Valley and other states to attend the service. Musicians, drummers, and dancers participated, and I told trickster stories. In December, 2006, Native Nations Dance Theater performed at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) where, as a member of NNDT, I had the honor of dancing, singing, drumming, and telling a Coyote trickster story, “How Light Came to the World of the Animals.” In November 2009, the Smithsonian NMAI took my photographic portrait and Gabrielle Tayac (Piscataway), a museum historian and the curator, decided to include my portrait in the national touring and online exhibitions of *IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas*. In the “Introduction” to the book by the same name, Tayac explains *IndiVisible’s* purpose in a very personal way:

Traversing the hundreds of years of racism, fear, and denial which has left communities, families, and individuals deeply scarred at many levels requires collective courage to bring a hidden history to light. When [Fred Nahwoosky, NMAI head curator] asked me to serve as the coordinating curator for the exhibit, I was hesitant. The topic can be excruciatingly controversial in both Native and
African American communities. Coming from a small Chesapeake regional tribe with mixed European and African American heritage, I was intrigued by the fact that only the latter had been submerged for centuries; I was not so sure I was ready to face what could be a racialized storm.

Ultimately, *IndiVisible* goes beyond its subject matter. All human beings express the basic desire for being and belonging. Revealing a particular aspect of this fact through the examination of African-Native American lives can help everyone to more deeply look into their own identities, origins, and the forces that make us who we are. May we all overcome the power of love, not the love of power. (18 – 19) 

The Academic Pursuit of Trickster

As you can see, trickster literature played a key role in my personal life as a member of the African American and Native American communities. I was already interacting with Native American and African American legends as a reader and storyteller; I believed that trickster tales contained the wisdom and the principles people should know in order to live lives in balance. I also understood the literal and allegorical aspects of the texts. These are the two areas I comfortably discussed when people wanted to talk to me about stories I had told.

When I returned to college in 1994 and made the choice to get a degree in English Literature, the first course I took in the major was “Introduction to American Literature.” The professor’s choice of texts was *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Fourth Edition* (1994). I quickly scanned the book, found the section “Stories of the Beginning of the World,” and read the three Native American creation stories: “The Iroquois Creation Story” and two Pima stories, “The Story of Creation” and “The Story of the Flood.” The professor assigned the “Iroquois Creation Story” and that was the first time I contemplated a Native American legend as a college scholar. I also searched the text for African American trickster tales. Disappointedly, I discovered that there
weren’t any of them in the Norton edition. However, the professor assigned the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself. For the first time, I read a text of Douglass’s own words—even though I was very familiar with the secondary biographical information written about Frederick Douglass. I also had a passing acquaintance with his short quotes such as, “If there is no struggle; there is no progress” and “Power concedes nothing without a demand.” Those two phrases were often memorized and frequently quoted by activists during the Black Power Era. As I thumbed through the Norton, I saw African American readings by Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, and Harriet Jacobs. I looked for and found two Native American selections by Samson Occom and William Apess. The “Cherokee Memorials” that protested the federal government’s removal of Cherokee people from their eastern homeland was of particular interest. Prior to that class, I did not know that there were primary written documents that expressed the Cherokees’ dismay that “[t]he Northern tribes, who were once so numerous and powerful, are now nearly extinct” and “the State of Georgia is pressing hard upon [them] and urging [them] to relinquish [their] possessions for [Georgia’s] benefit” (956).

Engaging in advanced academic studies has provided me with the tools to identify the particular literary forms and constructions present in trickster tales that create the “magic” and transmit the wisdom. The language of academic discourse enables me to verbalize to people, to write about why trickster tales are important, and to explain that and why they are America’s first literature. I feel confident about entering into the transnational and multicultural conversations about Trickster Literature and contributing new perspectives concerning the meanings contained in Native American, African
American, and European literatures when American authors use Native American or African American trickster methods or allusions as part of their writings—and over the span of American literary history, that list is very long.

My personal experiences with hearing and telling African American and Native American trickster tales and stories have given me an insight into how vibrant, powerful, and relevant folklore is in Native American and African American life. The academic skills I have learned have given me the ability to articulate my opinions and thoughts about these trickster folklore traditions. To write the dissertation, I have combined my many years of studying trickster tales since childhood; a grounded understanding, respect, and appreciation of Native and African American cultural traditions; and extensive experience telling stories from both traditions with the skills I have now learned as an academically trained researcher and writer.

I think that my participation in Native American and African American cultures as a community member and storyteller gives me an advantage concerning decoding and explaining the meanings contained in the trickster stories. However, I also think that it is possible to derive substantive meaning from Native American and African American trickster stories using the academic research skills literary scholars learn to apply when we analyze any texts.

The Oral Tradition and Trickster Theory

The nature of the oral tradition relies on a continuum of sound, what Jan Vansina in *Oral Tradition as History* describes as the transmission of words and messages by word of mouth over time until the disappearance of the message” (Vansina 3). The cumulative meaning of the oral text is relational to the time in which it is told, and also to
the time when it is retold. Given the nature of sounds involving the oral uses of language, it is time-stamped and culture-specific, so that only the current, momentary listeners can assess the full meaning. The residual impact of meaning once the spoken word has passed, “the memories,” is what is churning inside the listener as the ear drums still (Vansina xi). The memories are the location of meaning (Vansina).

As storytellers work their magic, electrical charges of meaning enter into the listener. In the oral tradition, people say and bodily perform the meaning of the text, so the words alone do not encompass the entire meaning. Oral storytellers “signifiers” are missing from the written word. Once the story is in print, it is a harder task to figure out how to extract the energy of the original oral trickster storytellers who help through performance to explain wider aspects of the meaning of the stories. The fact is, no matter how hard we try, we can only resurrect some of the meaning from oral texts that have been transferred to print.

Traditional tricksters the world over exist to teach people the social, political, or spiritual skills they need in order to function as integral members of their societies. They are the supernatural guardians of internal cultural continuity. But it must be recognized that the trickster folklore does contain discourses about universal humanistic experiences, such as spiritual contemplations; sorting out interpersonal relationships; strategies for coping with oppression; adjusting to change or loss; and feelings of pride in family, nation, and culture. These trickster folklore goals are embedded in all cultures.

In trickster folklore traditions, sometimes trickster beings live in the same time and space with people; sometimes they live only in their own world and contact must be divined, conjured; and sometimes, trickster beings can cross the boundaries between
worlds, going back and forth between worlds. According to folk tradition, there are people with supernatural powers who can contact folk beings; some people with strong enough *mojo* can even control them. For this analysis, I will call the wielders of magic who have the power to rearrange the terms of how the natural world operates *magicians* or *conjurers*. Magicians and conjurers are *tricksters* because they have the power to alter things which is the hallmark of tricksters. *How* magicians or conjurers use the power they have and the *morality* of the outcomes of their use of power determine the basis on which to judge their trickster actions. When tricksters become oppressors and abuse their power to transform spaces and are not functioning for the common good, they are dysfunctional tricksters, tyrannical, and do not deserve the noble name of *Trickster*, society's caretaker. They are *deceivers*. The purveyors of evil who use their powers of chaos and transformation to destroy rather than to balance or rebalance societal norms are the types that call the *real* Tricksters to arms. In distressed circumstances, righteous tricksters use their storytelling magic to uncover, unpack, criticize, and analyze oppressors and their systems. They must adjust and do double-duty to educate their constituents and oppressors and encourage constituent resistance and promote transformative behavior patterns on the part of the oppressors.

**Oral Trickster Tales that Have Been Preserved in Print**

I approach analyzing and writing about oral trickster tales that must be accessed in print as though I were retelling the stories—and describing their cultural and historical connections—as close to telling them out loud as I can. This strategy helps me to unlock cultural and linguistic carriers for readers to "hear" and understand the legends' meaning. To help readers better understand oral literature captured as print, I analyze the legends
by, among other ways, using narrative as a tool for explaining them, including much of
the story’s internal dynamics. I use this method to analyze the readings included in the
dissertation chapters.

I will tell stories about trickster stories to produce culturally-grounded insights
into them. Accessing the cultural markers in Native American and African American
trickster tales will immerse researchers in contextualized meaning, allowing readers to
burrow in and “hear” whispered nuances, and it will open up new linguistic and cultural
horizons. Native American and African American trickster tales began as media of oral
transmission, and the writers I address embed trickster storytelling principles contained in
the pre-nineteenth-century oral tradition. To do this, it is necessary to engage in “active
listening” to paraphrase Deborah Tannen in Talking Voices (27). Tannen argues that
“listening is an active not passive enterprise, requiring interpretation comparable to that
required in speaking, and speaking entails simultaneously projecting the act of listening”
(27). The trickster stories and authors I am analyzing who are using trickster
methodologies are “speaking” to us about culturally specific and important forms of
oppression that are going on in their worlds.

Accessing meaning from the writings of absent authors is what academics do for
many familiar canonical icons; we must also do this for trickster tale texts. This
undertaking requires researchers to use the best academic interdisciplinary tools we can
muster to find meaning. I have used as many literary, historical, sociological, political,
and folklore texts as I could with the time available that address Native American and
African American concerns, specifically their struggles with sovereignty, autonomy, and
liberation.
I have found that the most productive process with trickster material is to read tales with a literal eye first, examining the overt story—standard literary analyses work. But, the literal interpretation of Native American or African American trickster tales is not the culturally specific meaning any more than Lilliputians are actually tiny people Gulliver encounters. The literal does not release the spirit. It is the allusions and metaphors that count. We must combine the literal and metaphorical with the culturally specific and peel away the layers of literary meaning, just as we do with Gulliver’s Travels.

Before we reach conclusions, we need answers to questions such as, What makes Native American trickster tales culturally and politically “Native American?” What makes African American trickster tales politically “African American?” Besides the universal work that tricksters do, what is the culture-specific and political work African American and Native American trickster tales are doing? How do the writings of Native American and African American print authors who embed the trickster tradition into their work reflect Native American or African American social and political projects? What is it about the Native American or African American experience that authors want readers to know?

With the Native American segment of the work I am doing, I must express myself totally in English. I recognize that historically and sometimes even now English is a language of colonization, of cultural suppression and oppression for both Native Americans and African Americans. In For Indigenous Eyes Only, Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird declare that by using terms such as colonization and decolonization…[Native people] “are engaging in a form of resistance” (3). Since I am
only familiar with English, I have given considerable thought to how I can best interpret
Native American and African American trickster folklore and works by writers in those
traditions who use it. The “tricks” I will use to assist African American and Native
American voices to arise from the printed page will be to do extensive research in order
to write in as culturally sensitive a manner as I can and to use English literary tropes as
richly as I can. As I write for cultural accuracy and meaning, trying to make it accessible,
I seek to tell the truth and avoid “formulating a” new “set of lies” (Deloria, Jr., Red Earth
35). 24 One of the things I am doing is to seize my “right” to analyze the work from the
vantage points of a culturally-grounded storyteller, which I will fully explain later. I will
nod to the metaphysical and the supernatural, rethink unholistic concepts of Nature, and
acknowledge alternate space/time continuums. I think using English to promote literary
accessibility is a form of truth, promotes liberationist thinking, and empowers. I find the
words of Dan “White Cloud Above Horizon” Katchongva of the Hopi Nation
instructional for how to go about the process of “hearing” authentic voices that arise from
texts. In his testimony before the United States Congress in 1955, he expressed Hopi
concerns about the arrival of non-indigenous concepts to Indian Country. In his eighties
at the time, he commented on one of the ancient Hopi “narratives foretelling the future of
mankind:”

In ancient times it was prophesied by our forefathers that this land would be
occupied by the Indian people and then from somewhere a White Man would
come. We knew that the White Man will search for the things that look good to
him, that he will use many good ideas in order to obtain his heart’s desire, and we
knew that if he had strayed from the Great Spirit he would use any means to get
what he wants. These things we were warned to watch and today know that those
prophecies were true because we can see how many new and selfish ideas and
plans are being put before us. We know that if we accept these things we will lose
our land and give up our lives.” (6-7) 25
Although White Cloud Above Horizon’s words were written in 1955, and specifically referred to Native-White interactions, his words demand respecting a position for liberating truth from texts and for using a culturally-grounded critical world view in relationship to deciphering the meaning inherent in any texts. We apply a culturally-grounded and weighted European standard for literary analysis when we seek to find “truth” in Gulliver’s Travels, so as researchers we know exactly how that search for truth works: dive into 18th-century historical, sociological, political and religious background literature and read, read, and read some more. That research method is also necessary for analyzing Native American and African American literary texts.

Toni Morrison comments about the necessity of finding authentic African American meaning inside of American texts and argues that the first step is to acknowledge that there is a “black presence” in American literature. In Playing in the Dark, Morrison writes that “[t]he contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination” (5). In The Signifying Monkey, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that it is the “black vernacular,” which has distinctive “signifiers” that define it, that “informs the shape of the Afro-America literary tradition” (xiv). It is the “black presence” and “black vernacular signifiers” that are contained in African American trickster tales that I seek to release from the bosom of trickster texts and from the writings of the authors who use them.

Keeping in mind Above Horizon and Morrison’s admonitions, I have given considerable thought to how to avoid grounding readings of African American and Native American trickster texts primarily in concepts of universality. It is important to
say that there are universal principles that are found in world-wide trickster traditions, and I certainly do say so; but, it is the culturally-grounded differences that add vitality to the American literary conversation.

Universality does not serve to liberate these voices from the texts. Ignoring the indigenous or black presence, however they may manifest their presence in American texts, would be like totally ignoring the presence of the Lilliputians in *Gulliver’s Travels*. If we want to be taken seriously as scholars, we are not permitted to ignore the presence of Lilliputians. Even if we acknowledge the presence of Lilliputians, we can’t *not get* what Lilliputians stand for in the context of the story—by using the excuse that we are not British. If that excuse is valid, then there isn’t one American scholar who should ever write a book or article on *Gulliver’s Travels* because there is no possibility of anyone but an English national finding “the truth” inside of the text. Happily, I am seeing that the Academy has sophisticated research tools available for us to use that allow us to read, explore, and write about each other’s cultural work. Again, I am not denying advantages cultural insiders likely possess; I am arguing that cultural outsiders can use sophisticated academic skills to access substantive meaning from texts.

The Native American Trickster Tradition

From the Native American viewpoint, all things arise from and are tied to the natural world. Human beings, animals, plants, rocks, mountains, wind, rain, the sun, moon, and stars, and all of the other natural products of the world are inextricably linked. When processing how metaphysical perspectives can be deemed part of an indigenous "vast world," Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert in *Reading Beyond Words* help to explain it by pointing out that the "exercise is not so much to straighten out the facts, but
to understand how different ways of knowing generate distinct analyses of social processes” (Brown and Vibert xix).  

Indigenous trickster legends serve to explain how the world works and what relationship people should maintain in order for them to remain in harmony and balance within the web of the natural order of things in the American land space. Since the ontological and philosophical perspective of Indigenous American people is heavily tied to the natural world, it is not surprising that the early literature they produced – legends, stories, tales, songs, and speeches – is filled with significant and notable numbers of direct references to all aspects of the items found on earth and in the sky. In *Our Stories Remember*, Joseph Bruchac explains that "Human beings are a natural part of this living and aware world, and vice versa" (11). Paula Gunn Allen writes in *The Sacred Hoop* that she received instruction from her mother who "often told her that animals, insects, and plants are to be treated with the kind of respect one customarily accords to high-status adults" (1). In the "Historical Overview" of the anthology, *Native American Literature*, Lawana Trout observes that:

> [Early Native people's] words captured scenes of wild horses, musk ox, and bison, along with long, straight horns that attracted dire wolves, saber-toothed tigers and other predators. In a world where myth and mystery united, rituals linked the spirits of hunters and animals. Sacred stories formed the heart of ceremonies. (xviii)

As he was editing the collection *American Indian Stories*, Allan McFarlan noticed that the stories from the oral traditions contain early Native people’s “beliefs, hopes, fears, and what they lived, fought, and died for” (xi). The stories are vital literary and cultural instruments worth researching because, as Karen Beardsley argues in *Literary Legacies*, “the very act of engaging in a tradition like Native American storytelling helps
keep the past alive and is the bedrock of life in tribal communities" (102).31 While struggling with the issues of "a precarious life cycle," it is through the Oral Tradition that "fathers and mothers pictured memories and set cultural lessons for their children" (Trout xviii).32 When writing about deriving meaning from the writings of Zitkala-Sa, Harry Brown in “Uncompromising Mysteries,” believes that with care, it is possible for scholars to “restore life to [Native American trickster] stories” with sensitive “translation[s] [and become] a means of overcoming cultural misunderstanding and racial difference” (Brown, “Uncomprehended Mysteries” 70, 68).33

There are over five hundred different Native American nations, and although the people have what Vine Deloria, Jr. describes in God Is Red as a “complexity of attitudes, beliefs, and practices,” it is still true that there are common perspectives towards the environment “that are fine-tuned to harmonize with the lands on which the people live” (70).34 There is a way to read Native American trickster stories so they allow us to understand some of the philosophical, historical, political, social beliefs, and constructs that are contained in them.

Language and literature play a vital role in mediating the relationship between Native people and the land, for as Jeannette Armstrong explains in Land Speaking, “language was given to the people by the land they live within” and “the language changed as they moved and spread over the land through time (175).35 Gunn Allen states that "There is such a thing as American Indian literature” (4).36 Joseph Bruchac in Our Stories Remember describes how this literature has a clear unifying tradition because "ancient links between American Indian nations were made through trade and travel, resulting in the dissemination of stories...” (9).37 There is nothing "simplistic," to debunk
a historical pejorative concerning the sophistication of Native American thought, about the referencing to the natural order of things evident in indigenous tales. As the stories' trickster characters scamper around Indian Country, they travel through a complex web of interlocking and sophisticated spaces, behaving in a way that proves that indigenous people did and do understand the world. Native American trickster tales have to be read with an understanding that reality rests within the culture, and that the legends' meaning is best revealed by members of the culture and by researchers willing to view them from indigenous perspectives. Readers must operate on Indigenous Time, from within aboriginal spaces, encounter Nature with aboriginal sensibilities, and see life with indigenous eyes (Dinwoodie 334). 38

Native American Tricksters still reside in sovereign lands. However, as those lands shrink or Natives move off of them for various reasons, tricksters have their hands full past their “traditional” roles. Traditional Native American trickster lore has expanded its conversations beyond solely preservation and internal moral development. Trickster storytelling has evolved over time to include answers to challenges to sovereignty, land preservation, accommodations to off-reservation living, as well as responding to discrimination and oppression. The 2010 United States census statistics indicates that 67% of people who identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native alone lived outside American Indian and Alaska Native areas. The census indicates that 92% of people who identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native “in combination” with other races live outside American Indian and Alaska Native areas. These areas are defined as federal reservation and/or off-reservation trust land, Oklahoma tribal statistical area, state reservation, or federal- or state-designated American Indian statistical areas. 39
Most trickster stories contain strategies for survival in unfamiliar, hostile, or limiting circumstances, and now since the days of “First Contact” are over, they suggest optimal interactions that could possibly take place between Native Americans and “others.”

The Birth of African American Tricksters

African Tricksters, who take many forms, rode the Atlantic waves aboard the ships that carried Africans to the New World. A stubbornly persistent and prevalent historical misconception about enslaved and later politically oppressed African American individuals is that, as a group, they passively accepted enslavement and unjust circumstances—which slave masters and white supremacists insisted was “God’s will.”

No level of European abuse erased from group memory the culturally-ingrained knowledge and sense of sovereignty (they all did come from sovereign nations), personal freedom, and cultural autonomy Africans brought with them to American soil as evidenced by those themes appearing in African American trickster storytelling. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. points out in The Signifying Monkey, Africans “chose, by acts of will not to forget: their music…[and] their myths” (3-4). A close examination of the embedded cultural preservation and resistance messages that appear in early African American trickster storytelling and later nineteenth-century written texts paints a far different picture than the stereotype of the “happy slave” or later obsequious shuffling “Uncle Tom.”

For many Africans, who had already mastered several indigenous languages before they arrived, learning one more language, English, was just a matter of exposure and time. One component of the language “trick” was for Africans to acquire English skills at a level to understand “masters” without oppressors realizing the extent to which
they comprehended their situation. They intelligently and accurately assessed their situation and brilliantly commented upon it, just privately, which makes unpacking the trickster tales crucial. Gates and McKay point out in “Folktales” in *African American Literature* that “[m]any new black arrivals, whether coming in the seventeenth century, the eighteenth, or the nineteenth century, could immediately communicate together using a common Creole language that had facilitated commerce back home in Africa” (102).41 One purpose for participating in developing a universal language was for Africans to preserve and share the history, knowledge, and wisdom of their ancient cultures. A second aspect was for African leaders to develop a mastery of English nuances and the oppressors’ cultural traditions in order to pass on the strategies that were necessary for the community to survive and resist. However, since the newly arrived Africans were chained, out-gunned, and guarded by the enemy, logically, they had to mount their resistance in secrecy. A very important aspect of the examination of later written African American trickster projects is that the works are descendants of African-inspired African American tricksters whose jobs are to support the cause of individual and group freedom and uplift.

African trickster language crept into African American storytelling for use to transmit life's lessons and advice, amuse the internal community, and be employed as protest rhetoric against external oppression. Importantly, for understanding and appreciating the sophisticated use of language, African American trickster literature is purposely couched in complex figures of speech. Like all trickster projects, it is common to find that African American trickster stories and songs contain and use such figures as personification, metaphor, allegory, apostrophe, double-entendre, euphemism, climax,
and irony, to name a few, as rhetorical strategies to meet new world goals. Gregory Routledge describes the African trickster as “[s]erving both as a secular and a religious figure [that] links the profane, the anti-social, the treacherous, and selfish…with an opposition situated in the creativity, human spirit, and, ultimately, the sacrosanct” (64). Using trickster language, newly arrived African people were able to devise strategies for how best to cope with life, free or enslaved, and to extract themselves, ameliorate, or survive their predicament. Those people who could not communicate immediately upon arrival in America quickly learned some level of English. Songs also assisted in the language acquisition process.

Oral trickster storytelling provided a pathway to the cultural preservation of African folkways and knowledge, new world survival discourse, and a surreptitious site for engaging in political analysis. In the “Foreword” to *African Folktales in the New World*, Alan Dundes comments that ”William Bascom offers ‘a set of technical essays each devoted to one or more traditional narratives found in Africa and also in the New World’” (vii). The form’s eventual movement into print testifies to the form’s usefulness to the African American community’s liberationist agenda. He writes that Bascom’s collection demonstrates a direct link between African tales and tales told in other places in the Diaspora (Dundes vii). The widespread presence of trickster tales in the African American Diaspora testifies to the resolve and determination of an oppressed people to use all means to free themselves, including the liberationist political rhetoric present in trickster tales.

When I first encountered written eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African American enslavement narratives, transcribed oral testimonies, and subsequent protest
short stories and novels, it felt as though I was being run over by freight train cars carrying the weight of centuries of violent assault, flagrant injustice, agonizing physical and mental pain, and unbearable levels of abject misery. However, with time, research, and close reading, I am now struck by the power and force of African American narrative writers’ will to survive, overcome adversity, and think their way out of seemingly impossible circumstances. The authors write about people taking enormous risks to liberate themselves and change laws, courageously free other enslaved people, or confront dangerous systems of oppression. They are giving voice and witness to an underrepresented aspect of the pre-nineteenth-century African American experience—the resistance of ordinary people to enslavement and stifling oppression, most often through subterfuge. They wished to live, so, logically, the writers insert covert trickster resistance messages that mirror the weapons of choice for many people who chose to take the political long view.

Literary analysis of this body of African American trickster-influenced writing has allowed me to “see” the overt suffering the writers are depicting while at the same time, I am now able to detect multiple layers of more cleverly cloaked written sites of resistance and self-determination. I can now detect the presence of powerful elements of the African oral trickster tradition which has transformed into the African American written trickster tradition which the writers put to use as a social and political transformative tool.
Native American and African American Trickster Theory

For centuries, history was written by victors, and the perspectives of African Americans and Native Americans told in their own voices were nearly non-existent. While contemporary attention has been focused more closely on the separate experiences of African Americans and Native Americans, and educational efforts have taught about Indian-white relations and black-white relations, there has been a missing side. An invisible experience with an indivisible reality found in the illumination of centuries-long relationships between African Americans and Native Americans. (Gabrielle Tayac, Piscataway Nation, historian and curator, National Museum of the American Indian)

In 1860, at least 90% of African Americans were born in the United States, 13% were visibly of white as well as Negro descent and actually more than one-fourth were probably of white, Indian and Negro blood. [T]hey so mingled their blood with white and red Americans that today less than 25% of the Negro Americans are of unmixed African descent. (W. E. B. Du Bois)

[...]though the practice of enslaving Natives was gradually disbanded (though never legally abolished in some locales), the presence of mixed African-Native slave communities had quickly become so widespread throughout the plantation South that it ensured a permanent bond, both biological and cultural, between the two groups. (Melanie Benson Taylor)

The movement of our stomp dances is around the fire, counter clockwise. I understand that is the direction of dances in some of the West African tribes who were forced here. I can imagine camaraderie between our peoples. We provided a harbor of sense. [W]hen I hear our music, I always think of Africa announcing itself as part of the mix. And it goes the other way. The root of blues, rock, and jazz is around that stomp-dance fire, too, and it’s never, ever mentioned. (Joy Harjo, Creek Nation)

While I was reading nineteenth-century Native and African American coursework assignments in graduate school, such as the writings of Zitkala-Sa, Jane Schoolcraft, William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Martin Delany, and Charles Chesnutt, I noticed the presence of strong resistance rhetoric and key elements of trickster storytelling. The more I read and thought about the “tales” the authors wrote of how they or their fictional characters defied oppression, duped or tried to transform oppressors, resisted European incursions or escaped enslavement, preserved culture or outright ran away to freedom, the more I recognized the hallmarks of trickster behavior patterns. Tricksters bound around inside of these authors’ texts. With this dissertation, I am satisfying the overwhelming urge to explain to the world that trickster storytelling was still vital and alive in many nineteenth-century Native and African American texts. Trickster storytelling devices were used by these particular authors for political and social protest against European
hegemony, as well as for sophisticated literary, cultural, and historical preservation projects, and to foster intra- and intercultural communication.

Traditional African and Native American Tricksters are residents of their own homelands and demonstrate chaos to draw attention to the presence of unwanted disruptive behavior. The key fundamental theoretical trait of the traditional Native American and African trickster genre is that the tricksters act as free agents who foster the social, political, and moral stability of their communities. Using this line of traditional community trickster logic - if individual Native American or African citizens are clear about their roles in and responsibilities to their nations, then their communities, as a whole, will be successful. These traditional tricksters have a job to do which is to educate the people concerning the proper behavior in which citizens should or should not engage in order to maintain stability within their respective nation-states.

Indigenous American trickster lore is not designed to accommodate the political concept that social conditions must be totally culturally rearranged to counter a hostile, alien force that has invaded tricksters’ spaces with the intent to commit cultural or physical genocide. Although, by their nature, tricksters are “wandering through paradoxical-vagrant reality,” as Franchot Ballinger puts it in Living Sideways, the key to remember is that before Europeans disrupted African and Native American tricksters’ peace of mind, tricksters were “wandering” around doing their single chaotic duty as civil servants of their respective sovereign nations (30).48 It is when Native Americans are bedeviled and distressed by invaders in their lands and Africans are transported away from nation-states that their traditional tricksters must reassess their purpose and strategies.
Traditional Native American nineteenth-century tricksters must continue to protect the land; preserve the cultural past; generate a culturally vibrant and authentic future; protest oppression, colonialism, and genocide; and in their “sideways” ways, they must morally instruct the people, as always. Nineteenth-century African American tricksters must maintain cultural memory of African folkways; help build a future in the new homeland, no matter how hostile; struggle with oppression and discrimination; educate the oppressor; uplift the race; and provide solace to the downhearted.

Post-invasion or post-enslavement transport, Native American and African American traditional tricksters must do double-duty to observe, report back on, and—covertly or overtly—critique the invader, enslaver, or oppressor. Trickster stories employ the lore of chaos to critique the difficult, tense, and contentious pre-twentieth-century existence for African Americans and Native Americans.

As we saw earlier in the analysis of trickster tales in general, there is nothing passive in trickster tales concerning tricksters’ behavior patterns or the trickster storytelling language that describes tricksters’ antics. I was especially struck by how these nineteenth-century authors’ use of the trickster literary form made their rhetoric dangerously politically defiant. When they published their works, it was an era when millions of African Americans were enslaved or as Ida B. Wells laments in *A Red Record*, it was when “ten thousand Negroes [were] killed in cold blood, without the formality of judicial trial and legal execution” (Chapter 1). I seek to release the trickster messages these African American authors have embedded in their texts.

Working through the Issues of Translation
English was not the Mother Tongue of the Indigenous communities or the arriving Africans and learning English was even systemically denied to the enslaved communities; so, much of the spirit of pre-nineteenth-century Native American and African American cultures had no correlative expressions available in Standard English. Since written Native American and African trickster folklores spring from oral literatures, written Native and African American folklore collections are missing the sounds and visual performance aspects of the oral stories. The grunts, screams, cries, whispers, laughter, groans, singing, chanting, drumming, and snickers that I know should be heard are missing in print versions. The storytellers’ shimmies, dips, hands thrown in the air, bend-overs, grins, smirks, frowns, pointing, falling outs, and possessions are also gone. I had to figure out how to write about the meaning of the trickster tales in such a way that my explanations are still rich with meaning in spite of the missing performance elements. I chose to decode the “insider” cultural trickster content since I could not verbally or visually make a performative case. I had to rely on and trust my personal knowledge of Native American and African American cultural trickster performance as a guiding literary critical analysis compass.

While I was reading Native American and African American trickster tales for this project, I thought about how I “read” the tales in many different ways. I read them for cultural enrichment and preservation, to continuously spark my cultural awareness and memory. However, I now find myself thinking about them in academic terms like “authentic” and “inauthentic” and evaluating the literary, historical, and cultural reasons why I have either opinion. I evaluate them as a storyteller and they are scripts. I can distinctly and loudly “hear” the voices of all the characters and “see” how they
are acting. I see and hear the stories in a culturally grounded way. I recognize cultural “markers” in the texts and, besides the entertainment value, I derive additional pleasure and comfort from their presence.

I thought I understood the problems of translating oral trickster tales into written transcripts of the meaning I was finding in them; that is, until I attempted to unpack nineteenth-century Native American and African American writers’ Trickster Truth—much of which was written to be hidden in plain sight. It has been challenging to find the words to explain, describe, share and translate the cultural complexities in Native American and African American trickster literature. I understand how writing to explain the depth and nuances of the African American and Native American experiences reflected in trickster texts requires a delicate touch. Bold strokes are fine, but using a broad brush simply will not do. The singing, shouts, cries, moans, whispers, laughter and cackles, screams, and sighs are the heart and soul of Native American and African American trickster tales. It has been a challenge puzzling out and solving how to provide readers with the written sound track of the Native American and African American trickster storytelling experience.

A Multidisciplinary Approach

I have had to take a multidisciplinary approach to following the trail of Native American and African American trickster tales. I have depended upon principles in the fields of literary studies, Native American studies, African American Studies, folklore, history, sociology, anthropology, geography, performance theory, law, and political science to assist me through this project. I have delved deeply into each of these fields in order to understand and write about the meaning in Native American and African
American trickster texts and the writings of Native American and African American authors who embraced trickster theory and used it in their nineteenth-century texts.

Chapter Summary:

Chapter 1 will explain the concept and use of the trickster figure in Native American and African American oral storytelling folklore. Then, I discuss how early through nineteenth-century Native American and African American communities, in similar and different ways, employed the use of oral trickster storytelling as a tool to critique oppression. The chapter describes my personal relationship with the trickster oral tradition as a storyteller in both the Native American and African American oral traditions. It also explains how the advanced academic skills I have acquired are invaluable to the work of extricating the hidden meaning inside the oral and written Native American and African American trickster traditions.

Chapter 2 will cover an examination of what is literally distinctive about the Native American oral tradition, provide examples of trickster tales, explain their meaning, purpose, and cultural grounding, and discuss the problems involved with transferring the oral literature to print. It is important to understand what the ancient trickster stories have to offer and the principles they contain which are later used within the print texts of Zitkala-Sa’s *Old Indian Legends, American Indian Stories*, and Jane Schoolcraft’s short story “Mishosha.” This chapter will address such issues as the differences between how Native American storytellers and writers access meaning from the texts and what methods researchers, such as critical literary theorists, anthropologists, historians, and folklorists, use to do the same thing.
Chapter 3 will examine selections from Zitkala-Sa’s *Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories*, with her trickster tales and trickster genre-influenced stories being the primary focus. Trickster tales within the Native American tradition are central to understanding how life’s tribulations, its unanticipated challenges, joys and agonies, triumphs or failures, tests, and ironies are often depicted. In Zitkala-Sa’s writings, tricksters appear in different guises, genders, personifications, spaces, time periods, and ages, complicating the smooth, replicating the chaotic, and forcing the contemplation of the vagaries, travesties, and sometimes the bitterness of life’s journey. The Lakota trickster, Iktomi the Spider Man, has a strong presence in Zitkala-Sa’s *Old Indian Legends*, among other trickster figures, and serves to bring historical, political, and social messages to readers. In such stories as “Iktomi’s Blanket” and “Iktomi and the Muskrat,” in *Old Indian Legends* and “The Soft-hearted Sioux” in *American Indian Stories*, Zitkala-Sa preserves Lakota oral trickster traditions and presents them to an outside audience as a way to critique the dire conditions of the Sioux. This chapter addresses ways to access and understand the cultural complexities within the Native American storytelling trickster system moved to print. It shows how Zitkala-Sa employs the oral trickster tradition combined with the short story genre to uncover and highlight the challenges Native Americans faced in everyday life both before Europeans came and after Indigenous people encountered drastic changes to Indian Country.

*Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories* help to explain, transmit and preserve Lakota traditions, and were first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for a primarily non-native reading audience. Zitkala-Sa provides readers with access to the analysis and meaning contained within what originally was culture, wisdom and
knowledge only accessible by the Lakota. The legends reflect some of the fundamental belief systems, needs, and expression of Dakota and Lakota culture, while simultaneously preserving the stories in print. This is a difficult literary task as print is a medium which by its very nature requires the imagination to “see” the activity happening on the page; however, Zitkala-Sa is able to include much of the mystical, magical, supernatural, and mythical quality of the original oral stories. Zitkala-Sa’s narrative writing is an opportunity for the dissertation to examine how the earliest tradition of Native American storytelling, as a means of preserving historical memory, transmitting culture and tradition, and providing social commentary, retains its principal function as it moves into the print tradition.

Zitkala-Sa’s non-fiction essays are eloquently delivered, retaining much of the narrative qualities of her legends and stories. The essays lend themselves to an academic analysis of her particular situation and the larger historical, cultural, and political context of the Sioux and general Native American experience with the United States government and the expanding American culture.

Chapter 4 will examine what is literally distinctive about the African American oral tradition, provide examples of African and African American trickster tales, and explain their meaning, purpose, and cultural grounding. Due to the politics of literacy in the African American experience, it was and is no easy task preserving the literary "race memory" of people of African descent in America. Through primarily anthologies, Chapter 4 will examine several oral trickster literature selections from the wide body of African and African American folklore. And, as with the challenges faced with Native American collections, Chapter 4 will discuss the problems of transcribing the African and
African American oral trickster tradition into print. Through narratives, songs, legends, stories, tales, and myths, the large body of enslaved Africans brought the rhythms and vocals of Africa to America. The new African American community incorporated old, familiar sounds and transformed them into new-language words of liberation, infusing themes and words of freedom with urgent spiritual, social and physical significance. The early trickster tales are combative, offering the opportunity for African Americans to verbally address issues of injustice and to comment on their suffering under the yoke of injustice, brutality, and violated rights, giving voice to people who, by law, were not permitted to publicly protest their oppression. Trickster stories and later narratives did double duty, serving a personal as well as a political function. African Americans told trickster tales and autobiographical stories about their interpersonal relationships, intra-community interactions, and their situation and relationship to each other and to whites. In many African American narratives, especially when they employ the trickster tale form, philosophies and themes of individuals and their connections and responsibilities to the community are transplanted from African social, moral, and cultural experiences. The chapter closes with close readings of the trickster tale elements embedded in William Wells Brown’s *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter* (1853), Harriett Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Martin R. Delany’s *Blake, or the Huts of America* (serialized 1859 – 1862). Brown, Jacobs, and Delany began the process of translating the oral trickster tradition into written form, which Chesnutt would complete.

Chapter 5 will show how several selections from Charles Chesnutt’s collection *The Conjure Woman* rest upon the principles in African trickster myths, legends, and folklore and the African American community’s historical memory of these trickster
principles. Throughout the *Conjure* tales, Chesnutt uses the supernatural as a metaphor for slave resistance and survival skills and methods, and for leveling the ground upon which Blacks and Whites struggle within the confines of the slave and post-Reconstruction south. The chapter will plumb the depths and explore the heights of Chesnutt’s tales for the ways his eloquent use of trickster language adequately and eloquently explains how Blacks struggled to maintain some modicum of control over their existence in a world gone mad with enslavement and postbellum oppression. The chapter will relate the challenges Chesnutt writes about in the tales to the larger social, political and cultural landscape of the mid-to-latter nineteenth-century American experiences chronicled in African American anthologies and other texts.

Through Uncle Julius’s self-determining and rebellious trickster perspective, as the principal black male character newly freed from slavery, Chesnutt repositions our view of the slave south away from pro-slavery literature’s narratives of pleasant homes and contented field slaves. Julius’s testimony to the oppression of the African American post-slavery condition serves as Chesnutt’s vehicle not only for protest but for preserving the orality of the trickster tradition while translating it into a printed text. Chesnutt’s stories, novels, poems, and essays after *The Conjure Woman* allow readers insights into the upper-class world of African Americans of his time, but they also continue to address the condition of the lower classes, making his entire body of texts important for gaining insights into the larger African American experience of the time.

The unique contribution my dissertation makes, to the examination of Native and African American texts, is that as a Storyteller in both traditions, I can comment on the performative aspects of the materials. As a trained university scholar, I bring the
academic skills necessary to analyze, describe, and share in writing what I find in trickster literature and in the fields. The dissertation will allow the texts to “speak.”
Chapter 1 Notes


2 Crow Creek (Crow Creek Indian Reservation), Flandreau (Flandreau Indian Reservation), Hunkpapa (Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Reservations), Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate (Lake Traverse Indian Reservation), Lower Brule (Lower Brule Indian Reservation), Lower Sioux, Minniconjou (Cheyenne River Reservation), Ogala (Pine Ridge Indian Reservation), Prairie Island, Sans Arc (Cheyenne River Reservation), Santee (Santee Indian Reservation), Sicangu (Rosebud Indian Reservation), Shakoee-Mdewkanton, Spirit Lake, Standing Rock (Standing Rock Indian Reservation), Two Kettles (Cheyenne River Reservation), Upper Sioux, and Yanktonai (Yankton Sioux Indian Reservation).


10 Some of the storytelling and “Jazzoetry” presentation sessions I did in the 1990’s in Philadelphia were the African American Festival on Penn’s Landing; Melon Jazz Festival; La Salle University; Temple University; Community College of Philadelphia; Philadelphia Free Library; Chestnut Hill Academy; Philadelphia Public elementary and high schools; Philadelphia Zoo; Baha’i Center; WHYY “Storyline”;
WDAS radio “Deborah Stansbury Show” and “E. Steven Collins Show”; WHAT radio; and Greater Media Cable Television “Issue Forum.”


16 While I was in bachelor and master’s degree studies, I received many invitations to do Native American and African American storytelling sessions for Philadelphia public and private schools, area colleges and universities, and private and government agencies. The requests were always a result of “word of mouth” recommendations.

17 I was invited by Native People and the curators to be the storyteller for three Native American exhibit openings at University of Pennsylvania’s Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. I asked permission of the Tlingit people to tell a Raven legend, the Lakota to tell a Coyote legends.


22 My family’s Native American languages are Chitimacha and Cherokee. We do not know who the last members were who spoke the languages.


32 Lawana Trout, *Native American Literature*, xviii.


There are many examples of Native American tricksters. However, according to Dawn Bastian and Judy Mitchell in Handboook of Native American Mythology, some tricksters tend to appear repeatedly in regional areas: Coyote tales - west of the Mississippi; Iktomi the Spider and Hare - Sioux groups; Napi - northern Rockies and the Plateau; Rabbit - Southeast; and Raven – northwest” (x). According to Richard Erdoes and Simon Ortiz in American Indian Trickster Tales, “Coyote (the entire North American continent), Glooskap (Abnaki), Nanabozho (Algonquian), Masau’u (Hopi), NIxant (Gros Ventre), Rabbit, Rabbit Boy, Veeho (Cheyenne), among others, can also be added to the list of “New World Tricksters” (xiii).

In Old Indian Legends, Zitkala-SA informs us that: “These legends are the relics of our country’s once virgin soil. Under an open sky, nesting close to the earth, old Dakota story-tellers have told me these legends. And now I have tried to transplant the native spirit of these tales-root and all-into the English language, since America in the last few centuries has acquired a second tongue” (v-vi). In the “Foreword” to her collection American Indian Stories, Dexter Fisher explains that “Zitkala-SA will try to recreate the spirit of her tribe in her collection of legends…” (x).

For a particularly detailed treatment of Native American and European contact, that has a relevant focus on Sioux history, consult Dee Brown’s Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West. Ota Kte (Luther Standing Bear or Plenty Kill, 1868-1939), was Oglala Lakota and wrote My People the Sioux (1928) and Land of the Spotted Eagle (1933) chronicling the culture, history, and hardships of his people.

In Long Memory: the Black Experience in America, Mary Frances Berry explains that “when slaves came to the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, they brought West African music, folktales, proverbs, dress, dance, medicine, language, food, architecture, art, and religion with them. In the last decades of the twentieth century the African memory of Afro-Americans permeated American folklore, speech, music, literature, cooking, and religion. Africa and the slave experience remain central to an understanding of American history” (xvii).
For a historic overview of the African American experience, consult, among others, Robin Kelly’s and Earl Lewis’s *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans* and Lerone Bennett, Jr.’s *Before the Mayflower*.

Chesnutt’s *Conjure Tales’* central character, Uncle Julius, is struggling to come to grips with a Reconstruction South while telling tales about the enslavement period. Historic treatments of Reconstruction include: *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860 – 1880* by W.E.B. Du Bois and Eric Foner’s *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. For first person examinations of American slavery, see the autobiographies of Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs. Scholarly observances include Doudou Diene, ed., *From Chain to Bonds: The Slave trade*; Ira Berlin, et al eds., *Free At Last: A Documentary History of Slavery, Freedom, and the Civil War*; and Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death*. 
CHAPTER 2
THE NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL TRICKSTER TRADITION

One of the critical challenges to analyzing the Native American trickster tradition is to keep in mind that reading the texts is not a culturally neutral endeavor. Trickster tales exist “in a cultural framework where story functions to theorize the world,” and the tales “do more than simply entertain” (Robinson, King, Welch, Silko, Storied Voices, 36, 34). “[T]ribes seek—through...sacred stories (myths) and tales—to embody, articulate, and share reality, and to verbalize the sense of the majesty and reverent mystery of all things” (Gunn Allen 4).¹ In Native American Literature, Andew Wiget observes, “[J]udgments of satisfaction are intimately linked to the reader’s prior literary experiences” (4).² As a result, literary theorists have the responsibility of approaching the trickster literature of Native people with the understanding that its origins and cultural markers vastly differ from non-native literary traditions. However, it is also important to recognize that Native American trickster traditions do have universally understandable elements. The form is storytelling, a literary practice common the world over. The function of storytelling is to preserve historical records, teach, entertain, or explain. Early North American Native American trickster legends, tales, and stories share form and function with the world’s storytelling trickster tradition while still maintaining its particularities of location and culture. Craig S. Womack in Red on Red argues that Native voices of “difference rather than commonality are called for to disrupt the literary status quo,” so Native American trickster voices can eloquently speak for the people. (5)³

One of the most prevalent principles in trickster tales is the importance of community, unselfish behavior, and equitable sharing of natural resources, all of which exist for everyone’s use and sustenance. If anyone greedily limits access to resources,
Indigenous American tricksters step in to balance the problem. The Nez Perce trickster tale “How Beaver Stole Fire from the Pines” in the chapter “Coyote Laughs and Cries: Trickster Tales” in *American Indian Myths and Legends* features Beaver as the trickster who rectifies a key social and political imbalance involving the misuse of a natural resource, fire. It is notable in the story that there is peace and harmony in the original world, which is made up of animals and plants, before the arrival of people who bring chaos. The major Trickster is *people*, but that fact is the most subtly conveyed part of the story. In the legend “How Beaver Stole Fire from the Pines,” the Pine Trees were hoarding the secret of fire and refusing to share it with the Animals. Since the animals were in danger of freezing to death, Beaver devised a trickster strategy and stole fire from the pines. Once he had fire in his possession, Beaver out-raced the pines and as he ran, he disseminated fire out to the rest of the animal world. (Erdoes and Ortiz, 343 - 344).

The tale is an allegory and meant to reinforce that ethical people will share resources with each other and all living things; it is *just* to take steps to correct injustice whenever and wherever it presents itself; life is a process that requires evaluation, adjustments, daring actions, and the willingness to change; and those people who are not willing to behave ethically, or change for the better if they need to, will be left behind as moral and political progress and rectification occur. Tricksters running swiftly, fleeing to escape oppression or to distribute the necessities of life—ensuring the survival of the nation, is also a common theme.

The story also reinforces that human beings should not occupy a separate place within the topography of life. In the natural order of things, all living things, including people, must behave in an interdependent and respectful manner. Brian Yazzie Burkhart
writes in "What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us" that "we must never forget the things around us and how we are related to those things, which Burkhart calls, "the principle of relatedness" (16).  

The view that all things are interdependent is unlike the biblically-based Genesis 1:26 verse: "God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepth upon the earth;" this verse states that humans have the right to dominate the natural world.  

The view that man has the right to dominate nature and consume as much of the natural resources of the earth as he wants has, unfortunately, significantly contributed to the abuse of the systems of the natural world, with particular destruction occurring on reservation lands. In All Our Relations, Winona LaDuke, informs us that "according to the World-watch Institute, 317 reservations in the United States are threatened by environmental hazards, ranging from toxic wastes to clear cuts" and "reservations have been targeted for sixteen nuclear waste dumps" (2).  

She also points out that the loss and destructive pollution of the land has caused "indigenous cultures of the western hemisphere to suffer from a historical unresolved grief, the grief that is accumulated over generations of trauma (LaDuke 148). As evidence of "unresolved grief," LaDuke offers the unsettling statistic that "alcoholism, unemployment, suicide, accidental death, and homicide rates are well above the national average," especially for "the buffalo people and the buffalo nations" (148). In For This Land, Deloria, Jr. presents the problem as the “Western belief in the primacy of matter over spirit” (137).  

In American Indian History, Robert W. Venables points out that "the spiritual foundation of most American Indian nations was that the world was made up of
interdependent and equal beings: Humans and all other beings had separate mortal functions but equal spiritual identities (what might be termed equal souls). In contrast, Europeans believed that only humans had souls” (1). For indigenous people, there is no dichotomous relationship between man and the natural world, which explains the consistent presence and repetition in narratives of all manner of offerings derived from the earth and sky. That people are an inseparable part of the intricately woven web of life and must respect the limits and fragility of natural resources is one of the main principles many stories convey.

Offering a primary example is a trickster story I told one night at an after-Pow Wow gathering on the Shinnecock Indian Reservation at a time when people camp out, light fires, and sit around tents and RVs telling stories and “Indian Jokes.” I heard “Hawk and Beaver Teach People a Lesson” a on the Pow Wow Trail about how Hawk and Beaver worked together to save the Animal World from drought and cruelty at the hands of People:

A long time ago, the Animals lived beside a deep, wide river. They set up their homes along the banks, bathed in the water, and collected it for drinking. The women washed their clothes downstream and the children splashed and swam around in the shallow parts. Life was good.

But, one day, a strange thing happened. When the Animal People arose one morning to get water for cooking, they discovered that the river’s water had gone down considerably. The water was so shallow, they could see fish flapping on dry, rocky parts of the river bottom. “What does this mean?!” they asked each other. But, no one had an answer. They walked up and down the shoreline of their lands, but the low water
situation was the same everywhere they went. Finally, when it got dark, the Animal People went to bed and hoped things would return to normal the next day.

However, when they arose the following day, the river was worse. The water had dried up to a narrow stream overnight. There was barely enough water for drinking. Alarmed, the Animal People called a special council meeting to discuss the problem.

The meeting took a long time. Many animals had ideas about what might have happened to the water, and every animal was permitted to express his or her opinion. But no matter how much they talked, no one had the answer to what happened to the water.

Suddenly, Hawk asked to be recognized and volunteered to fly to all the way to the mouth of the river and see what could be wrong. Everyone knew what great vision Hawk had, so the animals agreed with his plan.

So Hawk flew downriver. After he had traveled many miles, he spotted a mighty log jam in the middle of the river. He flew down for a closer look and saw that the jam was holding back the water and had created a large lake. Flying closer still, Hawk saw People swimming, laughing, and playing in the lake. They were having a great time in the water the animals needed to survive. Once Hawk saw the problem, he flew back to the Animal World as fast as his wings would carry him.

Hawk told the Tribal Chiefs what he saw. The chiefs decided they needed to send someone to tell the People that the log jam they built on the river was causing harm to the Animal People. Beaver volunteered to swim downstream and go talk with the People to explain that what they were doing was wrong. Everyone agreed with Beaver’s idea, so he went.
Beaver received an audience with the Chief of the People after he arrived. When Beaver explained how the People’s log jam was creating great suffering for the Animals, the Chief of the People expressed remorse and promised in three days to release the water the People were hoarding. Beaver went back and told the Animals who rejoiced at the thought that their world would soon be put to right. However, after two weeks went by, nothing happened except that the water had almost all dried up.

The Animal Chiefs asked Beaver to return back to the People World and see what had happened. So Beaver swam back and saw that the log jam was still in place. He could hear the sounds of many people laughing, splashing, playing, and swimming in the water the Animals desperately needed to drink to survive. Beaver realized the Chief of the People had not kept his word to release the water the People were hoarding.

Beaver decided he would right the wrong the People were doing to the Animals. He swam right up to the bottom of the log jam, turned his back to it, swung his massive round tail around, and “Wham!” Beaver hit the base of the log jam with all of his might. It only took a few solid blows before the logs cracked, they all gave way, and water came pouring out. Beaver rode the cresting wave of water as it rushed over the riverbed on its way to the Animal World.

The People who had been swimming and boating in the water were also washed into the Animal World and finally learned first-hand the suffering they had caused and had allowed to continue.

There are many spaces and places within Native American trickster tales where what Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart terms indigenous "historical unresolved grief" is evident and often worked through in the persona of Trickster. The tale presents several
key points such as the fact that people have free will and make choices concerning their relationship to living things. Responsible social and environmental behavior is not accidental. Immoral choices lead to suffering and deprivation. There is a causal link between the actions of people in positions of responsibility and the social and political results of their actions. Many Native Americans feel that the social and political oppression of Native Americans and the destruction of the American environment were and still are the results of historical European conquest and genocide, colonialism, and the current American community’s – regardless of race or ethnicity - adoption of anti-tribal and anti-environmental practices and policies.

The loss of the land and all it means to tribal sovereignty and cultural traditions, and the knowledge that the current owners are not maintaining a balanced and caretaking relationship to it, is a site for Native Americans’ historical and modern grief. From the Indigenous viewpoint, the idea that “the earth simply does not matter, that human affairs alone are important” is incomprehensible, and it is noteworthy that the early legends of indigenous North America reflect it (Deloria, Jr. God 70). The native understanding that humans are part of the natural order, and should behave according to this code, does not negate the idea that people who hold this view are highly intelligent and enjoy the capacity for free will. Indigenous people, like anyone else, can choose to comport themselves in a manner that is in accordance or discordance with the indigenous world view; free will is and was always a factor in the affairs of the citizens of Indian Country. It is because early Indigenous people knew that environmentally, socially, and personally destructive free will choices can be made that they developed a literary system to teach people socially viable, constructive modalities of behavior.
Discussions of Native American tales have often been catalogued by some academics as belonging within the murky mists of “myth.” The word “mythology” has undergone various transformations of meaning from its early usages to current usages. “Myth” no longer means something that is untrue or that didn’t happen. Rather, myth is seen as a “way of apprehending life,” as a framework within which people and peoples come to conceptualize their place on the earth, and their interactions with their environment, be it natural or human. The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* [2nd ed.] defines mythology as signifying “a systematic examination of the traditional narratives of any people, or all peoples, with the object of understanding how they came to be told and to what extent they were or are believed, also of solving various other problems connected with them…” (718)

Given the functional uses Native American people made of the tales as sociological constructs, purveyors of psycho-social acumen, and also, for many people, as the source of literal truths about the way life came to be, was, and is, it is not always helpful to consign the tales to an analysis as so-called “mythology,” with the old “popular” attached meaning of fabrication or fantasy. Joanne DiNova laments an “assumed dominance of non-Native theories of self” (54). She correctly exhorts researchers to keep in mind the “sovereignty of the Indian nations from which the literature issues” as we write about the legends that have arisen from within indigenous societies (DiNova 56). The task of literary analysis of literature is not to ascertain the so-called “scientific truths” of the materials, but to understand how various groups interpreted their environment and their lives, and represented them in their songs, legends, and stories.
Jake Page’s book *In the Hands of the Great Spirit* takes on the thorny academic issue of categorizing the literature of America’s first people as myth. Page writes:

The story of American Indian people, in their own eyes, is all one continuing story, or stories, and Indians arrive at their past differently than non-Indians and think of it in entirely different ways. The European mind calls such stories *Mythology*, which is a ‘snobbery’ sort of word for someone else’s religion and history. 

There is a close relationship between Native people, the land, and literature, for “language was given to the people by the land they live within” and “the language changed as they moved and spread over the land through time.”

As Gunn Allen states "There is such a thing as American Indian literature." Bruchac further describes how this literature has a clear unifying tradition because "ancient links between American Indian nations were made through trade and travel, resulting in the dissemination of stories...." *(Our Stories 9)*

During a visit I made to Sinte Gleska University on the Rosebud Lakota Reservation, I had a meeting with Duane Hollow Horn Bear. Hollow Horn Bear is a professor of *Lakota Oral Literature, Lakota Oral Tradition,* and *Lakota Oratory* as part of the Bachelor's of Arts program in *Lakota Language – Oratory.* The courses contain requirements that include learning Lakota stories and mastering the art of oral storytelling and delivering speeches. Hollow Horn Bear told me the Lakota story “The Great Race” about how Man and Buffalo raced each other in the Black Hills to decide the order of the universe. After the story was over, he showed me an aerial map of the Black Hills, and indicated the place from which he says his tribe originated, and traced the image of a track around which Man and Buffalo raced. He said, “The Lakota People originated from the land.” The stories he subsequently told me about the origins of the Lakota people and
their past and present lives made it clear that their literature has an inseparable connection
to the land.

Albert White Hat, professor of Lakota language at Sinte Gleska, joined our
collection and commented that preserving the Lakota language is “crucial for the
growth of the people.” White Hat was the first Lakota speaker to write and publish a
Lakota textbook and glossary. In *Native American Literature*, White Hat explains the
importance of how language is used when he writes that people “need to understand that
language contains great power, that it can be used to injure people’s feelings or to
compliment the achievements of another human being, that it can be used to harm or to
honor and bless. [L]anguage contains the power to give life or take it away
and…therefore [it] must be used with respect” (594). In chapter 2, we shall see how
Zitkala-Sa, a nineteenth-century Lakota woman, writes the story collections *Old Indian
Legends* and *American Indian Stories* as an effort to preserve and “respect” the language
and cultural traditions of Lakota people.

During my visit to the Lakota Studies department, I told professors Hollow Horn
Bear and White Hat that I was a storyteller and asked them to evaluate my Native
American trickster storytelling skills. Graciously, they agreed. I told them my original
trickster story, “How Light Came to World of the Animals.” It is a trickster tale I have
been telling to Native and non-Native people for the last twenty years. I tell it from
memory and use animated hand motions to tell the story with my body as well as my
voice.
“Hey, yah, hey, yah, hey, yah.” I open the story singing a rattle song.

A long time ago, there was no light in the Animal World. The days and nights were so dark the animals kept falling over each other and hurting each other. Some animals starved to death because they could not see clearly enough to hunt for food. Finally, the animals all came together around the council fire to talk about the problem. They talked and they talked, but no one had a solution. Discouraged, everyone went home for the night. The next day, the animals resumed their deliberations, but to no avail. Suddenly, Eagle held out his hand for silence. When the chatter ceased, he said, “Last night, I had a dream. In the dream, I saw a big round yellow ball that gives off a glow called light. The light was trapped inside of a large teepee. There were tall beings in the dream called People that walk around on two legs who were guarding and keeping the ball for themselves.”

After much discussion, the animals decided that someone had to go to the People’s World and get the yellow ball so they, too, could have some of the light. At that moment, Coyote jumped up and volunteered to go. Everyone cheered and Coyote pranced and preened with pride. But, before he could scamper off on his journey, Chicken stood up and loudly protested, “I want to go, too! No one ever lets me do anything. Everyone always says I am too weak and too small to help. Let me prove myself!” Coyote was very unhappy with the idea of having to share the glory of success with Chicken, but before he could protest, Eagle agreed with Chicken, saying, “Take Chicken with you, Coyote, and treat him like a brother.” Coyote was beside himself with anger, but he kept it to himself and said, “Come on, Chicken. Let’s go.”
So, off they went. They crossed the prairie, climbed hills, and eventually came to a very wide river. Neither one of them could swim, so the river presented a major challenge. Coyote said, “Well, it looks as though our quest ends here. Besides, I’m hungry” and he started eyeing Chicken like he was lunch. Chicken read Coyote’s predatory expression and said, “Oh, no you don’t! You volunteered to help and we haven’t finished the job. Besides, I have an idea.”

Chicken told Coyote to take out his hunting knife and cut down one of the trees growing beside the river and then carve the inside out of the tree trunk. So, since he had nothing better to do, Coyote did it and said, “Now what?” Chicken told him to take one of the branches and whittle it into the shape of a paddle. Coyote did. Then, Chicken told Coyote to shove the trunk into the water and see what would happen. The trunk floated! And before it floated away, Coyote and Chicken hopped inside and paddled across the river to the other side. Once they were on the other side of the river, they saw a very high mountain in front of them and walked to its base.

“You stay here, Chicken, while I climb the mountain and see what is at the top.” “Oh, no you don’t!” said Chicken. “You have to treat me like a brother and take me with you like Eagle Chief said.” So, Coyote told Chicken to hop on his back and hold on while he climbed the mountain. When they reached the crest, they discovered the mountain had a wide flat plateau on top. In the distance, they saw a tall teepee with markings on the outside. As they watched, the flap opened and several two-legged beings walked out and then strolled around the back of the teepee. However, the surprising thing that happened was that when the flap was open, something bright and yellow flashed outward but suddenly it disappeared as soon as the flap fell closed.
“That must be what Eagle saw in his dream,” Coyote whispered. “You wait here, Chicken, while I take a closer look.” “Oh, no you don’t,” said Chicken. Coyote cut in, and angrily snapped, “I know, I know. I am supposed to take you with me and treat you like a brother.” Coyote eased down onto his haunches, began to crawl, and said, “Come on, Chicken. There’s no time to lose.”

So, Coyote and Chicken stealthily made their way to the teepee’s front flap, eased it open, and crawled inside. There—right above them, tied to the top of the teepee pole was a big yellow ball that was giving out rays of beautiful yellow light. “That’s what the People have been keeping all to themselves!” said Coyote. Chicken agreed. Coyote didn’t have the slightest idea how they were going to get a small piece of the ball back to their world. But Chicken came up with a plan.

Chicken told Coyote to climb the teepee pole and slice the cord that was holding the ball in place. While Coyote was climbing, Chicken looked around the teepee sides and saw a box with a lid lying next to it. “That must be how the People carry the ball all around to different parts of their world,” Chicken thought. Chicken grabbed the box and lid, dragged them both to a spot right underneath Coyote, and shoved the box into place just as Coyote cut the cord that held the yellow ball.

The ball slowly dropped down until it landed with a thud right inside the box. Chicken took his foot and flipped the lid onto the box, trapping the ball and the light it was giving off. “Let’s go!” hissed Coyote. The box had a leather strap sticking out the side, so Coyote grabbed the strap and started dragging the box outside the teepee and towards the side of the mountain and Chicken ambled along beside. When they got to the edge of the mountain, Coyote looked at Chicken. Coyote started to tell Chicken to wait
for him at the top while he took the box down the mountainside and put it into the canoe. However, Coyote didn’t bother. He knew what Chicken would say, so he told Chicken to hop onto his back again as he eased the box down the mountainside.

Suddenly, they heard shouting coming from the teepee and knew the People had discovered the theft of the ball of light. The People ran out of the teepee, but they couldn’t see a thing because their world had suddenly been plunged into darkness. Coyote looked back and thought, “Now it’s our turn to have the light.” The confusion gave Coyote time to scamper down the mountainside and paddle Chicken and the box back across the river. When they hit land, Coyote told Chicken to hop onto the box. Coyote then grabbed the strap and raced across the prairie, then up and down one hill, then up and down two more. When Coyote got to the top of the fourth hill, the Animal World was right at the bottom of that hill. To Coyote’s surprise, Chicken suddenly yelled, “STOP!” Coyote screeched to a halt and shouted back, “What for?”

Chicken said, “It’s my turn to carry the box. Eagle said I am supposed to help. Everyone thinks I am too small and weak to help. Also, you aren’t treating me like a brother.” Coyote bared his teeth but kept his temper even though he wanted to tear Chicken apart. “I’ll humor him,” Coyote thought. So, Coyote told Chicken, “Look, all you have to do is ease the box down the side of this last hill and we’ll be home.”

Chicken scrunched up his face, squeezed his wings around the cord on the side of the box, and eased the box down the side of the hill that led to the Animal World. Suddenly, the cord slipped out of Chicken’s grip and the box bumped down, down, down the hillside. When the box crash-landed at the bottom, the lid popped off, and the ball ascended right up into the sky and floated above the Animal World.
Slowly, the yellow light streamed off of the ball and made its way all across the Animal World. Suddenly, Bear surprised Deer with a growl and swipe; but, Deer saw the threat coming and bounded away. Hawk got a bead on Rabbit from a mile away and almost scooped her up before she looked up, saw him coming, and narrowly dived into her warren. All across the Animal World, everything changed. The Animals decided to hold another council meeting to talk about the situation.

Just when everyone was seated, Coyote and Chicken raced into the meeting with Chicken screaming, “I brought the ball of light back from the People World!” Coyote was so shocked by what Chicken claimed that he just stood still, dumb-founded. When everyone heard what Chicken said, all the animals broke out into cheers. Chicken’s relatives grabbed their drums, started pounding out Pow Wow beats, and singing honor songs. Chicken was so excited that he had helped the Animal community in a very important way that he started flapping his wings and hopped around the camp fire to the rhythm of the drums and singing. But, Coyote was seething about missing out on his chance to be honored. He started chasing Chicken all around the fire, but that only made Chicken dance faster and harder to escape Coyote’s jaws. And, to this day, one of the favorite Pow Wow dances is the Chicken Dance.

“Way oh hee, hay yih, hay yih, hiy yoh.” I ended the story as I began it—with a rattle song.

The tale emphasizes the social and political necessity for interdependent relationships. Each person is valued and has a contribution to make. In order for communities of people to function and survive, everyone—even historic enemies—must put aside differences when an external situation threatens the survival of the group.
Perfection is not required for societies to function. Turmoil, challenges, and chaos are a normal part of life. The effort to maintain balance is what matters. Differences of opinion are expected and discussions about differences are the road to balance. Wisdom, mediation, and compromise are encouraged and respected. Group and personal honor and duty are foundational principles. It is noble to resist immorality or acts of oppression. Joy, happiness, humor, and celebration are an integral part of life. Life does not always go according to plan. As with the historic chase of coyotes seeking to kill chickens, balancing the vagaries and vicissitudes of life is an ongoing process, not a static state.

Along with storytelling, singing is one of the forms of the oral tradition. The story begins with a song to announce the arrival of the trickster story and the storyteller. The musical notes capture the attention of the audience and allow the listeners time to settle down and pay attention to, to “hear,” the messages that the trickster story is bringing. The ending song tells the people that Trickster has delivered his message and is now leaving the audience members to contemplate the wisdom he has brought them. The songs encapsulate the storytelling session and signal audience members when Trickster arrives and when he leaves. The songs are energy doorways that open and close.

I asked Duane Hollow Horn Bear and Albert White Hat, “How did I do?” I was definitely in one of the most important oral exams of my life. They looked at each other and consulted together for a few minutes. “Namorah, you pass,” White Hat quietly said with a smile.

Ione Quigley is the Chair of the Lakota Studies Department at Sinte Gleska University. She says she includes the "Oral Tradition, along with Observation and Cultural Resource Management," as "identifying tools and protocols for acquiring,
maintaining and distributing indigenous knowledge for use in scientific studies."

The legends, tales, and stories of Native American tricksters are filled with reference points originating from an understanding of topographical and geological analysis, familiarity with categorizations and the habits of flora and fauna, meteorological studies, the basis of military strategies, sociological and political constructs, and environmental preservation concerns, among others. It is evident that the current work that native scholars, like Quigley, do is part of a sophisticated, ancient indigenous tradition of understanding the Earth and heavens, native knowledge that is always present in trickster literature. It is not a coincidence that one of the unifying factors about trickster stories across Indian Country is their consistent content referencing the natural world order. In the “Introduction” to Yellow Woman and the Beauty of the Spirit, Leslie Marmon Silko explains the intricate relationship land references have in storytelling when she writes that “[h]uman identity, imagination, and storytelling were inextricably linked to the land, to Mother Earth, just as strands of the spider’s web radiate from the center of the web” (21). An excellent modern example of the union of trickster storytelling and the rich language of land references is Silko’s short story “Yellow Woman,” in The Man to Send Rainclouds collection. In the next chapter, we shall see the first published Native woman’s rich use of land references in Zitkala-Sa’s nineteenth-century collections of Old Indian Legends and American Indian Stories. We will also see it in Jane Schoolcraft’s privately collected story “Mishosha,” which I will discuss later in this chapter.

As researchers, it is not necessary to question whether stories of the origins of the Lakota people, or any of the other thousands of trickster legends and tales of Native America, are “true” or not. In Voice, Representation and Dialogue Robin Ridington
writes that "spirituality is both intensely personal and distinctively cultural...and it needs
no representation and carries the authority of its own voice (98)." The Truth” resides in
the fact that trickster stories exist and they were and are functionally useful to the people
who tell and hear them told. Gunn Allen explains that "the American Indian perceives all
that exists as symbolic. This outlook has given currency to the concept of the Indian as
one who is close to the earth, but the closeness is actual, not a quaint result of savagism
or childlike naiveté. An Indian, at the deepest level of being, assumes that the earth is
alive in the same sense that human beings are alive (70)." 27

Beatrice Medicine writes in Learning to Be an Anthropologist and Remaining
Native that “in all anthropological investigations, mutual trust and understanding must be
built carefully and sensitively,” so whenever I get the chance, I quietly, without
interruption and critical interrogation, listen to trickster storytellers as they seek to
educate me (5). 28 Donald Richie in Doing Oral History explains the justification for
such a philosophy when he writes, "Regardless of a project's objective, a good oral
historian will always leave room for interviewees to speak their own minds and will not
try to shoehorn their responses into a prepared questionnaire or mind-set" (12). 29 As
Horn Bear spoke of the dawn-of-time Race Between Man and Buffalo that took place
circling the Black Hills, I was struck by how logical it sounded for a people to come to
the conclusion that their carbon-based ancestors originated from a large mineral-rich cave
that had ties to the earth to which people return when they die: from the earth, to the earth
- full circle. The logical line of thinking is impossible to miss.

This chapter will be concerned with the function, form, and content of Native
American legends, for whether the tales are "local metaphors, archetypal human dreams,
imaginative versions of actual events, or faithful rendition of real occurrences is really of no concern to those who do not share them as a belief system” (Page 3). One of the reasons it is vital to study Native American storytelling is because it represents an important source for understanding literary, historical, religious, and cultural traditions that have been neglected or ignored. If understood, these traditions can offer the world many valuable insights.

Historic disregard, marginalization, suppression, and attempted obliteration, often by physical violence, of indigenous spiritual and religious beliefs have a long, bloody, and distressing footprint in America. In "Missionary Intentions, Missionary Violence," in Missionary Conquest, George Tinker minces no words when he asserts:

"[T]he Christian missionaries—of all denominations working among American Indian nations were partners in genocide. Unwitting, no doubt and always with the best of intentions, nevertheless the missionaries were guilty of complicity in the destruction of Indian cultures and tribal social structures-complicity in the devastating impoverishment and death of the people to whom they preached” (Tinker 4).

The issue of Native American people's spiritual and religious oppression has resulted in the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. The AIRFA is a joint resolution by Congress which states that American Indian people have the "inherent right of freedom to believe, express and exercise [their] traditional religions.”

Studying the early Indigenous American narratives is one avenue researchers, who are interested in such areas as religious conquest studies, indigenous philosophical and spiritual belief systems, and moral and ethical environmental studies, can use to find evidence of what it is that early Native American people believed and how those beliefs might be useful for examining modern American perspectives.
Even taking into account the specificity of environment, particularities of language, and local cultural behavioral and religious codes, early Native American trickster literature has several significant unifying features that cut across North America. As storytelling performance pieces, trickster tales contain what I call “cultural carriers” that are transmitted through the lines of communication between the storyteller and the audience, carriers that do not make it through the translation from the oral tradition to print literature. In “Native American Oral Narrative” in the *Heath Anthology*, Wiget comments that "Native American stories, rich in tradition, are inextricably rooted in the things of tribal experiences and because they are oral rather than written, the tales rely upon a performance dimension that is lost to a reader" (21).³⁶ Think of the storytelling phenomenon as though storytellers are an energy-transmitting cultural power source and the audience is the electronic receiver. The teller transmits the story with attendant emotional forces or cultural carriers, packing a spiritual and emotional punch of energy that is received by the expectant audience. The carriers, some that are specific to the needs of the audience and some that are universal in scope, give the legends meaning that cannot be derived from reading them on the printed page. In “The Flight of Dzilyi Nee Yani,” Paul Zolbrod describes his experiences observing Native American storytellers with the comment that "nothing he has seen in print can duplicate hearing a [Native American] storyteller recite a tale for on one level it is impossible to extract an essentially immutable printed text from a dynamic oral tradition with any real fidelity to how the narrative once functioned” (303).³⁷

The storyteller uses the power of the spoken word to call out to the people to unite within the safety of the circle, a sacred symbol in Native American culture, and in this
context representing what Jayne Darby and Hanay Geiogamah in *American Indian Theater in Performance* describe as the "ongoing connection to the past, present, and future, providing a grounding and impetus for performance and transformation (Darby and Geiogamah iv)." Establishing the sense of community, the storyteller or legend keeper becomes a force that holds the people together, reminding them of a very important aspect of culture, unity. Given the constant struggle for life inherent in Indigenous cultures, the storyteller in performance serves the important role of preserving the vital elements of cultural behaviors and meaning that the village needs for survival. Without unity, the people will not survive. By calling the people together, the storyteller serves as an important preserver of culture, creating "a special world set aside from everyday life by contractual arrangements and social suspension" as Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks describe it in *Theatre/Archaeology* (27). 39 The world created by the performance is "a devised world" and "locale of cultural intervention and innovation," expanding and contracting at the will of both the storyteller and participants who are entwined in the tradition's process (Pearson and Shanks 27).

The spoken word carries sound: rhythms, tone, expression, punctuation, and many other auditory “carriers.” Storytellers can use the power of the spoken word to accentuate parts of the story that seem more important than others. Without adding printing tricks, such as constant bold print for emphasis or heavy use of quotation marks and italics, a practice frowned upon in “serious” scholarship, much of the cultural meaning of the Native American oral tradition is lost in translation to the print medium. Sarcasm, pain, triumph, fear, shock, surprise - a whole range of powerful human emotions cannot be adequately expressed only in print. In *Oratory in Native North America*, William
Clements comments that "though figurative language might survive the rigors of translation into a European language and subsequent reproduction in print, early records of Native American oratory most often fail to capture accurately the words uttered by public speakers" (103). 40

The Indigenous storyteller uses the voice and visual bodily markers, the classic modes of performance, to express the cultural range of emotion when telling tales to the audience. A good storyteller can weave an emotional web around the group, creating an illusion (or reality, depending on your belief system) that seems to, or does, depending on your perspective, suspend time and even alter the space or location of the gathering. Leslie Marmon Silko in “From a High Arid Plateau in New Mexico” in Speaking for the Generations describes the Pueblo listeners' experiences with storytellers "imitating voices between various figures" and "acting stories out" as the "moment being alive within them, within their imaginations and memory, as they listen (20). 41 True, reading print can create this state of consciousness too, but under the usual circumstances of the sole reader, it cannot capture a group of people all at the same time, creating community, which is one of the social functions of the Indigenous storyteller. The print experience is a solitary one, isolating individuals one from another during the reading time that people focus on the page. Once storytellers establish the connection with and among the group, think of the experience as if there is an electrical current running through everyone. It is the storyteller’s responsibility to maintain the kinetic connection throughout the session. The experience of community, one united to the other, is a crucial element of the experience, perhaps the most important one, and the experience of reading the printed
page cannot provide this kind of electrical charge. Storytellers can call up this kind of power for the people and so, this is why they are held in high esteem.

The importance of the lines drawn between the individualizing experiences resulting from reading print and the communal ones drawn from listening to stories becomes more apparent when contemplating the cultural aims of Indigenous people. The purpose of storytelling is to provide a re-creation of a basic Indigenous spiritual belief in what Deloria, Jr. calls “a religious view of the world that seeks to locate our species within the fabric of life that constitutes the natural world, the land and all its various forms of life. At the deepest philosophical level, our universe must have as a structure a set of relationships in which all entities participate” (God 1). The storyteller, through the power of the spirit of belief, draws the people into “the fabric of life,” drawing them into the ancient circle of all life in which “all entities participate (God 1). When considered from the light of Indigenous spiritual belief in the unity of all existence, it becomes clearer why the trickster legends of the people should be transmitted by oral tradition, a unifying experience. Jan Vansina in Oral Tradition as History describes the information imparted by storytellers as the expressions of experience:

This includes personal reminiscences, etiological commentaries on existing objects (iconatrophy), linguistic expressions (folk etymology), traditions (explanatory glosses), and literary expressions of experience such as occur in oral art. All these sources are reflexive, the product of thought about existing situations as well as about existing messages. They represent a stage in the elaboration of historical consciousness and are among the main wellsprings of what we call 'culture.' Such sources testify sometimes to events and always to situations existing at a given time.  

As tools for the “oral art” transmission of “historical consciousness,” trickster stories are most effective when storytellers can employ the methodologies of performance. However, literary researchers are consigned to study the print versions,
missing the opportunity to experience a spiritual healer who, through the self-induced
trance of his tales, leaves his body behind to visit another world, to commune with the
inhabitants of that sphere, and ultimately to share this vision with his listeners.

One of the most prominent and pervasive early Native American literary vehicles
of behavioral, philosophical, and psycho-social pedagogy are “trickster tales.” Prolific in
number, and surprisingly consistent in intent and purpose, trickster tales represent a
category of literature that spans all quarters of Indian Country. They belong in a larger
framework of tales, which promote political sophistication, personal, moral and spiritual
growth; these include stories of creation, emergence, the spectrum of the human
condition, the magical and mystical, thankfulness, coming of age, and wisdom and
spiritual growth, which help to explain important aspects of the later Native American
written tradition.

While many Native American legends and tales focus on the depth and breadth of
life’s concerns in dramatically serious tones and expression, a particular subset of these
tales—trickster tales—specifically address the numerous challenging and chaotic aspects
of life. There is a modern literary tension at work when decisions get made about how to
evaluate and where to place trickster tales because for the indigenous community, they
represent a vital link to culture and tradition. They serve a sociological function of
transforming myth into reality, bringing metaphor to life, and perpetuating life skills to
the young while at the same time reminding adults of their obligations. Due to the belief
in the power of words, as a "sacred act," and their ties to land and culture, the stories can
“create cause and effect in human interaction and can change the future” (Armstrong
183). With such vibrancy of belief in the power of words and storytelling as a force for
social change, and storytellers as Change Agents, Native American trickster tales have a
specificity of literary application. In Indi’n Humor, Kenneth Lincoln casts the "comic
outcast [as] holy seer” (73).
Trickster tales are crucial to understanding key elements of the Native American literary tradition and cultural experience. Therefore, this dissertation will concentrate on analyzing Trickster tales. According to Richard Erdoes and Alphonzo Ortiz in *American Indian Trickster Tales*, the Native American trickster is “the great culture bringer who can also make mischief beyond belief, turning quickly from clown to creator and back again,” and is central to understanding how life’s trials and tribulations, its often unanticipated twists and turns, joys and agonies, tests, triumphs and failures, and Trickster’s ironic or fateful occurrences are often depicted through the “mischief” of many of Native America’s early oral literature tales” (335). Through the literary machinations of the trickster, who appears in different guises, forms, genders, age groups, land spaces, time periods and personifications, people are able to access a “representation of the sheer spontaneity of life, the pure creative spark that is our birthright as human beings and that defies fixed roles or behavior” (Erdoes and Ortiz 335).

The Pacific coast’s *Raven, Old Man* of the Blackfeet and Crow, *Iktome*, the *Spider Man* of the Lakota, Nakotah, and Dakotah, and *Coyote*, who inhabits the entire oral and written storytelling location and time span of Indian Country are a few of the “defiant” tricksters of the American Indian experience who “represent the potency of nothingness, of chaos, of freedom, of a nothingness that makes something of itself” (Erdoes and Ortiz 335). Other salient and resilient tricksters include *Glooscap* of the Algonquian, *Great Rabbit* of the Micmac and Passamaquoddy, *Manabozho* of the Iroquois, *Saynday* of the Kiowa, and *Spider Woman* who appears in many regions. These entities of Native American trickster nobility, and other locally created trickster offshoots, represent a pantheon of sometimes Creators, chaos-bringing Mess-makers, Avengers, and also often function in the role of Harmony Restorers.

Noreen Lape points out in *West of the Border* that tricksters “mediate between humans and animals, nature and culture, the individual and the communal” (57).
Trickster is “agent and dupe,” master of disguise and disorganization as well as the “culture hero who improves the quality of life” by unraveling an understanding of the complicated threads of human interaction and existence (Lape 57). His existence serves the people’s need for a mediator “between the human world and the divine, to call attention to the element of disorder – even death – that makes the world real and alive,” according to David Leeming and Jake Page in *The Mythology of Native North America* (48). By following Trickster through the maze of life’s disorganization, the tales provide “humans with the lessons necessary to learn how to survive (Leeming and Page 48).

On the occasions when the tricks create harmony, the trickster has a clear vision and within the confines of the tales, the socially-ordered ends justify his thoroughly rotten means. Instead of trickster being vilified and his actions scorned, in this type of heroic tale, his mess-making is affirmed and the reprehensibility is shifted to an alternate oppressive villain or circumstance. In other words, in heroic trickster tales, that which would be bad behavior under ordinary circumstances becomes honorable behavior when trickster champions the causes of creation, righteousness, reformation, or justice. Barry Holstun Lopez in *Giving Birth to Thunder*, explains that “[f]or youngsters, the stories were a reminder of the right way to do things, dramatizing the value of proper behavior,” and the tales also illustrate the dire consequences of disregarding the community’s dictates of morality (xvii). 48

It is most often through humor that the trickster tale works its magic, the kind of humor that creates chaos to teach a lesson in maintaining order, stages a character’s graceless fall to stress the merits of humility and community, and underlies the vagarious irony of life’s seemingly uncontrollable, and unavoidable, challenges or travesties. According to Lopez, “listeners could release their anxieties through laughter, vicariously enjoying Coyote’s proscribed and irreverent behavior” (xvii). Since Trickster’s behavior
in the tales has the ability to peel away the deceptive veil of the concept of social
perfection, laying bare the reality that sometimes things just don’t go, haven’t gone, or
won’t go the way people planned or hoped they would, trickster tales take on a vital role
in Native American societies. The antics of tricksters make the smooth or easy way
chaotic; transform the bland endeavor into the adventuresome; shock human expectations
of contentment, shoving them towards possibilities of disappointment and
disillusionment. Through the stories of the possibilities inherent in the mix of human
dynamics, tricksters inform the population about how to tolerate the intolerable, and do it
with humor, wit, panache, and style, serving up "laughter as charged discharge" (Lincoln
73).

American Indian trickster tales engage in the act of questioning, thumbing their
noses, sneering at, and all-around making fun of and bedeviling forces within the sphere
of community. Post-contact trickster tales also address the troubling oppressively
assigned American Indian “place” in the wider American society. Insightfully, Lape
points out that “Trickster emerges from a religious-political context with the potential to
teach natives how to survive on the margins of Anglo American culture” (64). Trickster
texts are an important literary voice and vehicle for Native American internal and
external cultural work to get done. The uses, messages and lessons of Trickster have a
long and unbroken continuity within American Indian storytelling. They are also a major
catalyst and category of American literary humor. Irony, satire, minstrelsy, mimicry,
sarcasm, gross and subtle exaggeration, mockery, and understatement are literary
techniques evidenced in the tales and are made accessible through trickster activities
inside the texts.

There are circumstances when trickster behavior, with its chaotic teachable
moments, is not funny. In some cases, the lesson Trickster comes to illustrate concerns a
sobering issue, such as within a coming-of-age tale or an admonition against physical or
sexual abuse. Then, trickster behaviors in such tales are more wry than entertaining antic, more shocking than amusing, and bordering on the poignant and understandable rather than falling within the head-shakingly negative space of chastising disapproval. While it is understandable that the predominant critique of trickster farcical behavior is that it is a socially undermining force that the Native community is warning people against employing, this view of the meaning of trickster tales is not the only one that is valid. When trickster antics are employed to right wrongs, seek justice, punish the wicked, or pave the way to maturity or nobility, the negative head-shaking stops and empathetically understanding affirmative nodding replaces the message of disapproval. In the case of this type of trickster tale, the noble end justifies the ignoble trickster means.

Of course, it is not always easy to decide when Trickster is behaving heroically or damnably, for that determination depends on what moral standard and cultural yardstick is used to judge and measure the actions. Is Trickster still the People’s Hero when he is seeking revenge for wrongs done, the humiliation of arrogant transgressors, or the irredeemable and sometimes violent downfall of hegemonic oppressors? From some moral and religious bases, vengeance is not Trickster’s to wield, nor is shame his to dispense, unless he is first perfect himself. Violence is to be avoided as a principle, and forgiveness is the expectation of the morally superior and enlightened. It is clear from reading American Indian trickster tales that the heroic is not always limited to, nor encumbered by, these types of moral parameters and principles, which are usually associated with a Christian value system. "Perhaps, most importantly, no Native American origin myth identifies anything at all analogous to the Christian belief in sin or a fall from the grace of a god" (Wiget 22). So, one of the ways to make a determination about whether a tale is pre-Contact or at least contains some pre-Contact traits is to examine its relationship to some of the core social and moral values espoused by Christianity.
If Trickster is making ethical decisions about how he wishes to resolve dilemmas he is faced with by using a value system antithetical to the teachings of Christianity, then it is safe to assume that the tale can be placed within a pre-Contact framework, or at least that it was told using values that reflect a Pre-Contact viewpoint. It is vital to read Native legends, tales and stories for the expected moral codes of ethics and behaviors the early People had in mind versus making moral comparative judgments about them using Christian tenets of behavior and notions of justice. Wiget stresses that “any serious appreciation of Native American literature requires real effort to discover the cultural limitations of our own belief and recognize and value difference” (22). It is evident in the narratives, especially in the trickster category, that Native people were and are perfectly capable of making ethical determinations about how their societies ought to operate, and what consequences should be meted out to transgressors of their moral codes.

In addition, from within the body of literary analysis, there is an underrepresented side of Trickster – that of the heroic figure. It is often true, especially when Trickster appears in the Creation tradition, that through trickster behavior, order results from the application of chaos or confusion. At times, the "mess-making" is not only the modality for cautions against socially negative behaviors and abject lessons to be learned but is a vehicle for positive change, with Trickster functioning as the change agent for the better.

Trickster performs the bold moves necessary to create that which needs to be, to confront injustice, and to traverse into often dangerous locations or situations where no human realistically can or should go, and to commit acts of violence in the name of righteousness, some of the usually accepted hallmarks of heroic behavior. In the Tlingit tale, “Raven Steals the Sun, Stars, and Moon,” from a collection, *The Raven and the Totem*, edited by John Smelcer, the world’s creatures were living in darkness because of the selfish act of people hoarding the sun, moon, and stars in a box (13 – 14). The darkness, naturally, is an unacceptable condition and omission for a properly ordered
world, so Trickster Raven, in the role of Creator, functions as the catalyst for justice and change by obtaining the needed items of light for equal distribution to all. His strategy for righteousness is to steal the items. The chief’s “wonderful daughter” is an unwitting accomplice to the deceptive chief who is guilty of employing all manner of “tricks” such as using mystical abilities to cloak himself and activating powers of transmogrification. Given the chief’s social transgressions, Raven feels his is in the moral right and so he “tricks” the chief out of the light, places the sun, stars, and moon in the sky for everyone, and thus solves the community’s dilemma. In “Raven Steals the Sun, Moon, and Stars,” Raven is the trickster of the Northwest Coast Tlingit people and functions to bring social balance in the same manner Coyote balances the Plains Lakota world in “How Light Came to the World of the Animals.” Although Native American trickster legends are certainly the products of sovereign nations and land specific, they also have basic humanistic and ecological values that Indigenous people to America share across nations and tribes.

It is evident that many trickster tales are formulated on the basis of a different non-Christian ethical code, but they are still an example of a clear moral sensibility in operation. There is evidence in the tales of a moral compass that predates the arrival of the condemnation of transgressions against New Testament directives, and the tenets of such categories of Christian immorality as the “Seven Deadly Sins” as unacceptable modalities of behavior even when they are used as resistance against various forms of oppression. Many of the tales do not contain or preach Christian concepts of forgiveness for one’s enemy, and its attendant concept of “turning the other cheek” in passivity, nor do the texts advocate confession for one’s sins, which according to early Christian belief, leads to spiritual absolution and redemption for crimes committed against humanity. In these types of tales, Trickster, without shame, guilt, repentance, or agonizing recriminations, employs all the “tricks” he has in his moral arsenal to right wrongs and to
avenge transgressions as he moves along his merry righteous way. In the process, he is often able to defy or even overcome death, springing back to life at the end of tales in order to continue to bring lessons concerning how things should be. Trickster "is comic in the sense that he does not reclaim idealistic ethics, but survives as a part of the natural world," as Gerald Vizenor explains in the notes preceding "Naanaboizho and the Gambler" in *Native American Literature* (161). This alternative to an "idealistic" moral sensibility is often in operation as it deals with the behavior patterns of tricksters when tales dispense justice out to transgressors and is carefully applied within the stories. Right is right; and wrong is wrong, and justice is meted out impartially, no matter whose behavior, protagonist *or* antagonist, needs examining, adjusting, or punishing. The "good" outcome is the one that teaches a lesson.

From one commonly held Christian point of view based on the New Testament, committing sinful acts, no matter how severe, comes with the opportunity for forgiveness and redemption - usually after showing appropriate repentance – and entitles the believer to avoid reaping “the wages of sin.” Pre-Columbian trickster did not hear the message of Romans 6:23 as early Christianity's Everyman did. In the morality tale, Everyman figured out that he had neglected to love Good Deeds and therefore behave humanely. Although faced with imminent doom for immoral behavior, he benefited from Christianity’s solution, the provision of confessing his sins, (meeting "Confession") thereby being provided with the “free gift” of atoning for his sins (meeting Penance). So, by embracing Good Deed’s “sister,” Knowledge, which means accepting Christian doctrines, demonstrating appropriate levels of remorse (Penance), and applying his own self-imposed punishment of “scourging” and not suffering death, Everyman is eligible to receive a priest’s blessing.

The point of a tale such as *Everyman* is to understand the sacramental positioning of forgiveness facilitated by the *Sacrament of Penance* which can wipe clean a lifetime of
sins, making the believer eligible for blissful eternal spiritual life in the presence of God in Christianity’s Paradise.\(^5^4\) Forgiveness provides the opportunity for a Christian to be favorably judged and to have his corporeal body resurrected on Judgment Day.\(^5^5\) However, as evidenced in many Native American stories, Trickster missed the Christian absolution and redemption memo. Christian conversion, repentance, forgiveness, and absolution leading to salvation and eternal bliss do not lie at the end of many a trickster tale rainbow. As punishment for his transgressions against humanity, Pre-Columbian Trickster, the characterized form of the perpetrator of destructive anti-social behavior, is definitely severely punished for his or her sins. In *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert comment that "the exercise is not so much to straighten out the facts, but to understand how different ways of knowing generate distinct analyses of social processes and distinct interpretations of events, each with its grains of truth...." (xix).\(^5^6\)

True, at times, the tales are a Christian mirror, reflecting the arrival of the Black Robes\(^5^7\) and Bible verses among the People. But then, there are the tales that only shine in the clear light of the moral Native noonday sun, and cast no Christian shadow. Other times, trickster tales serve as vehicles for assisting communities with making sense of the everyday challenges of navigating dysfunctional aspects of domestic life. Tales contain themes such as adults and children struggling with the stresses resulting from difficult marriages, accommodating the financial strain of supporting the household, and dealing with abandonment issues. They narrate scenarios where adults struggle with ineffectual parenting skills and adolescents attempt to navigate the socially and physically turbulent coming-of-age stage of life. An excellent example of culture-specific ways of dealing with ethical and social issues from an indigenous point of view is Jane Johnston Schoolcraft’s trickster tale, *Mishosha, or the Magician and His Daughters*.\(^5^8\) *Mishosha* is an 1827 retelling of a Chippewa legend about how things were “at an early age of the
world,” Schoolcraft’s obvious reference to what was going on in Indian Country before Europeans and Christianity arrived.

Jane Johnston Schoolcraft was an Ojibwa woman born in 1800 in Sault St. Marie, Michigan whose Native name was Bame-wa-wa-ge-zhik-a-quay. She learned about Ojibwa culture and traditions from her mother who was the daughter of Chippewa war chief, Ozha-guscoday-way-quay. She mastered reading and writing English at home, perusing her father’s library. Her father, John Johnston, was an immigrant Irish fur trapper.

Jane Johnston Schoolcraft went on to marry Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (H. Schoolcraft) in 1823, a career government employee who was made Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Michigan in 1836. The married couple circulated a handwritten literary magazine, *The Literary Voyager or Muzzenyegun*, in which Jane Schoolcraft wrote essays and poems, using the pen names Rosa and Leelinau. In “The World and Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft,” his introduction to *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing through the Sky*, Robert Dale Parker writes about H. Schoolcraft’s involvement with collecting Native American folklore. He comments that due to H. Schoolcraft’s “diligence, opportunism, and imagination, [he] was the first person to set out systematically to write down a large body of Native American stories” (26). Parker calls H. Schoolcraft’s appropriation of Ojibwe and other Native American stories “cultural theft” because of his “extensive rewriting” and “minimal crediting” of particular Ojibwe people” who provided him with the stories (26 – 27). Unlike with H. Schoolcraft, Jane Schoolcraft’s short-story writing is culturally-grounded and displays what Parker calls “Ojibwe self-representation,” a term he uses to describe the authenticity of the poems she writes in Ojibwe (27).

Parker offers examples of Jane Schoolcraft’s authentic writing, such as her poem “To the Pines,” which evinces her direct ties to Ojibwe culture. She writes the poem first
in Ojibwe and then translates it into English. Therefore, Jane Schoolcraft is most likely the source for H. Schoolcraft’s accessibility to Native Americans who told him their tales. The issue is not only how to write Ojibwe using English, but also how to then translate the Anglicized Ojibwe into Standard English and retain the original meaning that has gone through several layers of manipulation. Parker notes that H. Schoolcraft writes in his notes on the poem that the effort is strained and H. Schoolcraft comments that “The English text, with its meter and its different pattern of rhyme, is not a literal translation of the Ojibwe text” (90).

Jane Schoolcraft’s exercises in translation point to the difficulties of trying to express, then and now, Native American esthetics in English. It is likely H. Schoolcraft ran translation interference between Jane Schoolcraft’s Objibwe thoughts and some of what eventually arrived in print as a result of their collaborations. However, Jane Schoolcraft’s writings in Objive and translated into English are solely attributable to Jane Schoolcraft and authenticate the cultural ties evident in her short story writings, especially in “Mishosha” which uses the trickster tale tradition. H. Schoolcraft has concerns about the form and syntax of the poem’s English translation and that it is not a “literal” translation; however, the power and force of Jane Schoolcraft’s ties to and feelings about the tenets of Indigenous culture come crashing through the lines of Ojibwe and English. The same connections and expressions happen in “Mishosha” and the rest of her writings. Jane Schoolcraft is fluent in Objive whether she is writing in Objive or in English.

The Presence of the Native American Oral Tradition in Jayne Johnston’s Short Story “Mishosha”

At the beginning of Jayne Johnston Schoolcraft’s short story, “Mishosha,” a man and his wife, a couple who have two young sons, develop serious problems in their marriage. This circumstance is due to the wife’s decision to leave her marriage for
another man and to kill her husband in the process. The husband ends the marriage by leaving. So, early on in the tale, social bedevilment and disharmony are introduced, the hallmarks of trickster ideology. In spite of the evidence of the woman’s capacity for betrayal, subterfuge, and violence, the husband entrusts the safety of his sons to the mother, believing she will discharge her maternal duties and the boys will be safe. The husband is correct about her lack of connection to him, but tragically mistaken and blind about the wife’s commitment to motherhood, for she abandons the children and runs off with her young lover. The woman leaves her children to starve, reinforcing the trickster dynamics of socially chaotic upheaval and painful twists and turns.

Forced to deal with maternal and paternal abandonment, once all the food is gone in the dwelling, the boys bravely go off into the tests within the “labyrinths of the wilderness” in search of sustenance, and being resourceful, manage to feed themselves (1390). The eldest brother uses his knife to make a bow and arrows and kill birds, assuming the role of hunter that their father has abdicated (1390). Taking on the mantle of hero, the youth takes his first tentative steps into manhood and must determine when to act on his own, when to seek help, and how to accept it. As the youth matures, he must, as Paul Zolrod explains in “Flight of the Dizilyi concerning staying in balance in indigenous societies,” learn what “offerings the Holy People expect and what arouses their disfavor.” 59 Insightfully, the elder son draws nourishment from the new “wilderness” womb of the Indian World that the brothers find around them. He “tenderly” cares for his younger brother, “carrying the boy when he is weak.”(1390). Due to the dire circumstances of isolation and danger, the eldest son flexibly serves in the female role of “gathering berries” and “picking wild rose seed pods” to save his brother’s life (1390).
Code-switching from male role to female role and back, when necessary to accomplish social re-ordering tasks, is a trickster behavioral trait. The point of the youth’s personification of gender mutability is for him to display the qualities of both a great hunter and provider as well as the traits of a compassionate protector of the weak and helpless. These are two primary traits a Native American male must display in order to be considered a man of standing within his community. Schoolcraft is using the youth’s characterization and actions, designed to respond to life in a time of extreme and severe stress. Her characterization debunks concepts of the Indian man as a one-dimensional, blood-thirsty warrior incapable of kindness, caring, and compassion, a theme commonly held and communicated by Europeans in her historical time frame.

The trickster element in the story further extends itself in the tale when the elder brother encounters Mishosha, an “old magician” trickster and “terror of the surrounding country,” who has magical powers and can move a canoe in the blink of an eye (1390). Mishosha takes the eldest son to an “enchanted island” where the trickster also turns out to be a father with a marriageable daughter who, because her father is a trickster, is living in an unhealthy social environment and confinement. Schoolcraft’s intent to use the tale as a trickster mediation for social chaos is clear when Mishosha presents the elder “young man” to his daughters with the statement that the young man is to be her “husband.” With the introduction of marriage into the tale, Schoolcraft offers the concept that there will be a resolution to the social chaos for the non-trickster male and female characters through the stabilizing force of the institution of matrimony. The time-honored cultural union of matrimony was often used in historic indigenous societies to join two opposing warring or chaotic forces into a unified solution to social unrest.
With Mishosa’s acknowledgement, and therefore that of an elder, the boy moves forward in the stages of life. He has been introduced to the threshold of the manhood responsibility of taking a wife. It is clear that Trickster, through the character of Mishosha, will have a role and involvement in the youth’s journey to manhood and that the journey will not be smooth, easy, or straight. With the reality of Trickster involved, which represents the reality of life’s challenges and tests, the courtship process and the return to social harmony from the chaos on the island, will not be as deceptively easy as Mishosha’s simple introduction of the youth as “husband.” The youth must prove that he is worthy of adult responsibilities by passing tests of maturity, which come in the form of tests of intelligence, character, endurance, strength, cunning and resourcefulness. The youth is faced with several serious obstacles in the form of tricks and threats to his life generated by Mishosha before he can right the chaos resulting from his parents’ broken marriage, desertion of their social tasks, and abandonment of the young. The youth must face the tests of manhood in order to claim his place as a responsible male member of his nation.

After meeting Mishosha’s daughter, the young man establishes a positive, noble, and trusting pre-marital relationship with her, so she tells him the secret tricks of magically making the canoe transport him. She also protects the young man’s increasingly autonomous and independent behavior, by telling lies to her father. She is the single, young maiden who matures, moves away from the circle and authority of her father, is preparing to mate, and slowly enters into the marital rituals with the young man. The first thing the youth does when he has magical transportation, provided by his loving intended mate, is to show concern for familial ties. The young man goes and sees to the
welfare of his younger brother, whom he was forced to leave behind while he went searching for help. The youth proves himself to the young woman through his kindness and sense of responsibility to his helpless brother.

The young man exhibits behaviors opposite to those of the chaos and confusion of the trickster ploys of Mishosha. The youth proves he can be relied upon to take on the responsibility of fatherhood by tenderly caring for his younger brother. But, it is not as easy as being a kind youth to one’s sibling in order to gain a wife, for the young man must prove his resourcefulness, determination, and courage, as well as display his hunting skills, compassion, and caring. In short, he must not exhibit the kinds of destructive trickster behaviors his mother, father, and Mishosha have done, or he will fail in his task of righting wrongs, re-balancing social disorder, and cementing the restoration of an appropriate future in the community.

Mishosha places the youthful hero into several life-threatening situations. He puts the young man onto several different “islands,” magically “slaps his canoe” for instant travel, and deserts the youth “to his [dire] fate” (1391). The young man is attacked by birds, fish, and eagles, with which he has the magical power to talk and reason. With his own magical powers, the young man triumphs over the challenges by killing one of the attackers, making treaty bargains with the remaining animal community members, and returning to Mishosha and his intended wife victorious. The young man proves his youthful “spirit” is growing more powerful than Mishosha, the “old magician,” a metaphor for the never-ending cycle of life where youth eventually replaces the aged (1391).
The youth’s success rate at thwarting negative trickster magic grows. He continues overcoming Mishosha’s power, influence, and dominance, comporting himself like a first-rate hunter, and impressing the women back on the island. When Mishosha takes the youth on a hunting trip in the dead of winter, Mishosha steals away part of the youth’s protective clothing. However, the youth resourcefully uses magic of his own, but this time for good, fighting back to succeed in a test of skill, strength, and survival in the hunt, abilities he must have to be considered a man worthy of membership in the warrior community. The youth has performed the tasks of a man exceptionally well, with grace, honor, humanity and integrity, against trickster forces wielding great power. He is rewarded with a name, a very high honor in Native society: “Panigwun.”

Until this point in the narrative, he was “child, boy, eldest brother, youth, or young man;” so, he did not merit a name. The power of his name represents the recognition of his arrival into the adult world and his ability to marry. Panigwun can now take his place in society and Mishosha calls him “my son” (1391) Panigwun’s magic is now stronger than Mishosha’s trickster force; so, it is time for Mishosha to relinquish his role as chaos-bringer and messmaker. In keeping with the Circle of Life, Mishosha must retire and move on, pass away…die. He does die as Mishosha. However, Schoolcraft honors the tenets of Native American spiritual and cultural traditions, so Mishosha returns to the Earth, his body becoming a “sycamore tree, stiffly leaning over the waters” near his home (1394). As traditional Native American tricksters do, Mishosha enters the transformative cycle of life. With Mishosha’s passing, Panigwun’s maturity and role of the bringer of resolution of chaos is complete. He takes over the magical canoe, knows the mystical words to control it, rescues his brother and aids him to maturity. Panigwun
claims his bride and arranges his brother’s marriage to her younger sister. The now mature, married man takes everyone, now safely restored to balance, over to “the main land” where they “live lives of happiness and peace” (1394).

Leeming and Page point out that peaceful resolutions to mythologically disruptive and chaotic social circumstances, such as those that happen in Mishosha occur when "the hero is our representative in the world where our monsters and nightmares are confronted and where our deepest wishes sometimes come true” (146). 60 Schoolcraft has the group return to the "main land" because she knows that from within the codes of Native culture, the "entire community eventually becomes involved, because he must transmit what he learns to others," and share the "ritual knowledge" that such an undertaking has afforded him (Zolbrod 303). 61

Schoolcraft has transformed the hero from a boy into a successful Native man who possesses wisdom, courage, generosity, sensitivity, and crucial psycho-social and sexual life experiences. Panigwun displays the proven qualities of Native manhood a youth is expected to acquire after being tested under stressful battle conditions. The tale of Panigwun's success with overcoming all obstacles set in his way and the realization of an honorable place in adulthood, with an adult name to go with it, fulfills the heroic "representation" and "wish" necessary for Schoolcraft's trickster tale to work from the Native American point of view.

It is evident that Schoolcraft, within the format of the trickster tale, is retelling key elements of a rites of passage into manhood tale, what western literature often terms a “coming of age” narrative. The boys are effectively, and necessarily, cut off from the direct protection of Father and Mother as they must move towards manhood and
independence. The effective disintegration of the comforting domestic sphere forces the young males from its bosom and out into the adult world of self-sufficiency, opportunity and rewards, but also propels them into a realm of immense danger and challenges. The eldest son must prove his manhood and readiness to assume an adult role in the community; so within the tale, the characters around him act in service to the growth and development of this young man, a metaphor for the role the community must assume when its young men move through their stages of maturation. Mishosha’s trickster role serves the dual purpose of instruction as well as entertainment, like most storytelling done in Native American communities.

In "From a High Arid Plateau in New Mexico," from Speaking for the Generations, Leslie Marmon Silko explains that “traditionally everyone, from the youngest child to the oldest person, were expected to listen and recall and retell a portion of, even if it is only a small detail from, a narrative account or story” (9). 62 If we listen very carefully to the message in Mishosha, we can “hear” that Mother and Father have disappeared, the boys are left on their own to mature and survive, the eldest son rises to the trickster’s challenge for survival, protection and defense, and through survival and triumphant he will prove himself worthy to marry and take his place in Native society. The story is one of growth, maturity, triumph, life’s positive and negative inevitabilities, and ceremony. It is rich in Native American tradition and the “details” of what Erdoes and Ortiz call “emblems of a living religion,” the values people “believe” in (xv). 63

Male figures are not the only tricksters operating in Native American legends and stories. There are numerous tales about women who use subversive, trickster methods to gain power, overcome oppression, thwart or punish marital betrayal or sexual abuse,
obtain the men they want, triumph over their enemies or evil, and undermine, maintain or re-establish the social order of things using trickster’s confrontational, disorderly and chaotic methods. In *Spider Woman’s Web*, Susan Hazen-Hammond retells a story called *Sleeping with a Log*. It is an Iowa nation tale about a woman who escapes a sexual predator, “a trickster who saw a woman traveling alone.” The story's characterizations, plot structure, and action are culturally within the confines of the indigenous community; as with *Mishosha*, there is no European presence, interaction, nor intervention indicated. The solution to the problem is according to the dictates of an internal code of justice.

The story's antagonist dresses up as a woman to fool the female character in order to sleep with her in a shared bed, and then trick her into having sex with him. He resorts to subterfuge because, as per socially accepted custom, the woman is prohibited from even “speaking to a man she doesn’t know,” let alone have sex with him. The important concept to understand is that the story makes it clear that he *knows* she “wouldn’t speak” to him and break with tradition, which establishes her as a representation of the continuity of culture and concepts of the expectations of Iowan female sexuality. In order to illicitly seduce her, the man tries to subvert the feminine. He perverts tradition to satisfy his licentious intent, thereby contextualizing the woman’s subsequent trickster behavior into the realms of self-defense, rectifying the feminine, righteousness, upholding cultural traditions, and using deception as justifiable means to a good end. By turning herself into a “rotten log full of biting ants” for the male to hold, she inflicts painful consequences on the man for attempting to cause her personal pain, social imbalance, and for breaking with Native tradition. The woman ends up being a shrewder and more empowered trickster than the original male one.
Although the story clearly makes the point that women are capable of taking an adversarial position to men, Hazen-Hammond comments that her tales of women’s power are “not meant to create gaps between men and women, but to heal them” (7). She asks that we “approach the stories with reverence and respect” and understand that “Spider Woman has many powers that include the ability to restore harmony to humankind” (7).

The restoration of harmony through trickster behavior brings up one of the crucial dichotomies and ironies of the category of tales. Trickster characterizations are always a source of chaotic, disputative, and subversive action; and, the outcome of trickster behavior is most often disharmony-in-order-to-impart-the-lesson. However, trickster activities can be the catalyst for the resolution of disharmony, as with Mishosha’s deceptive trials and tribulations and the woman’s behavior in Sleeping with a Log. That trickster tales are empowered with ability to use chaos to teach harmony is one of the most complex enigmatic dichotomies about the tales.

Pre-Contact Native American Trickster Tropes in “Coyote, Iktome, and the Rock”

Reflecting pre-Contact Native American trickster perspectives, like elements found in “Mishosha” and “Sleeping with a Log,” “Coyote, Iktome, and the Rock,” a White River Sioux tale retold in 1967 by Jenny Leading Cloud, relates how Coyote, the central trickster figure, is out strolling around with his friend, Iktome, the Spider Man, and runs into Iya, the Rock (337 – 339). Greed, envy, duplicity, bad judgment, violent solutions, temper tantrums, and deceit all run rampant through the story as two of the main characters give vent to nasty, base emotions on the way to the tale's moral lesson. Violence erupts between two of Indian Country’s inhabitants, Coyote and Iya, for Iya does not take Coyote's bad behavior lying down, literally. Iya chooses to go after Coyote
himself. He renders judgment on Coyote's actions, metes out the swift and immediate corporal punishment he sees fit, and so rectifies the situation's negative social imbalance.

When feeling culturally appropriately generous and community-minded for a moment, while he is out strolling with his friend, Iktome, Coyote comes upon Iya and generously gives Iya his blanket as a gift. Iya exclaims, “Wow, a giveaway!” Kathleen Ann Pickering explains in *Lakota Culture, World Economy* that "[c]ommunity giveaways are held for several reasons: as part of annual pow wows, to commemorate graduations, as memorials for departed loved ones, as part of naming and huka, or adoption, ceremonies, and in conjunction with other events that involve honoring an individual or group" (57). But then, more indicative of his basic nature of fomenting chaos, Coyote selfishly regrets his largess and through various manipulations, figures out how to renege on the act of gift-giving. Coyote’s selfish tactics involve getting Iktome to ask Iya for the blanket back, a decidedly abusive use of accepted Indigenous friendship codes and generosity of heart and spirit. Coyote even asserts that Iya didn’t need the comfort of the blanket in the first place and insensitively claims that Iya is impervious to environmental elements. Of course, Coyote’s selfish position flies in the face of the indigenous relationship to the land and the harsh realities of surviving in an early hunting/gathering culture. Although Iya is quite clear about the meaning of Native American gift-giving ritual by commenting, “What is given is given,” Coyote, the chaos-bringer, refuses to heed the strictures of societal norms. The realities of the situation, and its potential social fall-out, are so clear to Iktome, ordinarily a prime trickster himself, that he is even prompted to warn Coyote about pursuing his deleterious behavior. Iktome cautions Coyote by saying, “Iya has power. Maybe you should let him keep the blanket.” But, if
tricksters listened to good advice, even from other solicitous tricksters, they would not be
the basis of Native American oral and literary instruction in how to avoid the pain,
suffering, and consequences of bad judgment calls. Having Iktome issue the initial
societal coded warning is an interestingly loaded literary device in the narrative, for an
insider Indigenous listening audience would immediate "get" the cue about the severity of
Coyote's act since Iktome is such a notoriously bad behaved trickster himself. If Iktome
thinks Coyote's behavior is bad...well, listeners know this story is going to be an edge-of-
your-seat trickster thriller. 68

So, in keeping with Coyote’s role as Trickster in “Coyote, Iktome, and the Rock,”
he ignores Iktome’s wisdom, and upsets the balance of indigenous harmony by
“snatching” the blanket from Iya’s possession and comfort. Once Coyote has given in to
his baser drives, he returns to the cave just as the sun reappears, and he and Iktome while
away the time “sunning themselves and eating pemmican and fry-bread, wojapi, and
berry soup,” uncaring about the uncommunal way they treated Iya. But, in the world of
trickster tales, bad behavior is a vehicle for enlightenment and instruction, so the
consequences of transgressing societal codes must be endured. The anthropomorphic
embodiment of these consequences is Iya; and, it is Iktome who is first jolted from the
pair’s space of self-imposed social oblivion. “What’s that noise?” Iktome suddenly asks.
Of course, the “noise” is the metaphor for the shift back into order and balance that is
coming with the arrival of Iya. Coyote acts clueless, not wanting to acknowledge any
upset to his disorderly reordering of things. But, Iktome “has a pretty good idea” what is
going on and tells his “friend” Coyote as much. When they get a glimpse of the “great
rock [of tradition] rolling, thundering, and crashing upon them,” Iktome is clear about the level of transgression they have undertaken, and shouts “Iya means to kill us!”

Iktome realizes that he and Coyote are operating in a very dangerous sphere of social reference. If the penalty for their actions is death as a consequence, then what they’ve done must be behavior that in its turn could cause the death of the offended party. So severe a consequence as Iya hunting them down in a “noisy” rage to kill them means taking back that which has been given away is no small matter, a deeply significant offense within the American Indian community. Coyote and Iktome find out that “no matter where they [try] to hide” from the nature of their heinous behavior, Iya confronts them, becomes the judge, jury and executioner of their crime against Indian humanity. Coming to the conclusion that it is time to weigh his involvement in what has turned out to be a very sticky, tricky situation with Coyote, the blanket, Rock’s heightened sense of injustice, and his certain culpability, Iktome flips from “friend” to saving his own skin. In a neat trickster maneuver—but done with the solace of having given Coyote fair warning about a better path—Iktome slinks away from culpability with, “Friend Coyote, this really is not my quarrel. So long!” Clearly Coyote is deserted, ostracized, and abandoned to a fate of his making; and Iya is not in a forgiving mood.

The Rock of Indian Justice “rolls over Coyote, flattening him out altogether,” and rolls back to his own place commenting, “So there.” Rock’s retribution kills Coyote’s relationship to the Indian social world and leaves him “flat” to be claimed by passing whites looking for a rug to put in front of their home’s fireplace. Coyote’s behavior transforms him into a dead Indian Being suitable for occupying a spot in the Western world of dead Indian collectables. However, in the spirit of many trickster tales, Coyote’s
harsh lesson in selfishness and community endangerment punishable by death is ameliorated by his ability to absorb the instruction, symbolized by his puffing back up with air and being able to escape the White world of things and running back home to inhabit Indian Country again. He can come home because Native people need him. He instructs and informs the People. He is “sacred,” hugely important, for he “teaches humans how to live.” And what way of being is it that Coyote has almost sacrificed his life for us to appreciate and understand? The story ends with the moral maxim that we, through the “tricks,” trials, and tribulations of Coyote, learn the lesson to “always be generous of heart”—or else.

Turning the Trick on the Invaders: The post-Contact Native American Trickster Tropes in the Brule Sioux Tale “Coyote and Wasichu” 69

In a tale which turns the trick back onto conniving European invaders, “Coyote and Wasichu,” published in American Indian Myths and Legends, is a more modern Brule tale told in 1974 on the Rosebud Reservation about a "white sharp trader" who brags about having a trading post and "cheating all the Indians around here” (342). 70 The story’s plot is much more modern, reflecting issues of European contact, conquest, and oppression and the subsequent interactive tensions between white and Native people.

After the institution of the reservation system, Native Americans, personified by Coyote in the story, have had to put up with the presence of usually cheating wasichu trading post shopkeepers in their midst. Even when there is ample evidence the trading post sustenance system is unfair—subpar food, price gouging, and selling expired products—many Native Americans in that situation were and are still forced to take a subtle, circuitous route to redressing the wrongs done to them. In “Coyote and Wasichu,”
Coyote refrains from direct, violent action against his tormentor, constrained by a changed cultural and social environment from the one possible when Panigwun was master of his own destiny. A more ancient version of Coyote could take disorderly matters into his own hands in all situations sans the armed interference of Wasichu.

One day a man told Wasichu that there was “somebody who could out-cheat him anytime, anywhere.” In keeping with the insider’s view of the arrogance of a “sharp trader” in that situation, Wasichu’s response is, “That’s not possible.” The absolute impossibility of a white man conceiving of himself as being bested by a Native man opens the door for the entrance of an American Indian Trickster, Coyote in this case.

The man informs Wasichu that “Coyote can beat you in any deal” and identifies Coyote to the white man as being “that tricky-looking guy over there.” Even though Wasichu is warned with the descriptor “tricky,” which is an interjection of fair play information on the part of “the man,” the white man is confident that Coyote will not present a challenge or obstacle to his usual pattern of trading post theft and deception. So, Wasichu takes the bait, goes right over to Coyote with total confidence in his ability to cheat all comers and says, “Let’s see you outsmart me.”

Within the context of the tale, enough of being cheated is enough. With Wasichu’s snide and arrogant challenge, Trickster comes alive, becomes the Indians’ champion going into battle, and the reciprocal “outsmarting” begins. Coyote is much too clever to openly challenge Wasichu. Head to head in a “deal” involving the direct exchange of money, goods, arms, or services, the white man would have the full advantage as Coyote would not have as much, if anything, with which to barter. Besides, he knows from past experience that Wasichu knows and understands the intricate ins and
outs of the nature of trading-post cheating. Coyote knows he must employ alternative knowledge-based maneuvers that Wasichu doesn’t know about. From what location would those maneuvers originate? Well, if Wasichu is operating his devious enterprise from out of the White World of cheating Indians, then, Coyote figures out that his best chance of out-maneuvering Wasichu is to use power originating from the Indian World. Coyote, the people’s champion, counters the challenge with, “I’d like to help you out, but I can’t do it without my cheating medicine.” The “medicine” Coyote needs is Indian medicine, and can’t be purchased in a bottle sold in Wasichu’s trading post store. It’s the kind of medicine that calls up the power of the ancestors and the Indian way of being.

Predictably within the message of the tale, Wasichu, although he has been among Indians running a trading post “for many years,” sneers at the power of Indian medicine, which is finally brought to bear directly on his bad behavior. In disbelief and disrespect Wasichu exclaims, “Cheating medicine, hah!” and dares Coyote to “go and get it.” At this point, the culturally, politically, and religiously, astute know the punch line of the story: “aaayyyyy”….Wasichu is going to lose out in this encounter with Coyote and his Indian medicine. The way post-colonial Native American trickster tales work is that with the opening line “there was a white man,” it means that outsmarting Wasichu is the point of telling the story in the first place- no surprises there. What is riveting about this particular tale and keeps listeners/readers on the hook is awaiting the explanation about how Coyote, as Medicine Man using Indigenous Power and going up against long odds, is going to triumph over a Wasichu whose onerous behavior is protected by the reservation system.
Coyote immediately gets down to bringing out historical facts and attempting to right historical wrongs. He goes on the offensive with: “I live five miles from here and I’m on foot.” Given the tale originates with the Brule, a Teton people who are part of the larger Dakota Nation, who rode horses and hunted buffalo across their extensive land base prior to the arrival of Wasichu to their lands, Coyote’s “on foot” comment harks to the great losses the Brule endured. It is certain that Coyote’s relatively short sojourn of “five miles,” compared to the distances of past journeys, is a reference to, and a reminder of, how small the Brule lands have shrunk down to the point of reservation confinement. Coyote, clearly assessing Wasichu’s underestimation of his decision to apply Indian medicine to the situation, suggests that Wasichu “lend him his fast horse.” As horses were a crucial element of Dakota culture for over 150 years, and known for being “fast” as the men rode them to chase down the buffalo across many miles of the open plains of Brule land before Wasichu altered Lakota and Dakota life, Coyote’s suggestion takes on both a comedic hue at the audacity of the request and also a bitter poignancy at another reminder of the loss of the land, sovereignty, and autonomy. The tale constantly repeats allusions to these three areas of transgression against the Brule and is an indication of the depth of the pain resulting from the historic “cheating” that happened to the people at the hands of “the white man.”

Of course, Coyote has a long memory and is also observant concerning the current state of Wasichu’s “cheating” affairs happening on the reservation, so notoriously and boldly blatant that Wasichu feels completely comfortable bragging about his actions’ effectiveness at oppressing Indians. Coyote’s and Wasichu’s interests lie on opposite sides of the teepee pole, and it is in Coyote’s best interest to hide this fact from Wasichu.
With “Well, all right, you can borrow [the horse],” it is clear Coyote has successfully concealed his intentions from Wasichu, which is a stage in the employment of Coyote’s Indian medicine. Too foolish or arrogant, or both, to recognize that Coyote already has his medicine operating on the problem, which is him, Wasichu says again, “Go on home and get your cheating medicine!” in what has now become a battle of wills Wasichu is determined to win. What he does recognize with “the man’s” challenge that “Coyote can beat you” is that his ability and credibility at being able to successfully double-deal, cheat, back-stab, and continue the imbalanced Wasichu politics and reality of reservation life for Native Americans is at stake. Wasichu is so used to being in the dominant, controlling position with Native people that he gives Coyote his horse, succumbing to the initial stages of Coyote’s exercise of power.

Once Coyote has the horse, he further lulls Wasichu with the comment, “Well, friend, I’m a poor rider. Your horse is afraid of me, and I’m afraid of him,” a definite culturally and historically deceptive statement. Harking back to remembrances of Brule life, the centrality of its horse culture, and male prowess in dealing with horses, the comment is clearly part of the trick. The reality is just the opposite. Present situation or not, historically, the double-meaning point of the comment, Coyote would be a member of a nation of fine horsemen, not afraid of horses, nor would horses be “afraid of him.” But, of course, given his blindness, this ironic distinction is totally lost on Wasichu, so he gives Coyote his “fast” horse. Since the medicine is working so far and the reality of the situation of why Coyote is really acquiring his horse is going over Wasichu’s head, Coyote pushes his medicine further and says, “Lend me your clothes; then your horse will think that I am you.” Aayyee! What?! In what world is a Native Man going to turn
into a White Man? Wasichu is so much under Coyote’s spell, awash in the glut of
wasichu hegemony, this bit of spiritual, historical, cultural, political, and physical illogic
escapes him. Since Wasichu cannot conceive that Coyote is deceiving him and Coyote
does not want to be him, Wasichu answers, “Well, all right. Here are my clothes; now
you can ride him.” So far, Coyote’s medicine has allowed him to acquire Wasichu’s fast
horse and finer clothes, which given the “many years” of Wasichu’s “cheating” are a
couple of items thrown onto the indigenous side of the balance scale. By this point,
Wasichu has withstood what he sees as Coyote’s constant qualifying delays to the
cheating showdown. Aggressively spoiling for a fight, he demands, “Go get that
medicine,” and confidently asserts, “I am sure I can beat it!”

At the point that Wasichu is positive he is going to best Coyote and successfully
add him to his long list of cheated Native people, the storyteller on Rosebud tells us how
well Coyote’s indigenous medicine has worked: “So, Coyote rode off with Wasichu’s
fast horse and his fine clothes, while Wasichu stood there bare-assed.”

This tale is a modern use of elements of traditional Coyote oral trickster
storytelling where Coyote rights wrongs in Indian Country. However, this Brule Coyote
Trickster is not righting internal Indian social imbalances. Brule Coyote goes to war with
the white man, the external political oppressor who invaded Indian Country. It is
noteworthy that the ancient and the modern trickster storytelling elements are blended,
remaining in continuity. Brule Coyote and his struggles with Wasichu and his uncivilized
ways represent modern Native American men and women who are still faced with
dealing with wasichu-created hardships. It is also true that, as with Brule Coyote’s turn to
traditional ways to handle his circumstances, many Native American men and women
still use the “magic” of maintaining traditional practices to keep their families, communities, and nations autonomous and strong.

“Coyote’s Antro”: An Uneasy Historical Relationship with Academia

Re-constructing tricksters of the past through present eyes, in *Visit Tee Pee Town: Native Writings After the Detour*, Peter Blue Cloud’s "Coyote’s Anthro" retells the story about a newly minted Anthropology Ph.D. who writes a dissertation entitled *The Mythology of Coyote: Trickster, Thief, Fool and World-Maker's Helper.* 71 “Anthro” is a term for western anthropologists who come to study Native people. The Anthros are out in Indian Country "gathering data" near what Cloud calls the anthropologist’s “latest informant’s shack,” which is a derogatory reference to Native Americans who supply researchers with insider information on Native American traditions. “Coyote Old Man" appears and speaks to Anthro, who is shocked by this occurrence because Coyote Old Man, the Trickster in this tale, is supposed to be a “myth.” Of course, the ironic humor in the supernatural occurrence is that western science is continually going on record about its skepticism regarding Native America’s religious and spiritual traditions.

The image of “Anthro,” the self-proclaimed Indian Expert, being caught totally unaware by an aspect of Native culture and traditions, especially in the realm of the magical and mystical, is a source of snickering amusement. Throughout the tale, Coyote Old Man engages in actions that demonstrate his powers to alter western science’s concepts of what is possible for humans to do in the world. The Old Man is anthropomorphized as a Native male who “plucks a long hair from his tail” and is able to make it “float in the air.” He is able to walk on a lake’s water, jump as high as the moon, grab it and then hang suspended from it, confounding Anthro, who, of course, represents
western academic traditions. Trickster Coyote in this tale is able to convince Anthro that he too can defy the laws of science; and so, Trickster convinces Anthro to give walking on the lake’s water a try. Trickster makes a buffoon of Anthro who sinks down into the water, gets soaking wet, and almost drowns. In the tale, it is Coyote Old Man who is able to evince an intricate, energized, “reciprocal” connection to the natural world and not Anthro, who is, by the standards of measure in the tale, dead to the indigenous world. In the chapter “Tricking In/Subordination,” Dee Horne writes that “trickster can reflect and refract the colonial discourse” (130). In “Coyote’s Anthro,” Blue Cloud uses trickster humor to re-discuss the American colonial discourse that has been going on for the last 500 years.

Another area of inquiry concerns the magical and mystical quality of the tales. In The World We Used to Live In, Deloria, Jr. explains that when he was "growing up in Bennett County, South Dakota, and listening to stories of the old days and learning, from time to time, of the unusual things that were still being done by spiritual leaders, I have never emotionally or intellectually questioned the veracity of the old accounts (Deloria, Jr, The World xix)." Deloria Jr.’s belief in the powers of medicine men and women and his recollections of elders speaking about how the spiritual and physical world work in tandem in Indian Country is by no means a solitary perspective.

In The Sacred Hoop, Gunn Allen describes a process of responding to the validity of readings about Native American topics as "checking with her inner American Indian self" to see if the literary content is "upside down and backward" or not (5). She indicates that she has an internal indigenous alarm system that "warns her when something deceptive is going on," and that there are times during her reflections on the
readings when the clarity and "confirmation" she seeks "comes about in miraculous ways (Gunn Allen 6). That's when she knows her guidance comes from the non-physical and the supernatural" (Gunn Allen 6). Her method of arriving at "a reasonably accurate picture of truth is somewhat non-Native and somewhat Indian," she asserts (6). She delivers a cautionary directive to scholars in the field to acknowledge that "Indian American does not in any sense function in the same ways or from the same assumptions that western systems do," which means that it is necessary to use a double-consciousness approach, non-Native and Indian, to access the meaning within Native American literature (Gun Allen 6 – 7).

It is evident that Deloria, Jr. and Gunn Allen are discussing a literary analysis system that encompasses and embraces the reality of the metaphysical in the world as a way of making sense of Native American literature, used as a literary analysis access route. While Gunn Allen says she is appreciative of the non-Native "formal training" she has received to perform the tasks of the academic scholar/researcher, she reveals that she is "especially fortunate" because of her ties to the indigenous world. These ties allow her to be a student of "the wind and the sky, the trees and the rocks, and the sticks and the stars "which are "usually in a good teaching mood" (Gun Allen 5 – 6). When Gunn Allen "needs an answer to some dilemma," she explains that "she can usually get one" from the natural world, "for which she says thank you to them all” 5 – 6).

Deloria, Jr. and Gunn Allen clarify that a vital step towards reaching an understanding of the meaning within Native American legends is to know that the stories reflect a view held by some people who clearly and deeply understand the natural laws of and occurrences within the world. Deloria explains that:
they can invoke the assistance of higher spiritual entities to solve pressing practical problems, such as finding game, making predictions of the future, learning about medicines, participating in healings, conversing with other creatures, finding lost objects, and changing the course of physical events through a relationship with the higher spirits who controlled the winds, clouds, the mountains, the thunders, and other phenomena of the natural world. (Deloria, Jr. *The World* xix)

Researchers will arrive at a richer analysis of Native American legends when they appreciate that Native American listeners and readers are enjoying and evaluating the legends using a different set of cultural measurement criteria, such as believing that people can communicate with the natural and supernatural world interchangeably and also "change the course of physical events (Deloria, Jr. *The World* xix).

Researchers who hold this indigenous belief have an academic advantage over those who do not. Why? Like all accomplished academics, we have the tools of the scientist to pry and ferret out the stories from their hiding places, shine a spotlight on them, and then share them with the academic community. Unlike academics who do not share the Native American world view, however, once we believers find and access the stories, we can more fully see and hear and know what it is that the stories are truly imparting—when the tales' characters, trickster and non-trickster, exhibit "amazing spiritual powers" (Deloria, Jr., *The World* xix).

Native American audiences do not experience the same sense of skepticism that western literary consumers do because legends make more sense and are more enjoyable when you believe that your native nation had or has medicine man and women - which may even include your own grandmothers who have "amazing powers" like the ones you are hearing about in the tales you listen to or are reading. When evaluated from the Native point of view, legends have more meaning, are more nuanced, and truth can be more deeply accessed. But, the spiritually powerful belief system that is reflected in the
actions and antics of literary tricksters is not blindly naive about people's claims to 
possess supernatural abilities in real life. Hearing and reading about the presence of the 
supernatural in tales is one thing; believing it about specific individuals is another issue 
entirely. Even when Native Americans believe it is possible for people to do "amazing"
natural-order-suspending actions, they are still astute enough to be clear that not everyone 
can do it.

Deloria, Jr. removes any doubts about the intellectual sophistication of Native 
American audiences' abilities to separate a belief system in operation within legends from 
the false claims of shyster shaman when he explains that authentic "medicine men, for the 
most part, performed their healings and predictions in front of large Indian audiences that 
were saying, show me long before Missouri adopted that slogan for itself” (The World 
xix). Native American audiences enter into the storytelling circle in possession of a body 
of spiritual belief, but they also have the cold-eyed, rationally intelligent clarity to apply 
evaluative measures to the actions and claims of their fellow human beings.

Trickster behavior is believable, understandable, and highly entertaining because, 
from within the Native American body of truth, tricksters execute what Native people 
believe to be possible. Whereas, human beings claiming to have supernatural and 
metaphysical abilities are scrutinized by the community, which subjects them to vigorous 
and rigorous "show me" measures of disbelief, Trickster has total social permission to use 
an entire arsenal of metaphysical and supernatural actions to twist and turn the world into 
any shape he wants. This complex understanding of an indigenous belief system about 
how the world works clarifies what Native American legends and authors such as 
Schoolcraft in Mishosha are showing us.
One of the reasons trickster tales have continued to be a prolific and enduring literary model of social and intellectual engagement, spanning thousands of years and especially touching on major aspects of the uglier sides of the human condition, is because they serve as linguistic inquisitors of oppression. Interrogating oppression is no easy task; even under ideal circumstances, the language for liberation and confrontation becomes acutely important. Finding ways to tell oppressors about their behavioral transgressions is a sensitive linguistic tap dance. The process is fraught with physical or emotional danger. Brutal honesty is not necessarily the best policy for people to take if the goal is to inform oppressors but at the same time preserve life or social ties to the community. If, after people confront oppression, they cannot relocate or escape physical or social retribution, then trickster storytelling employs time-honored categories of linguistic subtlety. Trickster tales use allegory, irony, characterization, personification, and allusion; and thus, they become battle axes for justice. The hallmark of Native American trickster tales is that they grapple and wrestle with ways to make the dictates of community work by highlighting the ways in which cultural structures are not working. Stories and storytellers, past and present, act as pathways for discovering ways to fix what is socially broken, instead of being strategies for fomenting social malcontent. They do socially internal service and function as a communal tie that binds, rather than being a divisive force. Their intentions are to upend injustice, not to end social construction as the community knows it; the tales, although rife with chaos, paradoxically affirm the role of internal community.
Chapter 2 Notes


6 Genesis 1:26: “God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”


8 Vine Deloria, Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 137.


10 Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red*, 70.

11 Monroe E. Price, *Law and the American Indian: Readings, Notes and Cases* (New York: Bobbs -Merrill, 1973) There are “jurisdictional statues (1154 and 1156) that refer to Indian Country, and many Congressional and judicial attempts to define it. The current definition enacted in 1948 means a) all land within the limits of any Indian reservation..., b) all dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States..., and c) all Indian allotments...” (32).


19 See Albert White Hat and Duane Hollow Horn Bear, *Reading and Writing the Lakota Language: Lakota Iyapi Un Wowapi Nahan Yawapi*, (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 2006).

20 Sinte Gleska University, Rosebud Reservation, Mission, South Dakota, offers an extensive Lakota Studies curriculum: *Lakota History and Culture, Lakota Language, Traditional Lakota Arts, Oratory and Creative Writing*.

21 Duane Hollow Horn Bear is an enrolled member of the Lakota Nation and professor of Lakota Language, History, and Culture at Sinte Gleska University, located on the Rosebud Reservation in Mission, South Dakota. He is the direct descendant of Chief Hollow Horn Bear (1850 - 1913). I traveled to Rosebud and Sinte Gleska University in June 2009.

22 Ione Quigley is an enrolled member of the Lakota Nation and Chair of the Lakota Studies Department at Sinte Gleska University. Quigley teaches *Lakota History and Culture*. I traveled to Rosebud and visited with and interviewed Quigley in June 2009.

23 Quigley is engaged in scientific studies as part of the Traditional Botany Project at Sinte Gleska and has helped to identify and is in the process of collecting over 250 medicinal herbs and plants growing on Rosebud, using methods that include interviewing Lakota elders who tell her the history and stories of the indigenous plants to the region. Quigley presented this line of research at the *United States Geological Survey* conference held in Las Vegas, Nevada, December 10, 2007.


27 Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 70.


30 Page, *In the Hands*, 3.


AIRFA pertains to the religious rights of American Indians, Native Hawaiians, Aleuts, and Intuits (Eskimos).


Armstrong, Land Speaking, 183.


Noreen Lape, West of the Border, 64.


Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in union with the Messiah Jesus our Lord,” a dictum which ameliorates condemnation and the application of the death penalty for sinful acts with the promising accommodation of the “free gift” of redemption if transgressors accept Christianity, and its tenets, as their moral pathway.

*Everyman* is a late 15th C. Christian morality play that takes a Christian character nearing death through the process of contrition, penance, and redemption for his sins, although he has spent a lifetime in pursuit of material acquisitions and not spiritual concerns.

An act by a priest that absolves Christian believers of their sins.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” *King James Version*, 2 Corinthians, 5:10.


Early Jesuit missionaries to Indian Country, especially in the Canadian regions, were called “Black Robes.” This moniker is due to the long black clerical robes the Jesuits wore upon meeting and while ministering to the people.


*American Indian Myths and Legends*, XV.


In June 2009, I was invited to retell *Coyote, Iktome, and the Rock* to twenty Lakota children attending the Rosebud Reservation's St. Francis Indian School's vacation summer school program. Several children knew the story intimately. When I purposely paused in spaces throughout the story for audience participatory input, the children correctly called out the expected dialogue and behaviors of prime characters in the story. They proved that Trickster and storytelling still lives in Indian Country.

Wasichu (wasi’chu) is a Lakota word for a non-Native person. In the context of this story, it means a “white person.” It can be used in the singular, plural, as a noun or adjective. It can also refer to the English language. The term is not meant to flatter and it’s use has spread to places outside of Lakota lands.


Gunn Allen, *Sacred Hoop*, 5.


Vine Deloria, Jr., *The World We Used to Live In*, xix.

For perspectives on pow wow MCs, see Daniel Gello, "Pow Wow Patter: Indian Emcee Discourse on Power and Identity," *Journal of American Folklore*, 112:443 (Winter 1999): 40 - 57. Commenting on the current role of pow wow emcees, who deliver much of the general public’s modern consumption of oral native humor, Gello points out that Native American "public speakers are still seen as having strong influence and a responsibility for shaping social life correctly" (43).
CHAPTER 3
ZITKALA-SA’S LITERARY RENDITIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL TRICKSTER TALES FOR POST-CONTACT READERS

Under an open sky, nestled close to the earth, the old Dakota story-tellers have told me these legends. In both Dakotas, North and South, I have often listened to the same story told over again by a new story-teller. Zitkala-Sa, *Old Indian Legends*

History tells us that it was from the English and the Spanish our government inherited its legal victims, the American Indians, whom to this day we hold as wards and not as citizens of their own freedom loving land. Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*

Zitkala-Sa was only twenty-four years old when *Old Indian Legends* was published as a book in 1901, representing a Dakota folklore preservationist project she had undertaken. In 1921 when her autobiographical narratives, essays, and short stories collection *American Indian Stories* was published, Zitkala-Sa was still younger at forty-four than the honorific “Grandmother” designation commonly given to native women of more advanced years. As she watched Dakota storytelling and cultural traditions transform and begin to disappear around the Seven Council Fires of the Great Sioux Nation during post-Contact, she made the decision to take on the traditional role of native storytelling grandmothers “who shoulder the task of maintaining traditions and retelling the old stories—not simply as memories from the past, but as living elements in the contemporary American Indian experience” (Penman 4).1 Zitkala-Sa recognized that even by 1901 and certainly by 1921, the Dakota World was no longer solely the domain of “Stone-Boy” who dwelled and “frolic[ked] about” in “level lands where grow the wild prairie flowers” (*AIS*, “The Great Spirit” 102). So, Zitkala-Sa saw the cultural literary work that needed to be accomplished; and, she “shoulder[ed] the storytelling “task” of the elders. She wrote *Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories* to “transplant the
native spirit of [Dakota] tales—root and all—into the English language, since America in the last few centuries has acquired a second tongue” (OIL, vi).

Zitkala-Sa’s early Native American written trickster legends and personal reflections on the difficulties Native American people had coping with the European impact upon the culture are an important resource for the preservation of the culture and history of North America's Indigenous People. They are also invaluable for illuminating the difficulties inherent with early Indigenous and European contact, the basis for many of the choices Zitkala-Sa makes in her texts in order to interrogate this complex relationship.

*Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories* serve to preserve and transmit in print the pre-text literary tradition that was swiftly fading under the physical and cultural onslaught of European conquest and settlement. In a complex web of blending traditional tales with embedded and coded messages of modern conquest and contact concerns, Zitkala-Sa also uses both texts as a mode of critique. In *Old Indian Legends*, she uses the trickster narrative tradition to tell the tale of European behavior in Indian Country, its consequences for Native people, and of her and the Lakota people's coping and responses to it. Like the legends, the autobiographical and fictional selections in *American Indian Stories* serve to preserve as well as instruct and critique, making them multi-purpose and multi-layered linguistic and rhetorical masterpieces. While there had been scores of oral protests by Native Americans against European conquest, doctrines, policies, and domination, few Native American voices were in print. Zitkala-Sa is the first Native American woman to be published in American mass distribution, multicultural-voiced forums. Through "the very act of engaging tradition—like storytelling, for instance—
[Zitkala-Sa] keeps the past alive, [for] it is the bedrock of life in [Native American] tribal communit[ies]” (Beardsley 102). 4

Zitkala-Sa’s printed texts are important because they provide “the tenacity of tradition” as a source for cultural and literary insights (Beardsley 102). Even though they are not transmitted strictly through the oral tradition, her written legends reflect the fundamental belief systems, needs, and expressions of Lakota culture. While simultaneously transcribing the stories into print, a medium that requires by its very nature the use of imagination, the mind's eye, to “see” the activity before you even write it, she is able to include the mystical and mythical material of the original stories. One example of when Zitkala-Sa writes from within the mystical sphere of Lakota reference, is in “Iktomi and the Coyote,” when Iktomi must withdraw a dance-song from his “bundle of mystery songs,” even “hopping and dancing about at an imaginary dance and feast” of his own, before he can eat his prey (41). The texts draw heavily upon magical and mystical references in order to convey cultural meaning. When describing how magic or the supernatural fit into oral traditions, Vansina points out that communication through these mediums “is perceived as communication from the supernatural to the living...” a theory that can be comfortably applied to the storytelling activity (7).

The problem researchers have is to find ways to access and understand the cultural complexities within Native America's trickster storytelling system, moved to print. Print is the medium which Zitkala-Sa employs to uncover and highlight the challenges Native Americans faced in everyday life both before Europeans came and after Indigenous people encountered changes to Indian Country. Zitkala-Sa's writing is important because, among other functions, "her essays constitute a text that brings into
view the patriarchal imperialism of a developmental model that values only individuation through separation and restricts even this limited form of development to those in power..." (Fetterly and Pryse 376). Like a Native American Trickster, Zitkala-Sa re-shapes the Oral Tradition into a blunt force object and bludgeons her readers with Native American Truth, delivered in the very language, that in the hands of Euro-Americans, "created a fallen, brutal world where language is often used as a means of aggression" against her people (Cutter 38). Cutter asks researchers to consider the question: "[W]hy should we expect Zitkala-Sa's writing to conform to canonical models of autobiography? As a Native American writer forced to speak and write in the language of the oppressor, why should we expect her writing to legitimate the very institutions (the English language, writing, culture, and 'civilization') which have suppressed her?" (Cutter 31). Yes, why indeed? Due to the issues of conquest, resistance, accommodation, transformation, and sites of triumphant transcendence, interpreting Zitkala-Sa's work is a delicate and complex affair. By combining narrative and "fictional" autobiography, oral and print mediums, and mixing deadly serious themes with the absurdity and seeming triviality of talking animals, she changes the Euro-deceiver’s cruel joke back on himself, and slips the tethered yoke of native oppression. She seizes "a new tongue" and competently and boldly wags it at her oppressor, but her new tongue is so culturally grounded that it "[does] not denote a rejection of Dakota values" (Spack 43).

The literary, critical, and theoretical tools modern researchers have learned and employ are useful, but also limited when they are the sole methodologies applied to trickster texts, such as Zitkala-Sa's. Without in-depth insights into the cultural coding embedded in trickster legends, readers can understand some of the legends' and stories'
intentions, but not all. The reason for this is because the meaning in the texts was originally transmitted orally, through voice and physical movement. Therefore, no matter what medium of transmission researchers are considering, since the stories and voices are tied to indigenous life, specifically Zitkala-Sa's Lakota references, and generally North American Native American traditions, much of the trickster behavioral traits and their meaning are culture-specific. Gerald Vizenor laments that "the fragments of songs and oral stories published in anthologies of tribal literatures seldom have anything in common [with the original versions] but the [use of] the language of dominance." To access a fuller meaning, it is necessary to modify a non-indigenous cultural lens to accommodate aspects of a different cultural and historical perspective. By choosing to publish her writing for a multiracial and multicultural reading audience, Zitkala-Sa likely must have thought that her pieces offered the opportunity for readers to access the meaning in her texts, if readers would but try. This kind of analysis applied to Zitkala-Sa's writing offers an opportunity to consider Richard Drinnon’s contemplations on how to achieve a "transhistorical harmony" between the oral tradition, Zitkala-Sa's text transmission and preservation of Lakota traditions, and print-culture's "monument of books:"

“As a civilization we remain in need of revisionistic appendices to our monuments [of books]. It ought to be the duty of the revisionist historian to create out of the old, worn materials a more meaningful sequence, one which would not only illuminate the past of which it speaks but would also point toward a future it would influence. The only way [these historians] could achieve such transhistorical harmony would be by adopting a view of existence so broad and so fundamental to the species that it would be literally timeless, and even in a sense ahistorical. Here is a paradox (which we should remember is a seeming contradiction containing a truth): the way the revising of Indian-white history may become truly significant is by a conscious abandonment of our Western view of life and human history. In order to understand Indians and the complexities of our mutual history, we shall have to attempt the strategic adoption of an aboriginal view of life.” (116 – 117)
One of the best tools researchers can employ is using fuller narrative writing techniques that will allow Zitkala-Sa's voice to speak more clearly from "an aboriginal view of life" printed in English. Adjusting our literary critical techniques to encompass stronger elements of narration when analyzing Zitkala-Sa's works will allow what Calvin Martin similarly describes as an "Indian reality or an Indian thoughtworld” to emerge from her texts. Martin outlines the problem of using non-Native approaches to analyzing the literary or artistic product of Native American “thoughtworlds," a view which appropriately applies to examining *Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories*:

One begins by cultivating an appreciation for the metaphysics of the Native American lifeway. The first principle is that these people traditionally lived in a world dramatically different from the one we perceive, products as we are of the Judeo-Christian, rationalistic, empirical, scientific tradition. The Indian was a participant-observer of Nature, whereas we in the Western cultural tradition tend to be voyeurs. We may listen to Nature but we cannot make out what it says. (17)

The Western approach to critically analyzing the component parts of a trickster legend or story, by breaking it down into minute pieces, carving it up until the piece is no longer recognizable as a mode and force for transmitting the wisdom and culture of indigenous people, is not the most optimal process for understanding Zitkala-Sa's writing. If researchers fail to use culturally inclusive methodologies, they will be left with a singularly sterile “thoughtworld” analysis from them. What is the point of that? If the idea is to understand what is in Zitkala-Sa's trickster tales, then researchers have to "hear" them from an indigenous cultural point of view as well as employing more structurally critical methodologies, in order to understand them.
Trickster’s Help Is Needed

A long century of dishonor followed this inheritance of somebody’s loot. Now the time is at hand when the American Indian shall have his day in court… Zitkala-Sa

Before going into more detail about the Trickster, a short review of the historical background of the Native American situation will help to situate Zitkala-Sa’s writings and their contexts.

In 1876, the year of Zitkala-Sa’s birth on the Great Sioux Reservation, later designated the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Lakota people were engaged in major armed struggles with the US Army to preserve Lakota sovereignty and protect their hunting grounds from European incursion. Two battles of note were the Battles of the Rosebud and Little Big Horn. In December of 1890, when she was fourteen and had returned to the reservation from White’s Manual Institute boarding school in Indiana, Thathanjka Iotake or Chief Sitting Bull, the principal chief of the Lakota Nation, was shot dead, while trying to escape capture by a tribal police squad. During that same month, his successor, Si Tanka, Spotted Elk or Chief Big Foot was killed at the Massacre at Wounded Knee. In addition, 300 Lakota men, women, and children were also killed by the soldiers.

Even a hundred years earlier, in 1788, when the Northwest Territory west of the Mississippi was supposed to be protected Native American land, Henry Knox protested to the Continental Congress concerning “white inhabitants’ unprovoked and direct outrages” against indigenous nations (Knox 11). Knox termed the behaviors “enormities that have risen at length to such a height as to amount to an actual although informal war of said white inhabitants against [them]” (Knox 11). Concerned white voices, such as Knox’s, were ignored by the governing sphere of the United States, and
conquest behavior continued towards the indigenous nations of the western territory. Understandably, Lakota anger, frustration, distrust, and disgust were common sentiments towards white soldiers and settlers, feelings which were often voiced in the speeches of the chiefs (Vanderworth). Once Native American writers were given an audience, such as with Zitkala-Sa's "America's Indian Problem," their commentary put a long-term perspective on the sense of betrayal and frustration Native Americans felt. She points out, bitterly, that "the hospitality of the American aborigine, it is told, saved the early settlers from starvation during the first bleak winters" [and] "in commemoration of having been so well received, Newport erected 'a cross as a sign of English dominion'" (185). She is likely referring to such European colonizing attempts as those that resulted in the dire initial circumstances of the Jamestown settlers, America's first English settlement, founded May 14, 1607 in the Virginia colony. The settlers arrived ill-equipped, unskilled, and inadequately suited to the manual labor required to survive and to compound the issues, they selected an environmentally inhospitable location, Jamestown Island, to set up a living space. The results were that the settlers spent the winter of 1609 - 1610 starving to death (154 of 214 died) until their supply ship arrived from England.

In 1620 when the Pilgrims later landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts, Native people, such as Tisquantum ("Squanto" to the English), were sent by Chief Massasoit of the Wamponoags to the Pilgrims to help the settlers survive, preventing another Jamestown "starving time." The largest Native nations in the Rhode Island region were Narragansett, Nipmuck, Pequots, and Wampanoag. Early Native and European relationships were difficult but not usually bloody. But tensions flared with the increased
European land acquisitions and persecution tactics against the Indians. The major violent interaction between the parties was King Philip's War (1675-1676), led by Chief Metacomet of the Wampanoags, called "King Philip" by the settlers. General Josiah Winslow, leading a colonial militia, destroyed Narragansett villages and Captain Benjamin Church tracked down and killed Metacomet. It is with this early historical and cultural cross-to-bear that Native American voices, such as Zitkala-Sa's, were raised in defensive testimony or protest. She asks readers:

Do you know what your [her emphasis] Bureau of Indian Affairs, in Washington, D.C., really is? How it is organized and how it deals with wards of the nation? This is our first study. Let us be informed of facts and then we may formulate our opinions. (AIS 187)

However, studies that favorably examined the conditions of Native Americans were too often marginalized from mainstream outlets, discounted altogether, or inadequate against the oppressive shadow of the "cross" of the march of Manifest Destiny. 24

Beginning in 1889, many Lakota people were frustrated with the ramifications of mainstream America's westward movement. They embraced the Spirit Dance ceremony which was initiated by a Paiute shaman named Wovaka. During an eclipse of the sun, Wovaka had a vision in which he saw the second coming of Jesus Christ and also warned native people about the evils of the presence of white men. Converts to the belief system danced to usher in the new era of the return to Indian lives of sovereignty over the earth. Native Americans called it the "Spirit Dance" or "Dance in a Circle." Whites translated the terms to “Ghost Dance.”

The Spirit Dance belief system preached non-violence, universal love, and a spirit of cooperation with rival nations and, for some believers—but not all—whites. But,
a most attractive feature to its adherents was also the promise that the Spirit Dance practices, that whites placed highly under suspicion, would purge the presence of white people from indigenous lands and restore the land and culture back to indigenous control. This period gave rise to government and missionary efforts to assimilate Indians into Euro-American traditions which prompted many Native Americans to forge stronger indigenous ties and identities. In spite of the efforts of Christian missionaries and government officials, “American Indians did not disappear. To the contrary, during this period an identity that united all American Indian peoples became increasingly possible and salient” (Smoak 153).  

Storytellers like Zitkala-Sa, after acquiring English language skills, moved to preserve Lakota culture in print. Her writing reflects Native people's awareness of the "tricks," the duplicitous and destructive behaviors and practices whites were perpetrating as they swept through Lakota villages and across the American landscape. Zitkala-Sa's trickster legends and autobiographical stories testify to aspects of the European "shadow" that crossed and darkened the sunlight of Lakota culture. Her writings bear witness to the pro-active stances and actions Native Americans were taking to promote and preserve their culture. She participated in the [e]xpression of and control over [people’s] identity [that] has been a key form of resistance among subject peoples, and the great unintended consequences of the assimilation program [which] was a stronger American Indian identity” (Smoak153). By preserving Lakota traditions, using English, she effectively "employs the tactics of a trickster" and "restores hope by retelling the history of the Euro-American invasion from the American Indian's point of view” (Chiarello 1).
By 1900, when her first pieces of writing were published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Everyman*, and *Harper's* there had been a long march of offenses, disagreements, and armed struggles between Native Americans and the invading body of Europeans. Many laws had been enacted stripping Indigenous people of rights, land, and physical freedom, with speeches given on both sides concerning the desired disposition of the Native Americans. As evidenced by her comments and tone, Zitkala-Sa was aware that Europeans had also written multiple negative texts, executed numerous destructive policies, and broken all too many treaties. Vine Deloria, Jr.'s 1988 commentary echoes Zitkala-Sa's observations concerning what she terms "the long century of dishonor" which is likely indicative of Zitkala-Sa’s familiarity with Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1881 book *A Century of Dishonor*, an indictment of the federal government’s negative policies towards Native Americans (Zitkala-Sa, *Stories* 186). Deloria, Jr., reflects on the type of behavior of Europeans towards the Indians that troubles Zitkala-Sa and prompted Jackson to protest by noting that upon "looking back at the centuries of broken treaties, it is clear that the United States never intended to keep any of its promises" (Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died 48*). It is against this wider historical backdrop that her two books, *Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories*, took shape and form.

The Power in *Old Indian Legends*

"These legends are relics of our country's once virgin soil. If it be true that much lies 'in the eye of the beholder,' then the American aborigine as in any other race, sincerity of belief, though it were based upon mere optical illusion, demands a little respect. After all he seems at heart much like other peoples." Zitkala-Sa

As a beginning step on the road to understanding Zitkala-Sa's trickster viewpoint, it is important to appreciate that the texts in *Old Indian Legends* are storehouses of culture, narratives designed to create unity, coherence, cooperation, and understanding
between audience and storyteller. Vansina points out that, "no one in oral societies doubts that memories can be faithful repositories which contain the sum total of past human experience” (xi). 29 Old Indian Legends is culturally constructed to draw the audience into the indigenous trickster storytelling experience, with Zitkala-Sa serving the ancient role as guide, so the meanings of the stories swirl in unity within the heads and around the hearts of the teller and her audience. She is our Native American storyteller, but also draws us into a space around the fire and into her wigwam with her and her mother, as part of her agenda to critique and educate, and also assimilate and integrate.

The trickster storytelling experience is at once culturally instructive, spiritually soothing, and functional in preserving the continuity of tradition, and through Old Indian Legends, Zitkala-Sa furthers these aims. Her work transcends the barriers of the printed page, examples of Vansina’s “expression of experience,” while retaining much of the dynamism of the oral tradition. Locating the origins of the legends as the “relics of our country’s once virgin soil,” Zitkala-Sa ties them to the continuity of the Native belief in the sanctity of the Earth, a fundamental value found in many Native American folktales in the general body of oral literature (v). Connected to the natural world through bonds of love and tradition, Zitkala-Sa describes an aboriginal spiritual reality where “the personified elements and other spirits played in a vast world right around the center fire” of the native world during storytelling sessions (v).

What Zitkala-Sa means by “played...right around the center fire” is a start and asks us to enter into the world she sets up with her testimony. We are called to look deep into the fire of Native American oral tradition, into Zitkala-Sa's work, finding and affirming the insistence that visions, dreams, and hallucinations “were and are frequent”
in oral societies (Vansina 7). And, now that it is affirmed that the oral tradition originates and embodies the elements of the Native American world, we can examine Zitkala Sa’s legends with multidisciplinary methodological tools, including narrative structures to ensure that her native voice, and the aboriginal voice of her characters, is heard. Whether or not Zitkala-Sa means that the entities exist in visions, dreams, hallucinations, or through active imaginations, or all of these choices, she wants us to know that they do exist for her people. Zitkala-Sa's characters are important members of the community, and we know this because they have names (Voss, Douville, Little Soldier, and Twiss 228). The characters are called Iktomi, Muskrat, Coyote, Toad, Iya, and Badger, among others. And, in case readers do not understand the powerful relationship the entities around the fire have to the Lakota people, Zitkala-Sa lets us know that these “legendary folk for the young aborigine are not wholly fanciful creatures” (v).

Zitkala Sa, The Storyteller, invites indigenous supernatural creatures to the Book World, so that readers can learn the lessons of life and living from the creatures’ example. She describes wonderful sessions “under an open sky, nestling close to the earth, when the old Lakota story-tellers have told me these legends” (v). A researcher's job is to shift to Zitkala-Sa's world and consider that "the stories constitute, along with song and ceremony, a language of performance, participation, and experience that represent the cosmic order within which the world realizes its meaning” (Riddington 98)." But, be wary of being "unprepared as an outsider to understand the spirituality of conversations that create a world that is alive with storied voices" such as the ones that are contained in the trickster lore of Old Indian Legends (Riddington 98).
True comprehension of the legends occurs from within the totality of the storytelling experience Zitkala-Sa seeks to re-create in print; and even though her effort can be analyzed, it must be evaluated from within the cultural context of a Native American legend experience. Think of *Old Indian Legends* as narrative nuggets that Zitkala-Sa uses as a medium of exchange that allows us to look into the lives of Dakota people and their culture. The legends have culturally-specific internal characteristics she preserves, which she seeks to disseminate to a general reading public.

According to the cultural codes Zitkala-Sa sets up in the legends, the animal characters and all the rest of nature speak to us as humans, and humans speak as humans and as animals. If we permit ourselves to comprehend what the characters are saying to us, and stop trying to “conquer, subdue and tame” the “Indian thoughtworld,” we can appreciate the messages in the tricks (Martin 29). Through the legends, it is possible to live in a world where time is relative and the universal order of things is magical, and to occupy a space where the "power of the oral tradition and a story is much more than the story and the storyteller; it is an Indian reality” (Fixio 26). 31 *Old Indian Legends* is a storytelling space where, through Zitkala-Sa's recollection, re-creation, and voice, tricks occur, the supernatural is natural, cultural norms of acceptability are not usually non-Native ones, heroes and their actions are defined differently, and traveling life’s pathways leads to spaces and places that do not necessarily define success by non-Native models of behavior or achievement.

*Old Indian Legends* makes sense, when researchers read and "hear" them in a different way and are willing to learn a new language, and dive into a different cultural frame of reference. Maurice Boyd assisted the Kiowa community, as part of the Kiowa
Historical and Research Society, with compiling Kiowa stories and observes that "the listener or viewer who does not see or enter [Boyd's emphasis] into the story cannot feel the essence being imparted" (Boyd and Pauahty 35). 32 A more adequate and fuller understanding of *Old Indian Legends* offers modern scholars the opportunity to rectify missed literary opportunities. Researchers "can rightly use folktales to peer into the past of a people" because "they reflect not only a people's culture but the particular historical experience and situation that shape their preoccupations" (Jastrzembski 285). 33

Realizing that a European view of indigenous cultural traditions is not shared by Zitkala-Sa is a prerequisite to understanding how her legends and stories counter and present the cruel and inhuman tricks played on Native Americans prior to and during her era. Then, we can better understand what Zitkala-Sa is saying to us. Haunani-Kay Trask describes the problem of miscommunication between whites and indigenous cultural traditions when she writes that “when she was young [in Hawaii] the story of her people was told twice; once by her parents, then again by her school teachers” (Trask 172). 34 Zitkala-Sa’s work needs to be “twice-told,” from the Native oral tradition and from the print tradition and translated into a language both Native American and non-Native American researchers can appreciate and understand. Fetterley and Pryse, correctly, advocate "close reading" as an empathic positioning to Zitkala-Sa's texts because the method "puts readers a century later back in touch with [the] voice [she] wanted her readers then to hear" (376). 35
The Legends: The Work of Preservation and Cultural Critique

The old legends of America belong quite as much to the blue-eyed little patriot as to the black-haired aborigine. And when they are grown tall like the wise grown-ups may they not lack interest in a further study of Indian folklore, a study which so strongly suggests our near kinship with the rest of humanity and points a steady finger toward the great brotherhood of mankind, and by which one is so forcibly impressed with the possible earnestness of life as seen through the teepee door! Zitkala-Sa

*Old Indian Legends*, Iktome, or "Iktomi" as Zitkala-Sa refers to him, occupies a central trickster character role, understandably because "Coyote is the trickster par excellence for the largest number of American Indian cultures," a grouping which includes Lakota people (Swann and Krupat 431). Since Zitkala-Sa's literary purposes are to preserve indigenous cultural traditions and to bring readers the word about the catastrophic chaos western contact has wrought, it is fitting that she call upon and bring into service Indian Country's most powerful trickster to fulfill both purposes. A Native American Trickster "is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and is always duped himself" (Radin ix). Zitkala-Sa harnesses Trickster and trickster lore to explain how native people were "duped," and how they suffered at the hands of a "destroyer," and a "negator" of indigenous culture, but she also shows that she is powerful enough to "transform the enemy's language as she offers resistance [in her writing]" (Hollrah 34). She operates in *Legends* like the traditional Lakota Trickster and uses her tales to "destroy fundamental limitations in existence and help people emerge to new possibilities" (Jahner 58).

"Iktomi’s Blanket"

In “Iktomi’s Blanket,” in Zitkala-Sa’s *Old Indian Legends*, Iktomi, the coyote protagonist, sits “alone in his teepee cuddling the evil memory he bears for bad, bad gray wolves who have eaten all his nice fat ducks,” an allusion to the starvation situation on
Sioux reservations (19). By the 1879’s, the buffalo herds, the main source of food, shelter, and clothing for the Sioux, had been killed by white invaders to near extinction. Such “gray wolves” marksmen as William “Buffalo Bill Cody” gained fame from their prowess at killing buffalo in large scale numbers. Iktomi decided to “pray for food” and “fell upon...a huge rock.., Inyan, with outspread hands” (19). He called the rock, “Grandfather,” and “stroked and caressed the face of the great stone god,” in recognition of the age of the earth’s rock formations which translates to Zitkala-Sa’s signaling the reverence and respect with which Sioux people hold elders living in their midst (20).

She is also careful to explain that her people have a religious base and belief in a "Great Spirit,” and she reinforces the Lakota right to pray before Grandfather Rock to be heard. The right to worship as Lakota people wish must be respected, she indicates (20). She points out that "The all-powerful Great Spirit, who makes the trees and grass, can hear the voice of those who pray in many varied ways” (19). The phrase “many and varied ways” admonishes readers to open their minds to accepting the variety of religious traditions co-existing on American soil, and to allow Native Americans the right to pray as they see fit, which was not Wasichu law in Zitkala-Sa’s time. Nineteenth-century Spirit Dance believers and practitioners were being hunted down, persecuted, and barred from performing indigenous religious rituals. Freedom of religion and worship would not be a right for Native Americans until the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. 42

Iktomi turns to resources within nature for relief from starvation, noting that he is sitting in Inyan’s presence and witnessing “the prairie put on a snow-white blanket and then change for a green robe more than a thousand times” (20). With these words,
Zitkala-Sa clarifies the indigenous Lakota land claim; it is as old as the rocks, as consistent as the changing seasons and grounded in religious traditions. But, more importantly, Zitkala-Sa stakes a land claim based upon a Lakota presence within the space for “more than a thousand” years, obviously embedding the politically important message that her people significantly predate the arrival of the usurping imperialistic white Americans.

Iktomi’s prayers to the Great Spirit for food are answered; he comes upon a “freshly wounded deer” from which he “cut[s] large chunks of choice meat,” indicating that if white people leave Native Americans to their own historic devices, way of life, and belief system, Native Americans can provide for themselves (21). She is stating that her people have a religion, understand the environment, and are capable of weathering, and withstanding dire problems and figuring out solutions to them. However, as always with trickster tales, and their purpose for mirroring life and its circumstances, things are not always perfect. Iktomi, in a moment of profundity of purpose, gratitude, and generosity, gives Inya his blanket as a gift, and lopes off to roast the meat on a spit. Unfortunately, as he is preparing the meal, the weather turns very cold and he misses the warm blanket. He ungraciously, selfishly, short-sightedly, and “wrongly” takes the gift back from Inya, who has been merciful and kindly enough to see to Iktomi’s welfare when he was in need (23). By “seizing the half-worn blanket and pulling it off with a jerk,” Iktomi engages in negative trickster behavior which in the Indian World of trickster lore requires that a correlative price must be paid. When he returns back to his camping space, the deer meat is magically gone:
But where [is] the deer--the venison he had felt warm in his hands a moment ago? It [is] gone. Only the dry rib bones [lie] on the ground like giant fingers from an open grave. Iktomi [is] troubled. At length, stooping over the white dried bones, he [takes] hold of one and [shakes] it. The bones, loose in their sockets, rattle together at his touch. Iktomi let[s] go [of] his hold. He [springs] back amazed. And though he [wears] a blanket his teeth chatter more than ever. (24)

Supernatural experiences are part of the actions in the story, as they are in most trickster lore. In this instance, magic serves as a warning, a moral compass for Iktomi to follow, an opportunity for philosophical and ethical reflection concerning the immorality of stripping Inyan of the “half-worn blanket.” But, even though he is spooked by the “dried bones” of the mysteriously disappeared deer and experiencing an eerie grave-like premonition, Iktomi ignores the possible lessons he could have learned from the events because “his senses are blunted” (24). It is his moral “senses” that are dysfunctional for “instead of being grieved that he had taken back his blanket, he cries aloud, ‘Hin-hin-hin! If only I had eaten the venison before going for my blanket!’” (24). His cries herald his oblivion to the indigenous civics lesson he is supposed to absorb, so the tricks must continue until he reaches a state of harmonious social integration.

It is proof of the continuity of Lakota oral trickster traditions that in 1967, Jenny Leading Cloud told “Coyote, Iktome, and the Rock,” a Lakota tale we saw in chapter 1. Nearly a half-century later, Cloud is still telling the same basic Lakota trickster tale as Zitkala-Sa’s “Iktomi’s Blanket.” Cloud is commenting, as Zitkala-Sa did, on the negative impacts in Indian Country of post-contact as well as warning Lakota people not to adopt self-defeating social behavior patterns but to continue to hold the traditional ways dear.

Lost or rejected opportunities for moral enlightenment and reformation are not new themes in trickster lore. What is notable about Zitkala-sa’s trickster tale are the embedded cultural, social, religious, and political implications and assertions that are
framed directly against white American contact: the Lakota are the ancient indigenous people of the land; whites are the johnny-come-lately usurpers who have violently “jerked” the “half-worn blankets”—symbolizing the Lakotas’ lifeblood resources—off the backs of the rightful inhabitants. The Sioux in her stories have a deity they worship, The Great Spirit, and akin to the Christians’ god, their deity also hears their prayers, sees to their needs, and provides insight, comforts his people, and answers petitions that produce results. Moreover, the Sioux belief system recognizes and addresses moral transgressions, chastises offenders, and metes out punishment, not being “moved to heed selfish tears” when transgressors do not get the socially objectionable outcomes they seek (24). Zitkala-Sa highlights the complexities of Sioux life and culture in her time.

“Iktomi and the Muskrat”

In “Iktomi and the Muskrat,” in *Old Indian Legends*, the narrative demonstrates the twofold aspect of the trickster phenomenon, where the narrative incorporates the oppression and explains it to an audience in a way that readers can understand its impact on Native Americans. The story opens with Iktomi sitting “on the bare ground” among the “heap of smoldering ashes,” which symbolizes what is left of Sioux lands and many cultural traditions after the arrival of whites to Indian Country (27). As with the condition of Zitkala-Sa’s people after the battles on the plains, starvation, “ravenous hunger, irregular means, and frequent occasions of going without food” mark Iktomi’s existence (27). On one particular day, Iktomi manages to procure fish from the local lake, alluding to the abundance of food that had been available to Native people when they controlled the land, and he makes “a pot of boiled fish soup,” planning “to eat enough to last some time” (27. But, before Iktomi has the chance to eat a single bite, a disembodied
voice next to a local lake “start[s]” him, causing Iktomi to “almost choke on his soup” (27). The voice belongs to Muskrat and is sudden, unbidden, and unwelcome like the “choking” arrival of whites into Sioux life, which reduces Sioux physical and cultural traditions to “ashes.”

Muskrat and Iktomi exchange greetings as “friends, so Muskrat assumes and expects that Iktomi will offer him half his food (28). Even though Muskrat had to have known Iktomi is starving, he is still “ready” to take a large portion of Iktomi’s sustenance. It is true that according to “the custom of the plains people,” Iktomi is required to offer to “share [his] food,” so Muskrat’s expectations, on the surface, seem within traditional behavioral dictates (28). According to the standard trickster model, Iktomi would be outside the boundaries of acceptable indigenous social behavior if he refused to share his food with Muskrat. However, Zitkala-Sa introduces a twist on the normal trickster psychology. Definitely, under pre-Columbian conditions, when the Lakota World was not laid waste to “ashes,” Iktomi was under the moral obligation to “share,” so failing to share was the uncomplicated obvious social trickster tale faux pas. Zitkata-Sa states that sharing behavior was "the custom of the plains people," and is distinctly critiquing the selfish conquest profile of the invaders of indigenous lands. From within the indigenous model, Iktomi would have to suffer negative consequences for making Muskrat “feel awkward before such lack of hospitality” because causing someone social discomfort was unacceptable (28).

But, Zitkala-Sa does not adhere to the straightforward trickster script of Iktomi as villain and Muskrat as the hero or wronged party. Iktomi does not begin his existence as a well-fed glutton, or greedy, selfish trickster figure. No, he is starving, in a barely
subsistent state, and still manages to remain polite, even to a “sudden” stranger. Zitkala-Sa subverts the norm, placing Iktomi, in the role of the tricked, victimized by a more powerful and insidious trickster. Iktomi is faced with the decision to break Lakota social rules or die adhering to Plains traditions of hospitality, generosity, and sharing. She presents readers with a nineteenth-century Sioux World impossible-to-solve dilemma because either choice – give Muskrat the food and starve or refuse to give it and experience an incrementally painful step on the path towards cultural genocide – is untenable. Readers are forced to contemplate Iktomi’s position as having to make a difficult indigenous decision concerning participating in his own march towards experiencing a physical demise or suffering an agonizing social and moral death, since "Native American religions ritually embody the cosmological imperative to share” (Morrison 133). 45 Zitkala-Sa cleverly turns the contemplative trick back onto the Trickster by forcing readers to walk in Iktomi’s painful moccasins.

Eventually, Iktomi has to obey, even at the cost of betraying his moral base, one of nature’s prime human directives – to eat. Deriving sustenance, in the face of a homeland reduced to ashes by the unwelcome advancement of imperialistic strangers, supersedes his social instincts. To avoid giving up his food, Iktomi does institute a trick, but this time Zitkala-Sa imbues the traditional trickster with a sense of the tragic, casting him in the role of the wronged party reduced to employing subterfuge and deception against his higher order instincts in order to survive. Iktomi becomes the non-indigenous model of the solitary figure, isolated from his cultural traditions. He is the Lakota male forced to use wiles against an invader who is “hungry” for what Iktomi possesses, down to the last morsel of food the interloper can wring from a land in a state of scorched earth.
By publishing this tale in a public forum, Zitkala-Sa brings Iktomi and his tricks into service as the voice of political and social indigenous description and indignation, retooling, and expanding traditional Trickster’s reach to extend outside of solely Lakota cultural critique.

In a desperate attempt to keep his food, Iktomi “concocts a plot,” suggesting to Muskrat that they should “run a race to see who shall win the pot of fish” (29). But in an uncharacteristically generous gesture for a trickster, an entity usually bent upon triumph at all costs, including that of sacrificing his own life at times, Zitkala-Sa has Iktomi alter the scenario to disfavor his position. Iktomi “turns his gaze upon the unwelcome visitor” and says, “I shall carry a large stone on my back. That will slacken my usual speed, and the race will be a fair one” (29–30). What? Since when is a trickster interested in creating a “fair” situation and willing to suggest assuming a handicap? Zitkala-Sa presents readers with a Trickster with Honor, cementing the idea that Iktomi represents the honorable and wronged Lakota people who are engaging in diversions from traditional sharing and caring only because of near deathly circumstances. But, still, as evidenced by his sense of “fairness,” Lakota people cannot entirely stray from their intrinsic codes of honor and dictates of cultural norms. Iktomi is bound by Lakota tradition; so, therefore, even under attack, if Iktomi adheres to it, the culture lives. Zitkala-Sa's Iktomi, uncharacteristically for a Native American Trickster, refuses to function as Messmaker, engaging in "adventures" that "constitute metasocial commentary" on how not to behave within the confines of solely indigenous-to-indigenous interactions (Babcock and Fox, *Native American Trickster* 101). This Iktomi cannot allow us to "tolerate a margin of mess" against Lakota traditions as his
methodology for helping readers understand and appreciate indigenous culture (Babcock, *Tolerating Margin* 152). That is an insider approach to mess-making Zitkala-Sa is not prepared to extend; the reader has to know the internal codes of the way it is supposed to be in order to get "the joke." Zitkala-Sa shifts the mess-up role to Muskrat in order to make it clear that the offending trickster resides outside of Lakota culture. Muskrat functions as the trickster figure, interjecting himself as the "marginal intruder" into native space (Babcock, *Tolerating Margin* 155).

Muskrat protests the contest, the traditional way of settling the situation, even though Iktomi offers an advantage, saying, “My friend Ikto, I cannot run a race with you! I am not a swift runner and you are nimble as a deer. We shall not run any race together” (29). For even the most casual observer, Muskrat’s refusal to engage in the race highlights his insincerity but more importantly, Zitkala-Sa cements Muskrat’s outsider status. No indigenous male would refuse to enter into the Race. He would be clear that it represents far more than the opportunity to have Iktomi’s food, which is obviously all that Muskrat cares about. The race signals a mutual pact of honor among warriors, a shared opportunity to contest for food, with the understanding that the winner walks away with the satisfaction that, under the dire circumstances, he will allow the other man the “fair” chance to survive. The realities of the Race for Survival are brutal; one man lives – one man dies, but Iktomi is not only willing to preserve the basics of cultural tradition, he is willing to go overboard for a stranger, not realizing that Muskrat isn’t operating from the same moral dictates as he is.

Zitkala-Sa has Muskrat, the “unwelcome visitor,” Babcock-Abraham's "intruder," appeal to Iktomi’s sense of community, generosity, balance, and fairness, but, if readers
are paying attention, they realize that for the exchange to be fair, Muskrat has to enter into an indigenous frame of reference. But, that reality does not happen because, lo and behold, Muskrat doesn’t have the same moral, ethical, and philosophical outlook as Iktomi. Muskrat wants the unethical edge, the manipulative treaty-breaking type of deceptive psychological advantage Zitkala-Sa seeks to drive home concerning the nature of Indian/White relations. She employs and continues a trickster image of white American behavior towards Native American traditions that Jarold Ramsey says "dates back to the earliest Indian/Anglo contact in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and ranges in tonality from awe and wonder at these mysterious ways, impatient, potent newcomers, to perplexity over their strange ways, to anger and outrage, to sly or open contempt” (Ramsey 139). In “Iktomi and the Muskrat,” the definition of "sly contempt" for "Indian/Anglo contact" as a way to describe Zitkala-Sa's tone works just fine.

After much wrangling, Muskrat agrees to the race for Iktomi’s food, obviously ascertaining that he has the advantage since Iktomi would be laboring under the “large stone” of a handicapped situation (29). Iktomi is weighted down by the acceptance of concerns about behaving honorably, unselfishly, and righteously. Muskrat, being a cultural outsider, has no such moral burden to consider; and to add moral insult to cultural injury, he even “helps to lift the heavy stone upon Iktomi’s back before they part” to begin the race (30). Under the weight of having to contend with powerfully destructive outside cultural and moral forces, Iktomi never gets to actualize his usual capacity for being the quintessential traditional Native American trickster who functions as the role model for reprehensible and unrepentant law breaker of tradition. Rather, in
“Iktomi and the Muskrat,” Zitkala-Sa requires Iktomi to function as Law Keeper, carrying the Lakota cultural stone of tradition; even in the world of tricksters, desperate times call for desperate measures. For a while, Iktomi carries the stone of cultural norms, but he “finds the load a heavy one with perspiration hanging like beads on his brow and with his chest heaving hard and fast” (30). He learns that holding fast to tradition is extremely difficult when he is starving, scrounging for food, and faced with making decisions about who lives and who dies.

After Iktomi struggles for a time under the weight of his conscience and culture, he suddenly comprehends that Muskrat, without concern or compassion for Iktomi’s welfare, has outstripped him and has “gone so fast ahead that the disturbed grasses in his trail have quieted again” (30). Realizing that Muskrat, unlike him, is selfish and only out to procure the food resources at any cost, Iktomi is forced to make alterations in his cultural code and “drop the heavy stone” of tradition and “run swiftly towards the goal” of survival (31). But, when Iktomi finally takes the measure of the “unwelcome stranger” and realizes that Muskrat is morally shriveled and socially bankrupt, it is too late to compensate for this knowledge by making adjustments to his game plan. Belatedly, Iktomi discovers that Muskrat lets him believe that the race’s contractual agreement is as Iktomi thinks – a land race between the two males. However, unbeknownst to Iktomi, Muskrat has no intentions of allowing the race to be a “fair” contest. When considering the dynamics at play out between Zitkala-Sa’s Iktomi and Muskrat, one cannot help but notice that she has crafted a morality tale. Zitkala-Sa is asking readers to contemplate the troublesome unjust issues surrounding Indigenous and European treaties, the morally questionable European deployment of guns versus Indigenous strategies of hand-to-hand
combat use of knives, clubs, bows, and arrows, and European battle tactics that include starvation and scorched earth methods.

Zitkala-Sa is using Iktomi’s plight to illustrate a parallel to the Indigenous experience of the sudden, destructive, culturally incompatible, and confusing arrival of “strange” Europeans to Indian Country. Iktomi is so steeped in indigenous tradition that it is only when he is faced with the horrible reality of “the empty ground"..."no pot of boiled fish," and a "missing water-man," Muskrat, who has made off with his food, that it occurs to him that he is being duped (32). But the situation is so culturally confusing for Iktomi that he wrongly attributes his failure to a moral flaw on his part, tragically wailing, “Oh, if only I had shared my food like a real Dakota, I would not have lost it all!” (32). But, by this time in the story, Zitkala-Sa’s readers know the truth: Without the deathly circumstances under which Iktomi – the Lakota Man - had to live after Europeans came and laid the land to “ashes,” he could have and would have safely exercised Lakota cultural practices and generously shared his food. Iktomi’s lament that he is at fault is sad, but his lack of understanding about the clash of cultures he is dealing with is heartrending:

Why did I not know the Muskrat would run through the water? He swims faster than I could ever run! That is what he has done. He has laughed at me for carrying a weight on my back while he shot hither like an arrow! (32)

It is Iktomi, the Native American Trickster, who is tricked. He is duped, ridiculed, and “laughed at” by Muskrat for being deeply indigenous, a frame of reference which turns out to be a political liability for Iktomi when he is faced with Muskrat’s mores and lifestyle. Using nefarious means to win, such as deceptively withholding information and allowing Iktomi to take the moral high road while he trod the lower compass points of ethics, Muskrat ends up victorious. But, what is it that Zitkala-Sa wants readers to
understand about Muskrat’s victory and Iktomi’s defeat? It is that Muskrat materially outwits the traditional Native Trickster, but that Muskrat is not the moral victor because he turns out to be deceptive, cruel, selfish, and without remorse. She points out that there is a more vicious and immorally cunning American Trickster who historically entered and is currently operating in nineteenth century Indian Country. The New Trickster is a stranger who does not know the indigenous rules, or doesn’t care about the rules if he does know them, and takes profiteering advantage of the conquest situation he opportunistically sees, whether he directly created it or not. In Zitkala-Sa’s time, culture and custom were Lakota “stones” of disadvantage when indigenous people had to deal with the European “visitors” who had an overwhelming imperialist intent and weaponry to back it up, such as repeating rifles and Gatling guns.

When it is Muskrat’s turn to be merciful, unlike Iktomi, he does not give one second’s reflection concerning sharing a morsel of food to ensure Iktomi’s existence. At least Iktomi, “as [is] the custom of the plains people hum[s] an old dance song and gently beats on the edge of the pot with his buffalo-horn spoon” and does not take Muskrat’s request lightly, even devising a way to adopt Muskrat into the community’s social system (28). But, ungratefully, Muskrat chooses not to reciprocate Iktomi’s moral and social largesse. Iktomi begs Muskrat for food after the race, saying “My friend, give me a bone to gnaw!” but Muskrat cruelly only “lets fall a small sharp bone which drop[s] right into Iktomi’s throat” (33). Muskrat’s behavior is vicious, insensitive, and vindictive, for “Iktomi almost choke[s] to death before he [can] get [the bone] out” (33). And, now that Muskrat is in control of the food, he is neither compassionate nor forthcoming with any Trickster-to-Trickster options that would possibly allow Iktomi to have a sporting
opportunity at procuring a bite of food. By instituting starvation warfare tactics, Muskrat changes the rules of engagement from the indigenous position of Share and Everyone Lives to the invader's perspective of Be Selfish and Look Out for Only Number One.

Iktomi's traditional role as Mess-maker is to use the lessons of the negative, undesirable aspects of chaos in order to encourage order and morality to reign in the space. But, Muskrat does not adhere to the indigenous trickster modes of behavior and creates chaos for the sake of undermining social stability, not promoting it. Although Iktomi does not realize it, he is pre-destined to lose the race because he does not understand Muskrat's driving purpose, mistakenly assumes Muskrat is operating from the same moral imperative, and inaccurately misjudges the inequities of Muskrat's battle arsenal and the immoral tactics Muskrat is willing to employ to win. Zitkala-Sa's Warrior Tricksters are in mortal combat, but with the Muskrat side of the duo keeping the rules unfairly and safely hidden from Iktomi's scrutiny and view - until it is too late.

Muskrat, even twists the trickster knife deeper into Iktomi's pain and suffering by taunting him with the tenets of a moral system to which Muskrat obviously does not adhere. He jeers, "Next time, say to a visiting friend, 'Be seated beside me, my friend. Let me share with you my food.'" (33). Under ordinary trickster circumstances, Iktomi would get what was coming to him for not making the offer: a punishment to fit the social crime and eventually, redemption. However, he is out-maneuvered by a "visiting" trickster who is not the community member he appears to be. When Ikotomi enters into negotiations with Muskrat, Iktomi is culturally transparent, as a traditional Lakota and as a Trickster. Muskrat possesses deceptive powers that are operating on a different cultural plane from Indian Country’s highly adept indigenous trickster. Iktomi thinks he can “see”
Muskrat in “the deep water” of the lake, but Muskrat’s image is only a reflection (32). It is a deception coming from his perched location in “a great willow tree” above the water and out of the social parameters in which Iktomi is operating (33). Muskrat’s intentions and actions are impossible for the Lakota trickster to pin down, decipher, and understand; he isn’t where Iktomi thinks he is or should be, nor does he behave as Iktomi thinks he should. With "Iktomi and the Muskrat," Zitkala-Sa makes it clear that there is a Foreign Trickster loose in Indian Country that is disrupting and destroying Indigenous land and cultural space, and employing an unfair alien bag of tricks that has left Indigenous people in a state of starvation and Indian Country reduced to “ashes.” Her nineteenth-century narrative connects to early "depiction[s] of Anglos in Native American historical oral tradition" harking to "the [First] Contact Era" when "the depiction of whites in Indian storytelling...[was], not surprising, a form of imaginative coping with a new reality indeed full of drastic change and trouble” (Ramsey 140). 49

“The Coming of Wasichu”

The Brule Sioux have a "drastic change and trouble" trickster First Contact legend, retold by Leonard Crow Dog. 50 The tale is also appropriate for considering the devastating impact of the arrival of whites to Sioux country. It is called “The Coming of Wasichu” which tells in trickster terms of the coming of the white man, or “wasichu” in Sioux. 51 According to the legend, Iktome the Spider Man, the story’s Native trickster, travels from village to village informing the people of the arrival of the new man: “He is like me, Ikto, a trickster, a liar. He has two long legs with which he will run all over you” (491). It took the ancient trickster to recognize the new trickster and sound the warning, telling the people of the Indian World that "he's coming from the East whether you want
him or not" and that "once among them, everything would be changed" (493). The tale's admonitions to the people turned out to be prophetically very true, for one of the Sioux's daughters, Zitkala-Sa, was spiritually and physically uprooted from her people and land and “run all over by Wasichus” during her time in boarding school in Indiana. Iktome, the trickster figure, warns the people about the coming of a different trickster to their lands. Iktome tells the people:

Hu-kanska-ska, the White Spider man, the Daddy-Longlegs Man, the Long-White-Bone Man has long legs, and each of his long legs is a leg of knowledge, of wo-unse. This new man is not wise, but he is very clever. He has knowledge in his legs, and, greed. Wherever these legs step, they will make a track of lies, and wherever he looks, his look will be all lies. (492)

In an interesting reversal of roles, Iktome becomes the truth-teller instead of the trickster deceiver. His usual disruptive function is suspended during a time of external crisis and threat to the people. He becomes the figure of stability, balance, unity and harmony; Iktome functions as the comfortable, the known, the Sioux. He speaks out of a place found within the culture, so he is likely to be believed when he tells the people about the threat to their survival. He lies, but only to teach the people something for their own good. They are used to listening to Iktome and weighing his messages and actions. Now, when he speaks of another trickster, they will listen. If anyone can recognize the danger from another trickster, it is Iktome.

“İktomi and the Coyote”

In “İktomi and the Coyote,” Zitkala-Sa, again, explores what the arrival of Wasichu means to the Lakota. In the beginning, İktomi roams free “without following any worn footpath,” wearing “his fringed buckskins” in what is obviously a state of indigenous autonomy, peace, and tranquility in his homeland (37). He is secure in his
place on “the great plain” until he discovers “a sleek gray-faced prairie wolf fast asleep” in his midst (38). Zitkala-Sa is making the wolf an allegory for the “gray-faced” white man who has entered Indian Country, with wolfishly predatory behavior patterns that disrupt the order and civilized life of America's first inhabitants. As in “Iktomi and the Muskrat,” in “Iktomi and the Coyote,” Iktomi, the consummate Indigenous Trickster, cannot penetrate the deceptive veil of European intentions, represented by the Gray-faced Wolf Trickster who hides from detection “in the shadow of a bunch of grass” (38). This time, the outsider trickster feigns harmlessness through the imagery of the coyote being “a round ball of fur lying motionless under the sage grass” (38). Coyote actively engages Iktomi, but the wolf avoids contact for as long as he can, waiting to penetrate into indigenous lands as far as he can in order to prevail over the Native American figure. It is a story of European incursion, its disrespect for indigenous cultural traditions, commentary on the wide gulf between the two cultures, and how Europeans are not sharing in the responsibility for forging links.

When Iktomi comes upon the wolf for the first time, he employs cautious and intelligent measures to determine if the wolf is dangerous. Iktomi quietly inches up on the wolf, closely examines his eyes for twitching, and checks for any respiration, but “when not a breath or air stirred from [the wolf], Iktomi decides that Coyote is “dead” (39). Zitkala-Sa’s wants readers to note that it was with care and circumspection that Native Americans responded to the arrival of whites to Indian County, but that many "pale-faced" arrivals cloaked their intentions like “sleek gray-faced prairie wolves" hiding in the grasses of Indian Country (38). Once Iktomi concludes that the wolf is safe to engage, he rejoices and picks it up to take it home so he can savor the benefits it could offer.
Iktomi "swings wolf overhead across his shoulders" and has to carry him “far across the prairie” (39). It is an allusion to the fact that American Indians who assimilated had to accept and shoulder the mantle of European culture and would find the distance between Indigenous and European traditions to be a very long and arduous journey. Zitkala-Sa’s “gray-faced wolf” symbolizes the challenges of assimilating to white culture, of discovering that it comes with hidden difficulties, acute dangers, and back-breaking hard work in order to make the conversion. She makes it clear that, in her opinion, the cultural divide between Indigenous and European cultures is as vast and wide as a "prairie" size space of difference.

All the time Iktomi struggles with carrying the gray-faced wolf, he thinks the wolf is oblivious to the journey, analogous to whites being deadened to Native concerns. However, this is not the case, because the wolf is paying close, wide-awake attention to Iktomi’s movements, with “his long white teeth gleaming as he smile[s] and smile[s]” (39). Zitkala-Sa is couching delicate Indian-White relationship challenges in language that is coded in phrases and word choices, rather than overtly direct. Coyote’s predatory gleaming white teeth, smiling at the realization that he is gaining entry into Indian Country, symbolizes Zitkala-Sa’s ambivalence concerning the merits or pitfalls of Native Americans embracing European culture. She is emphasizing the differences between Indigenous and European culture and the propensity for whites to remain “aloof” from engaging Native people when she describes the coyote as “blinking blue winks” (40). She asks if readers had ever “seen a birdie blink a blue wink?” and explains it as “when a bird stands aloof watching your strange ways, a thick bluish white tissue slips quickly over his eyes and as quickly off again; so quick you think it was only a mysterious blue wink”
(40). The “blue wink” is a metaphor for whites “cold bird-manner” non-participatory stare at the Native World, representative of a state of white cultural disconnect Zitkala-Sa so objects to, continuously dissects, and often references in her later American Indian Stories (40). She has reservations about the deep cultural differences she sees and knows Natives and Whites must move beyond the cold “blinking blue winks” with which whites negatively view Native life. Through the story line of “Iktomi and Coyote,” Zitkala-Sa places the social burden to act and the necessity of effort needed to bridge the spaces leading towards sincerity and understanding as resting squarely in the European cultural camp.

When Iktomi carries Coyote into his “dwelling place” in Indian Country, Coyote initially “lays still,” but then he surreptitiously watches Iktomi through his eyelashes” (41). Iktomi prepares to eat the wolf by first “humming a dance-song” and “hopping and darting about at an imaginary dance and feast’” (40). Zitkala-Sa has Iktomi keep the ceremonies and traditions even though he is in the company of the gray-faced being. However, it is noteworthy that she mentions that those, like Iktomi, who want to hold the ceremonies are in so much danger if they do it that they have to hold an “imaginary dance and feast” to recreate the nature of old times (41). There is also the issue that not everyone, due to the stressors in Indian County, remembers the intricacies of the ceremonies, part and parcel of the devastation taking place on native land.

Once Iktomi and the wolf arrive in Iktomi’s homeland, they enter into a contest, akin to combat, concerning whether or not Iktomi can subdue the wolf long enough to vanquish and destroy him, which Zitkala-Sa symbolizes as Iktomi “eating” Coyote. Iktomi manages to throw the wolf into a fire, so Iktomi thinks he has subdued and killed
the blue-eyed predator, much as it is certain that Lakota warriors often believed that individual battles with whites had stopped the incursion into Sioux lands, or that conflicts might result in fair treaty settlements. But, Coyote “leap[s] out of the flames” leaving Iktomi “dumfounded” and believing he has seen “a spirit walk out of his fire” (42).

Undoubtedly, there were times when Sioux people were “dumfounded” by the devastating outcomes for them when the Cavalry in blue coats “walked out of the fires” of battle, to leave the “ashes” of Sioux culture behind them. At the same time Coyote avoids being consumed by the fire, he also “scatter[s] a shower of red coals upon Iktomi’s bare arms and shoulders” (42). Zitkala-Sa makes it clear that White and Lakota people entered into deadly struggles where both sides came away injured, but that the Lakota people’s losses were of such depth and breadth they caused Indigenous America's psychological and cultural “jaws to fall apart” with shock (42).

Once Coyote manages “to put out the fire on his fur,” and soothe his injuries, he “laugh[s] at Iktomi.” He gives Iktomi some advice, as one warring trickster to another, and says, “Another day, my friend, do not take too much for granted. Make sure the enemy is stone dead before you make a fire! Then off he ran so swiftly that his long bushy tail hung out in a straight line with his back” (42 – 43). It is the gray-faced trickster who advises Iktomi to operate according to the scorched earth battle adage of never leaving an enemy behind. Zitkala-Sa wants to emphasize that this is the battle tactic the Sioux are experiencing as they engage the “blue-eyed” and blue-coated “enemies” who have, inexorably and permanently, entered Lakota lands.
“Iya, the Camp-Eater”

In a story that appears toward the end of *Old Indian Legends*, Zitkala-Sa continues her literary and moral interrogation of America's historical imperialistic and violent behavior towards Native Americans and definitions of culture and community. “Iya, the Camp-Eater,” begins with a pastoral setting in which Native American “men [are] engaged in hunting,” a reference to times of freedom, plenty, and cultural autonomy; it is a time before reservations and forced cultural change. In sentiments that perfectly explain the kind of purposeful intent Zitkala-Sa has in “Iya, and the Camp-Eater,” Martha Cutter explains that Zitkala-Sa is "refusing to remain silent in the face of oppression..." and "[her] writing initiates a reconsideration of the oppressive nature of Euro-American discursive and cultural practices (39)."53

Hidden in the “tall grass” of Native Culture, the hunters encounter “the voice of a crying babe” (39). One perspective of interpretation is that early Europeans arrivals were like “babes” in the Native American space, needing care, guidance, and comfort, “crying” for assistance in what they viewed as the wilderness. Like Zitkala-Sa’s huntsmen who come upon the helpless babe and clasp it to their cultural breast, Native People rescued early Europeans only to have their camps consumed by the course and curse of Manifest Destiny. The hunters in the story take the helpless child to their “wise chief” who graciously and trustingly welcomes the baby into the bosom of the native community, adopting the child by “gently laying the black-eyed babe in his daughter’s lap,” and dubbing the child “his daughter’s little son” (132). This narrative scenario was certainly enacted in real life, for there are countless historical legacies documenting Native Americans assisting Europeans in their time of need.
However, not every Native American was convinced that the arrival of strange whites to Indian Country was a fortuitous occasion worthy of trust, open-armed acceptance, and a show of celebration. One concerned community member in “Iya and the Camp-Eater” is a “superstitious fellow, who fear[s] some bad spirit [is] hid[ing] in the small child to cheat them by and by” (132). Another man says he has “heard that bad spirits come as little children into a camp which they mean to destroy” (132). Of course, Zitkala-Sa is writing from historical evidence and close personal experience, describing an internal dialogue going on in Indian Country between supporters of assimilation or separation, those who lauded the opportunities afforded by western civilization versus those who were “suspicious” and “fearful” of its arrival. Some people, as with the chief who welcomes the baby, consider it “cowardly” to turn their backs on whites, for it is akin to “leaving a baby in the wild wood where prowl the hungry wolves” (133). Others disagreed with this view considering the arriving whites to be dangerous, possessing the negative intentions of “bad spirits” that have arrived in their midst. But in “Iya, the Camp-Eater,” the proponents of assimilation win; the community adopts the child, hosts dancing and feasting, and conducts a naming ceremony in order to bring the foundling into the culture. The "baby" is generously afforded all the best cultural norms Indian Country has to offer.

The chief accords the child the highest honor he can by adopting him into the Nation, bringing him intimately into his home, placing him into the loving arms of his daughter, making the child his “eldest son,” and naming him “Chaske.” This behavior in the narrative mirrors many of the native nations’ inclusive and generous actions towards early Europeans during the period of First Contact. However, the situation with Chaske's
adopter into the bosom of village life does not remain rosy for long. Before the celebratory “laughing voices of women, the singing in unison of the young men,” and the “dancing and drumming” have even barely faded into the “deep quiet that stole over the camp ground,” the chief’s daughter notices a strange anomaly involving the child (136). As she protectively and lovingly “watch[es] the babe in her lap,” she hears “the faint sound of murmuring people in the air,” sounds of “voices which [grow] larger and nearer” (136). This symbolizes the significant number of whites arriving in Sioux lands. The young woman heralds the arrival of the foreigners with her cry to the chief, “I hear the coming of some tribe. Hostile or friendly-I cannot tell” (136). This is a precognitive entry into the story where Zitkala-Sa has the daughter function as a seer foretelling the arrival of whites and their Eurocentric culture.

Although the chief adopts the baby boy, and gives him a native name, the daughter nurtures him, and he appears to look like a Native American, Chaske still causes suspicion because he is “so unlike other babes” (138). Zitkala-Sa reveals the fear and concerns many Native American people of her time had with trusting whites not to “devour” their culture, “trick” them “in the night” of false promises and worthless treaties, and “swallow the whole tribe with one hideous gulp” of genocidal violent actions (138). Once the chief and his daughter realize that they had made a terrible mistake thinking that Chaske is worthy of their love, respect, and inclusion, they warn the Sioux people they are in danger. Quietly, in the dead of night, “the people fold their wigwams and bundle their tent poles and slip away unheard by the sleeping Iya babe” (139). Once “the teepees were gone,”…”heaps of dead ashes” were the only sign that they had ever lived in their former space, before they had to flee (139). When Iya “awakes” to find the
village people gone, “he throws off his baby form in a hot rage,” sheds his innocent, friendly image, and adopts “his own ugly shape,” and gives chase after the people (140).

Iya locates the people “encamped beyond a river” but since he comes upon them in the daytime, the villagers are not afraid of him, make fun of his physical appearance, and “laugh” at him (140). Zitkala-Sa points out that there were Native American “brave ones who had been terror-struck the night before by the name ‘Iya’,,” but who were not afraid of him in the daytime when they could clearly see him for what he was. She writes of “warriors” who “slew the camp-eater” and so freed “a whole Indian tribe” which emerged from Iya’s grip once he was defeated. Zitkala-Sa ends the story of Iya’s demise with a satisfied Sioux ring in her voice, observing that once “Iya was killed, no more are the camp grounds in danger of being swallowed up in a single night time” (141).

In “Iya, the Camp-Eater, Zitkala-Sa offers a view that painfully examines an Indian perspective concerning the arrival of Europeans to Indian Country, one that depicts the meeting as fraught with European trickery and betrayal. Her legend refuses to embrace the militaristic braggadocio perspective of the glories of Blue Coat cavalry units sweeping through Indian Country to subdue "the natives," narratives which were quite common in newspapers and magazines prior to and in Zitkala Sa's time. The "danger" Zitkala-Sa heralds, that "whole Indian tribes" were experiencing from contact with Europeans, was not only from armed conflict and possible physical extermination of indigenous villages "in a single night time"; the danger also took the form of the negative impact on the Indigenous people due to the loss of culture and traditions.
“The Toad and the Boy”

“The Toad and the Boy” is an excellent narrative illustration of the horrible impact and consequences of the policy of taking native children from their families, homes, culture, and traditions and placing them into foreign circumstances, such as consignment to Indian boarding schools. The legend’s scene opens with domestic tranquility, native-style. Birds are flying over marshy lakes, Indian men are using bows and arrows for hunting, people are living in wigwams, and wives are roasting wild duck and making down pillows (119). Zitkala-Sa makes sure readers are aware that Native people are enjoying the hallmarks of civilized life and are self-sufficient, productive, and hard-working. Ironically, and with a reading of sarcasm not out of the question, she describes the same domestic type of setting white settlers would have understood, with only the wigwam structure being different from a tranquil log cabin scene.

The legends depict a young mother carrying out domestic tasks inside of her teepee home while caring for her “black-eyed baby boy” who is contentedly “cooing and laughing” (119). The peace, harmony, and contentment with Indian life are impossible to miss as Zitkala-Sa’s opening point. When it is time to procure more wood for the fire, the mother “girdle[s] her blanket about her waist,” gets a “short-handed ax,” and “hurrie[s] away toward the wooded ravine” (120). Zitkala-Sa makes a statement about the self-sufficiency of native women who are able to perform domestic activities, care for children, and provide the basic necessities for living.

When she writes that the young mother is “strong and [swings] an ax as skillfully as any man,” she is making a statement about Native women being equal in status with men (121). She is clear concerning the roles of men and women being different, but she
establishes that those roles are equal. This line would also have resonated with nineteenth
century white women still familiar with the hard-working life of the settler-wife who
would have had similar responsibilities. The image she projects is of the industrious
native person, contrary to the shiftless, lazy "Indian" stereotype, or arguing against the
“Indians don’t productively use the land” position whites made up and used for centuries
as justification for taking the land.

In addition, Zitkala-Sa gives a description of the functional and practical aspects
of traditional clothing. The woman’s “buckskin dress” provided “freedom” to “easily
carry a bundle of long willows on her back” (120). The importance of animals to
indigenous life is clear as ducks, buckskin cushions, porcupine quills, and sinew-threads
are introduced as basic parts of everyday life (119 – 120). Zitkala-Sa’s female protagonist
is married; she goes about her domestic day in tune with its traditions and rhythms, so she
knows when it is “almost time for the return of her husband” (120). The character is a
respectable, devoted homemaker, wife, and caring mother, a type Zitkala-Sa knows her
non-Native readers with middle and upper class sensibilities will respect. When the
Lakota mother returns home, she discovers that her son is gone. In solidarity, the village
women exclaim, “We will search with you,” and “the returning husbands joined in the
hunt for the missing child” (121). However, even with the combined efforts of the
community, the child is not found and it is sad to hear the mother wailing aloud for her
little son. The “wailing” of Native American mothers that Zitkala-Sa fictionalizes was
very real in her time with the advent of official federal government policies encouraging
educating Indians by removing Indian children from their homes.
On Oct 1 1889, Indian Commissioner Thomas T. Morgan wrote that:

Practically all the land in this vast region known as the United States, from ocean to ocean again, has now been organized into States or Territories. The Indian populations are surrounded everywhere by white populations, and are destined inevitably, at no distant day, either to be overpowered or to be assimilated into the national life. The Indians must conform to the white man’s ways, peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must. The tribal relations should be broken up, socialism destroyed, and the family and the autonomy of the individual substituted.  

In the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 21, 1887, J. D. C. Atkins argued for the use of Indian boarding schools and their exclusive use of English:

Of necessity that the Indians acquire the English language as rapidly as possible… and the main purpose of educating them is to enable them to read, write, and speak the English language. Whatever steps are necessary should be taken to place these children under proper educational influences. If under any circumstance, compulsory education is justifiable, it certainly is in this case.

Holding contrary ideas to the federal government about how Lakota life ought to operate, Zitkala-Sa writes about pleasant domestic scenes, from the indigenous point of view where native women have sole responsibilities for crucial areas of life and display power, dominance, intelligence, and physical strength. Her female characters, along with the other women of the village, are left alone for the time it takes “the returning husbands” to complete hunts (120). This means that axe-wielding native women, as strong as men, have to be prepared and capable of also fighting off intruders and engaging in warrior behavior, if necessary. The central female character "remember[s] there [are] no willow sticks for the fire” (120). Therefore, “she quickly girdle[s] her blanket tight about her waist, and with a short-handled ax slipped through her belt, she hurrie[s] away toward the wooded ravine. She [is] strong and swings an ax as skillfully as any man” (120).
The intruder Trickster, white American culture in the guise of "a big, ugly toad," is a cowardly thief that steals into the domestic and tranquil setting of Lakota life with cold malicious intent, creating chaos and havoc. In the legend, trickster attacks the most vulnerable and weakest member of Lakota society, a young child, and carts him off, wreaking social trauma and rendering psychological and emotional abuse, putting into fictional action the chilling factual words of America's official policy towards Indians.

Zitkala-Sa’s Trickster is, specifically, United States policies concerning American Indian education and the forced assimilation strategies that accompanied the codes. During her time, native children were often kidnapped from their homes and villages and put into boarding schools. Other native families, like that of Zitkala-Sa herself, were forced to place their children in the schools, resulting in grief-stricken parents and desperately lonely and broken-hearted children. The "old toad" of a trickster had the little boy and “a great desire to keep the stolen boy a while longer” than the “ten summers” she ha[s] him (124). But, this does not work out just the way the kidnapper plans, for the boy is touched inside by the sound of his mother’s “wailing human voice” as she searches for him (124).

Children trapped in the Indian Boarding School system did not always stay. Many of them ran away; some returned to their reservations, but some of them chose to set up independent lives of their own. In Boarding School Seasons, Brenda Child explains that there were some children for whom boarding school life was intolerable:
The explanations Native students occasionally gave for running away from boarding school illustrate the shortcomings of the Indian education system as it had developed by the early twentieth century. Isaac Plenty Hoops said he disliked the poor boarding school diet. Other children complained that they were mistreated by teachers, felt burdened by the workload, or were unhappy with the kind of work they were assigned at school. Some said they were too confined by the innumerable restrictions placed on them in boarding schools, where they also felt looked down upon as Indians. Homesickness was a persistent problem. When loneliness or tensions inevitably surfaced, the typical response of Indian students was to abandon school, usually for the security of family and tribe.  

Zitkala-Sa has several points she wants to make in “The Toad and the Boy” about the importance of indigenous family ties that bind, the cruelty of policies designed to destroy them, and that not all native people liked or supported those policies. At least one boarding school attendee, Zitkala-Sa, hated it and said so in her autobiography “School Days of an Indian Girl,” discussed later in this chapter.

Of course, as with most experiences, including Indian boarding school, there are always some individuals who have a differing view. David Wallace Adams in "Beyond Bleakness: The Brighter Side of Indian Boarding Schools, 1870 - 1940," touts the merits of the same boarding school experience Zitkala-Sa vilifies. He writes, "It is important to remember that although agents often resorted to force to fill school enrollment quotas, some Indian children came to boarding schools willingly" (Adams 36 - 37). Adams does not clarify how he reached the puzzling conclusion that Indian children "willingly" agreed to the idea of going to an Indian boarding school, given what we scientifically, legally, and ethically know about minors and informed consent. Zitkala-Sa's story, based on observation and experience, unpacks the trickster aspects, no matter whose idea was, of Indian children waking up in "the solitary wigwam" of a boarding school bed faced with the "ugly toad" of colonization (122).
Once the village realizes that the boy is beyond their reach, lost to them, the parents react caringly. The mother’s “wailing voice was heard from [his parent's] solitary wigwam” and the father’s voice was also singing a sad song which was so loud he could be heard from a far distance” (122). The genders behave equally, husband and wife are united in their efforts to find their son, continue to mourn his loss, and publicly and audibly grieve for the ties of family. Zitkala-Sa dispels the myth of the “savage Indian,” incapable of tender feeling and building and maintaining households.

The little boy confronts the toad after hearing the native mother’s heartbreaking wailing, asking her to “tell him what voice it was [he’d] heard which pleased [his] ears” (124). Zitkala-Sa uncovers the “ugly toad” of contact, conquest, forced assimilation, negative stereotypes, manipulative policies, and cultural genocide, metaphorically extended to boarding school. Adams goes on to justify his "brighter side" view of the captive experience by first offering a "disclaimer" that his treatise "is not a revisionist attempt to argue that boarding schools were a necessary or desirable development in the evolution of federal Indian policy or that most Indian youth looked upon their school years as an overall pleasant or positive experience" (Adams 36). Well, if the schools were not necessary, except to advance the brutally sadistic government agenda outlined by Indian Affairs officials early in the process, and most Indian youth, like Zitkala-Sa, did not enjoy or find value in the experience, then Adams's argumentative position begs serious questions about its merit.

Toad’s answer to the boy’s recognition of his ancestral and filial ties to his people is that she and her voice of European counter-culture “can please your ears and break your heart” (124). Of course, Zitkala-Sa is using sarcasm and irony with the toad’s
"heartbreaking" comment about having the same capacity to cause positive emotional stirrings towards or within Native Americans. The two cultural situations she is depicting are the exact opposite. She is unveiling the agony the "stolen" boy is experiencing as he recognizes his cultural ties to his community and the need to re-affirm his heritage. In his mother’s native voice he hears the call of his origins but realizes he is trapped in the “gruff, coarse voice” of a non-native existence (124). The Toad cried, “Hin-hin, doe skin! Hin-hin, Ermine, Ermine! Hin-hin, red blanket, with white border!” (125). Zitkala-Sa’s uses couched metaphor and coded messages to stand for the situation of the Lakota who are trying to practice traditional ways, but who are surrounded by white encroachment from all sides and trapped in the “red blanket, with white border[s]” of reservations and boarding schools. Zitkala-Sa's views in the tale contradict Adams's assertion that children in Indian boarding schools "find solace, promise, and even pleasure in an institutional setting constructed on cultural and political premises of more than dubious standing" (59). There is nothing pleasurable or redeeming about the child's fate in the hands of the Toad. Her intent is "dubious," her acts deplorable and immoral, and she demonstrates no remorse for her crimes. There is no bright side in “The Toad and the Boy.”

Toad attempts to retain and maintain the boy’s presence and loyalty and “[seeks] to please the boy’s ear with the names of valuable articles” (125). Zitkala-Sa points out that, the toad does not “know that the syllables of a Dakota’s cry are the names of loved ones gone” (125). She is snidely commenting on the materialistic conquest underpinnings of the European motivations she is encountering against the more community-based survival and preservation goals of indigenous ones. She is also interrogating the foundations of the belief common at the time that native people were ignorant “savages”
who didn’t have knowledge and needed to learn English and adopt a European cultural skill-set to survive. To the contrary, Zitkala-Sa writes that the Lakota woman’s voice was “pleasing” and that the toad, an outsider, “marvel[s]” at its sound, which, of course, is more a directive to readers than a reflection of the general reality of her time.

The toad also represents European speakers of English, such as the white teachers and missionaries Zitkala-sa encountered in boarding school. She personifies Toad, writing that when Toad speaks, she “shriek[s] in a torturing voice” (125). This comment is an interesting insight into Zitkala-Sa’s apparent discomfort with English. While she obviously harbors a discordant, torturous, and uneasy relationship between English and Siouxan, she has still become a master of English and is forced to employ it to convey delicate cultural nuances. She clearly favors Sioux as the preferred language, calling the native woman’s voice “the human voice” and the one that “stirs all [the boy’s] feelings!” (126). The indigenous voice is “the human voice,” and the toad voice is that of a beast; so, Zitkala-Sa is turning a major stereotype of the times on its ear. One of the first significant European claims of the period was that Native Americans were “savages” and lacked refinement and a respectable culture equal to Europeans. According to Zitkala-Sa's position in “The Toad and the Boy,” the "voice" of Europeans calls for the appropriation of the land, kidnapping of children, genocidal behavior, deceitful relationships, and the annihilation of Lakota culture. It is the indigenous "voice" that contains the resonance of civilized life and cultural refinement.

The boy was once within the womb of Lakota culture and traditions and wants to return to his origins when he realizes their beauty. The separation becomes unbearable. He questions why “[his] little brothers and sisters are all unlike [him],” an allegorical
reference to the kind of soul-searching and cultural discomfort many native youth underwent during and after the boarding school experience, chafing under the strange, new yoke of European traditions (126). One day, a Lakota man out hunting sees the boy, recognizes him as the missing child, and tells the parents his suspicions. When the parents see the young man, they rejoice and “caress their baby boy grown tall” (127). The alienated youth, as with some indigenous people separated by years of life in European culture, awakens to the loss of indigenous traditions, is able to reconnect with them, and, as Zitkala-Sa chooses to do in her life, grows recognizably "tall" wrapped within the Lakota cultural and political bosom. “The Toad and the Boy,” among other purposes, is a post-Contact trickster tale of stress, loss, and eventual indigenous repatriation. Zitkala-Sa's concerns with the advent of boarding schools, kidnapped children, and the "ugly toad" of European cultural encroachment are wrapped tightly in metaphor.

Zitkala-Sa's views, expressed in the opening in “The Toad and the Boy,” incorporate looking at the female and male in balance, forwarding concepts of time and space as being mutable as well as fixed, respecting the politically cautionary linguistic position of colonized people having to find a working relationship to and with the language of oppression while heeding the call for bold, revolutionary agency. Zitkala-Sa brings forth the conjoined voices of the men and women of ancient myth and legend with the more current nineteenth-century voice of their daughter, which provides her writing with the enhanced agency and literary power of a transformative indigenous world view. Zitkala-Sa’s legends “represent thousands of years of [North American peoples'] experience[s] in living on this continent and their customs and traditions” and are a written legacy of culture and communication, of adaptation as well as adoption to new
technologies of language and print to capture old ways (Deloria, *For this Land* 144). Her writing reflects the reality that “the particular and sometime peculiar ways [Native Americans] have of approaching problems, of living, and of protecting the lands, are not simply the clumsy adjustments of primitives but the seasoned responses of people who synthesized and summarized the best manner of adapting themselves to the world in which they lived” (Deloria, Jr., *For This Land* 144). 60

“The Badger and the Bear”

Zitkala-Sa often reflects in her narratives the fact that Native women, alongside the men, take up the banner of defending and preserving culture and explaining and protesting oppression, for as Annette James, Standing Rock Sioux, points out, “it is women who have formed the very core of indigenous resistance to genocide and colonization since the first moment of conflict between Indians and invaders” (Jaimes and Halsey 311). 61 Hazen-Hammond, a descendant of Abenaki people, shares a creation story from the Yakima people who believe that the origin of the site of wisdom and law rests within the feminine, one story place where we can broaden our understanding of the indigenous view. In "The Beginning of Wisdom and Law," the Yakima relate how:

Before people came, all mountains were women and when strife broke out among them, the world was thrust into chaos and turmoil until the affairs of the female settled into peace, giving birth to Wisdom and Law. The Yakima lay out the parameters for using one of the earliest American methodologies for ensuring social stability, suggesting finding the location of the indigenous view of truth, justice and the American Way through the path of the vital place of the feminine. (213 – 214) 62

As befitting an indigenous world view reflected in the tales, before the destructive “civilizing” influences of such altering influences as the boarding school system, male and female are balanced principles. It is very noticeable in *Old Indian Legends*, such as in
"The Badger and the Bear," that the female and male cohabit amicably and equally, whether in times of ease or under assault, giving the legends, among other ways of looking at them, a gendered voice. In the beginning of the legend, Zitkala-Sa reflects a Pre-Columbian world of masculine and feminine success because "father badger was a great hunter" and mother badger was very busy hanging “thin sliced meats upon long willow racks,” packing them into “a huge stiff envelope,” and keeping “baby badgers very chubby” (60). The badgers have a home full of domestic tranquility and plenty; all is balanced in the Indian World prior to the arrival of the frightening “heavy footfall" of a black bear stranger (61). Wreaking total domestic destruction and disruption, the bear upsets the badgers' external social and physical balance of things by using brute force to enter and take over their home, food, and hunting weapons. Bear flashes his formidable sharp teeth, and when asked by father badger to share food, refuses to do so after he has dispossessed the badgers of their possessions and livelihood. Forced out of their home with children in tow, the couple is forced to re-build near their "stolen house" with the father constructing a "small[er] round hut” (66). There, mother and father badger, resume their relationship. The interesting thing about the legend, besides its being an analogy to the arrival of the white man to Dakota Country and the abominable suffering that entailed, is that Zitkala-Sa is careful to demonstrate that the balanced bond between husband and wife did not disintegrate.

The legends are a part of the feminine force of Spider Woman’s web of reason, Yellow Woman’s corn silk of creation, Mountain Woman’s power of wisdom and law, and White Buffalo Woman’s pipe of power and healing, as well as the masculine shaping spirit of Old Man Coyote, the resourceful inventiveness of Stone Boy, and the
relentlessly masterful teaching of Coyote, Raven, and the many chaotic trickster cousins to Iktome inhabiting Indian Country. And even on the characters’ days of challenging social and cultural transition, experiences of loss and pain, and difficult days of learning through doing, reflected in time frames both pre- and post-Columbian, the triumph of wisdom, lessons learned for good or ill, come through the stories. If we listen with a fine-tuned ear to *Old Indian Legends*, we are able to hear culture and meaning broadcast on an indigenous wavelength. We can come closer to reaching “the independence of native imagination,” versus “translations of tribal literatures that are blurred perceptions that serve dominance” (Vizenor 8)  

*American Indian Stories*: Grasping Agency

"[H]owever tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it." Zitkala-Sa

In addition to using traditional forms of narrative in *Old Indian Legends* to inform and protest, Zitkala-Sa’s militant, more autobiographical voice rises from within *American Indian Stories*. Her autobiographical narratives describe, "for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it," the consequences of the armed violent assault against the Lakota people and the Europeans' cultural extermination tactics and practices (68). The pieces' perspective is more within today’s critical language paradigm of radically questioning the brutality of Indian boarding schools and the United States’ racist policy on Indian affairs. Much of Zitkala-Sa's language, stripped of the more conservative anthropomorphic animal-voiced narratives of *Legends*, comes screaming at readers, overtly challenging us to look unflinchingly at American history. She instructs us that "it was from the English and the Spanish our government inherited its legal victims,
the American Indians, whom to this day we hold as wards and not as citizens of their own freedom loving land” (186). Not content to allow us to miss in metaphor, simile, or allusion how she categorizes such Euro-American trickster behavior as immoral and reprehensible, she judges that "a long century of dishonor followed this inheritance of somebody's loot" (186). Of course, readers, then and now, know who the "somebody" is, and what "loot" was stolen. It is chillingly clear that Zitkala-Sa is angry, knows Native Americans have been duped, are trapped in a real-life trickster narrative with little hope of Euro-Americans seeing the error of their ways, without a lot of help, or if ever.

Optimistically, and with rhetoric that interestingly resounds a bit like the sentiments of the African American freedom struggle of the time, she argues that "the time is at hand when the American Indian shall have his day in court..." and "the stain upon America's fair name is to be removed, and the remnant of the Indian nation, suffering from malnutrition, is to number among the invited invisible guests at your [white Americans'] dinner tables" (186).

When considering just how radical Zitkala Sa’s voice in Stories was for her time, we must keep in mind that much of Wasichu Country was discussing and agreeing with the merits of General Sheridan’s 1868 comment: “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead,” quickly immortalized as and linguistically transformed to the American aphorism much bandied around at the time, and even much later in use into the late twentieth century, as, “The only good Indian is a dead Indian” (Brown, Bury My Heart 171). Zitkala Sa’s strident rhetoric and criticism of “paleface's” Indian policies and treatment was courageous and revolutionary for the late nineteenth century.
It is tempting to view *American Indian Stories* as an important collection that solely, as Dexter Fisher observes, “presents Zitkala-Sa’s pain and difficulty growing up Indian in a white man’s world” (Fisher vii). While this view is certainly correct, there is an added dimension to Zitkala-Sa’s voice, for she also enters into what Ruth Spack calls a complicated “intercultural exchange in which the object of observation takes on the role of observer and returns the gaze” (Spack 143). Zitkala-Sa succeeds at both of these objectives and more. She uses the stories to grab agency in order to twist and wrest herself from the passive role of victim of the “pain.” Laser-like, she wields the weapon of critical observation and reflective writing, leveraging the language of the oppressor right back towards the perpetrators of the theft of her lands and destruction of her people.

Zitkala-Sa seeks to educate as well as castigate. Patrice Hollrah notices that through her writing, Zitkala-Sa “empowers herself in a public way” (Hollrah 29). Her decision to publicize the state of Lakota life slings her personal experiences, educational training, historical knowledge, social observations, and participation in the political work of Indian sovereignty into public spaces, available for scrutiny and judgment.

Because Zitkala-Sa chooses to bare her Lakota soul in English and in print for inspection, the very nature of the media drives home "the catastrophic consequences of forced relinquishment of her language, and subsequent culture" (Kunce 73). Readers are able to "see" and "hear" the stories chronicling the "bitter" results of European conquest. Zitkala-Sa's public voice's protest contribution clarifies the truth in Judy Boyd's assertion that "Native peoples in the Americas have been resisting European and U.S. colonialisms for over five hundred years" (Boyd 86).
American Indian Stories addresses oppressive concerns about which Frantz Fanon so eloquently discusses in The Wretched of the Earth. Although the struggles Fanon writes about are with Euro-oppression that takes place in North Africa, his perspective on the kind of thinking that it takes to give oral and written voice to the oppressed is applicable to the struggle of voice inherent in Zitkala Sa’s work. Fanon comments that:

“It is not only necessary to fight for the liberty of your people. You must also teach that people once again, and first learn once again yourself, what is the full stature of a man [and a woman]; and this you must do for as long as the fight lasts. You must go back into history, that history of men [and women] damned by other men; and you must bring about and render possible the meeting of your people and other men [and women].” (293)

Zitkala-Sa mourns the brutal stripping and loss of American Indian culture and "teaches" all those who will listen concerning the situation, Native Americans and "other men" and women:

There were no more young braves in blankets and eagle plumes, nor Indian maids with prettily painted cheeks. They had gone three years to school in the East, and had become civilized. The young men wore the white man’s coat and trousers, with bright neckties. The girls wore tight muslin dresses, with ribbons at neck and waist. At these gatherings they talked English. (72)

“The Land of Red Apples”

In “The Land of Red Apples,” unlike her voice choices in Legends, Zitkala-Sa chooses autobiographical narrative to voice outrage, again, at the inhumane treatment she and other children received in boarding school, while also metaphorically relating that treatment to the “palefaces’” activities to exterminate Lakota people and culture from Lakota lands. As the object of "staring," as though she was the stranger in Lakota space, tricked out of access to traditional clothes, and shorn of her hair, she expresses that she felt “she’d lost her spirit,” feeling like “one of many little animals driven by a herder” (56). The stories she writes offer a way for Zitkala-Sa to return to Lakota traditions and to
stay in balance. They restore her to the visions, wisdom, and spirit of her ancestors, of the Lakota people's collective cultural truths, insight she desperately needs due to the historic shift in indigenous culture. The stories restore a link to the spiritual world; a link lost as she “seemed to hang in the heart of chaos, beyond touch or voice of human aid” (69). The Indian boarding school tried to strip her of her spirit, so she writes the stories to prove to herself, her people, and to white people that she was still a Yankton Lakota. As long as the stories live inside of her heart and she remembers them, she has possession of her soul. The Wasichu has not captured it from her.

Zitkala Sa’s narrative writing in *Stories* is not only rich in metaphor and flowing poetic poignancy, it is designed to draw the reader to consider the actions of nineteenth-century “paleface” America towards the Sioux as the worst kind of trickster behavior, without redeeming qualities or social value, - torture, brutality, injustice, and genocide. According to her testimony in “School Days,” from the outset, her heart “[sinks] deep, she [is] watched, her culture scorned, and she [is] the object of curiosity, [is] embarrassed and [is] reduced to tears” (48). The “glassy blue eyes” of European men fasten upon her, “noticing” and [being] attracted to the ”blankets”of Lakota lands. Zitkala Sa’s militant writing lets us know she “resent[s]” the intrusion of the “bold white faces” to Lakota lands and her Indian World view of events leaps from the pages. Telegraph poles “moan,” uprooted from their ancestral homes, stripped of their fleshly bark, and serving as ghostly markers, sentinels, and mourners to a Native child’s march into colonial captivity. As she rides the iron horse to White’s school, she sits watching each pole that goes by waiting to reach the last one, which bears witness to her torturous journey away from her people.
Zitkala-Sa uses the train system as a powerful metaphor for European contact. The iron horse of Lakota change "run[s] amuck" and hurls Zitkala-Sa and other native children like her, down the political and cultural track of destiny towards such soul-crushing sites as the Indian boarding school system. Zitkala-Sa's stories force readers to consider the disastrous direction in which her people's fate is going as a result of Euro-America's relentless insistence on land acquisition and social change. Once Zitkala-Sa is captured in the grips of the system, her pleas for mercy and freedom from the Destroyer’s grip are unheeded, falling on deaf white American ears. She writes that she is "frightened and insulted" by the strange behavior of "a rosy-cheeked paleface woman" who [is] tossing [her] high in midair" (50). During her earliest contacts with "paleface" actions, Zitkala-Sa is "wondering in which direction to escape" from the relentless and destructive engine of European physical and cultural encroachment (50).

“School Days of an Indian Girl”

In "The School Days of an Indian Girl," Zitkala-Sa writes that there is "no peace" to be had amid the cacophony of "harsh noises," "crashing" bells, and the "annoying clatter" of hard "shoes on bare floors," instead of lives spent walking with silent “soft moccasins” gliding over the earth, all symbols of her cultural and psychological stress (52). She struggles to regain her soul's and body's freedom which is trapped in a bedlam of confusion, but she is overwhelmed in the face of insurmountable odds, a helpless child at the mercy of the government's plans to take the land and exterminate or assimilate the Lakota people. She despairs that "though my spirit [tears] itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all [is] useless" (52). She concludes that the machine of European culture has corralled her, one of the most vulnerable members of the Lakota community, like “one of
many little animals driven by a herder" (56). Zitkala-Sa bemoans being stripped of Lakota self-esteem and identity support systems and ceremonies, all needed for girls and boys to hold their heads up among her people. Clearly, her reflections in Stories speak the truth of the conditions and serve as testimony for the voiceless body of native children locked in the abusive Indian school system, for "government controlled schools [of the time] became military in character, without tolerance and patience, whose primary goal was to humble the heathen and destroy every vestige of the Indian life-way" (Mailes and Eagle Chief 24).

Zitkala-Sa bears testimony to enduring "unjustifiable frights and punishments" as a child stripped of her moccasin culture and protective blanket of tradition and ritual (59). She stands naked before western culture, writing about being tied to a chair as she feels the "cold blades of the scissors" shear off her hair, as the government sheared off nearly all of the Lakota lands from her people (56). For Zitkala-Sa, contact with western culture was chaos, forced immersion into an up-side-down trickster world of confusion where "not a soul reasoned quietly with [her]" (56). Once Zitkala-Sa masters enough English to comment on the enormity of the "unjustifiable" injustices done to her and her people, she uses the language of storytelling as a social bludgeon and "assert[s] the rebellion within [her]" (61). She chooses, as Ruth Spack puts it, to "use the language creatively to write within the constraints of colonialism - satisfying a mass audience while at the same time infusing her work with subversive messages" (Spack 149).

Her writings against the government and missionary boarding schools' systemic abuse of native families and children coincided with how the Indian schools "as might be expected, met with resistance at every turn from resentful students and parents" (Mailes
and Eagle Chief 28). In *Stories*, "as might be expected" under the historical circumstances, she wields simile and metaphor against the "paleface day" that has dawned in Lakota lands (65). She is the savvy lyrical Indian Trickster that seeks to undermine "the chains which tightly [bind her] individuality like a mummy for burial" (67). After mastering the conqueror's language right under his nose, she trots it out like Coyote on the prowl, and fulfills the traditional role of a Native American "trickster [who] uses sleight of hand and tongue to evade, manipulate, and subvert the colonial world" (Cox 252). She wants readers to understand, in their own language, that the arrival of western cultural traditions is not a cause célèbre for Lakota people because "it [is] next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine ha[s] once begun its day's buzzing" (66). And, if phrases like this one are not enough to convey the pain, loss, and suffering she and her people endure, Zitkala-Sa continues to use English language conventions to translate the Lakota experience into rhetoric her readers can understand:

The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above those smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. (67)  
As the religious boarding school experience was less than rewarding for most American Indian children, inspiring hard-hearts, not “soft-hearts” towards whites and wasichu culture in many of them. Zitkala-Sa describes her autobiographical sentiments about her unpleasant school days:
I grew bitter, and censured the woman [a missionary] for cruel neglect of our physical ills. I despised the pencils that moved automatically, and the one teaspoon which dealt out from a large bottle, healing to a row of variously ailing Indian children. I blamed the hard-working, well-meaning, ignorant woman who was inculcating in our hearts her superstitious ideas. Though I was sullen in all my little troubles, as soon as I felt better I was ready again to smile upon the cruel woman. Within a week I was again actively testing the chains which tightly bound my individuality like a mummy burial. The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. (67)

Judging from her descriptions of the brutality of her boarding school existence, many children must have chosen to follow the Christian teachings out of fear, not love. She writes about being at the bedside of a deathly ill native friend who does not find comfort in wasichu religion. When the friend needs solace the most, Zitkala-Sa notices.

She writes that “[a]mong the folds of the bedclothes I saw the open pages of the white man’s Bible. The dying Indian girl talked disconne-ctedly of Jesus the Christ…” (66 - 67).

What angered Zitkala-Sa was the system’s “neglect of [the children’s] physical ills” and its “inculcating in [their] hearts [its] superstitious ideas” (67). Zitkala-Sa uses a caustic tone and storytelling, technique to convey the loss and waste of a valuable young child to the racist “ignoran[ce]” and “cruel[ty]” of “Western” traditions, to rail against “the machine” that is grinding native traditions into dust (67, 65, 66). Of course her comment about “superstitious” Christian teachings, and their uselessness in the Indian world, is a direct rebuttal to the time’s prevalent white position that Native Americans did not have bone fide religions but only had “superstitions.” Jorge Noriega in "American Indian Education in the United States: Indoctrination for Subordination to Colonialism" describes the intent of whites towards American Indian culture and traditions in language
that aptly explains why Zitkala Sa did not find much of her boarding school experience rich and rewarding:

The “formal education” of the indigenous peoples of North America began at virtually the moment in which the European drive to colonize the continent began in earnest. At least as early as 1611, French Jesuit missionaries opened schools along the St. Lawrence River in which they actively pursued Louis XIV’s edict, issued a year earlier, that where possible, long-term native resistance to French rule should be neutralized by implementing a program to “educate the children of the Indians in the French manner.” Trapped in prototypical boarding schools, usually situated a considerable distance from their communities, the children were drilled extensively in [European subjects]. Meanwhile, their traditional languages and cultures, religions and world views were systematically denigrated and suppressed. (371) 76

In order to withstand the religious, psychological and physical onslaught of the wasichu culture, Native Americans often turned to their own spiritual medicine. Even though Zitkala Sa was thrust into the paleface world without her family and cultural support systems, for a little while she was able to remember and perform a Sioux protection ritual:

I [Zitkala-Sa] had a secret interview with one of our best medicine men, and when I left his wigwam I carried securely in my sleeve a tiny bunch of magic roots. This possession assured me of friends wherever I should go. So absolutely did I believe in its charms that I wore it through all the school routine for more than a year. Then before I lost my faith in the dead roots, I lost the little buckskin bag containing all my good luck. (75)

Zitkala-Sa's rich and beautiful language pushes, tricks, readers out of the complacency of collaboration with a brutal system of oppression, to, hopefully, a state that matches Franchot Ballinger's description of the traditional role of "tricksters [which is that they] do indeed free [readers] from the imaginative and moral impoverishment attending enslavement to codified and solidified thinking" (Ballinger 134).77

Dexter Fisher admiringly praises Zitkala-Sa's ability in *Stories* to "create her own name and essentially her own oral history," thereby “asserting at one and the same time
her independence and her cultural ties" (x). According to Fisher, "[A]s she becomes more and more fluent in English, language becomes a tool for articulating the tension she is to experience throughout her life between her heritage with its imperative of tradition and the inevitable pressure of acculturation" (x – xi). This is very insightful and accurate; but, Fisher misses the mark in a crucial area of analysis of Zitkala-Sa's work. She correctly determines that Zitkala-Sa's writing in Stories "is a model of ambivalence, of oscillation between two diametrically opposed worlds," but, she wrongly assesses that the text "[does] not fully succeed" in reaching "a vision of wholeness in which the conflicting parts of her existence could be reconciled" (xviii). Fisher realizes that Zitkala-Sa’s exposure of the clash of cultures' "tension" and her "controlled rage" and "desire to convince Americans of the Indian's humanity" are laid out in the text, linguistically stripped naked for all to see (xi). Bringing the state of Indian Country and its struggles to cope with the strictures of western cultural demands to the awareness of her readers is the rhetorical and cultural goal and strategy she sets out to accomplish, and does. The problem is that Fisher thinks the measure of Zitkala-Sa's literary success needs to be whether or not Zitkala-Sa's personal writing testimony in American Indian Stories reflects that she reached a state of "wholeness," of reconciliation with "her own position between two alien worlds" (xi). That is not the proper measure with which to judge Stories.

Zitkala-Sa's work succeed because she carefully and fully reveals, in excruciating narrative detail, that her life is fraught with tension, ambivalence, imbalance, rage, and the passion to teach an ignorant or skeptical audience about the humanity and value of her people. She uses the tales of her experiences with having to cope with living
life suspended between "two alien worlds" as the foundational metaphorical principle for expanding readers' vision to encompass the wider indigenous American struggle. Her point to *Stories* is that, given America's historical treatment of Native Americans and its crucifixion of her culture, a condition which has given rise to "the conflicting parts of her existence," unless things change, there can be no state of indigenous "wholeness," either for her or the Lakota (xviii). Given that her goal in *Stories* is to have readers see the trickster chaos swirling within her and set loose on Indian lands, the book, unequivocally, succeeds.

“The Soft-Hearted Sioux”

In the story “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” Zitkala-Sa shifts from autobiographical narrative to fictional storytelling to continue her discussion of the clash between Lakota and white cultures. The tale demonstrates how the volatile historical political and social relationship plays out to the detriment of her people, a tension which is shown in the representative life of the "soft-hearted" Sioux male protagonist. She tells a tale of a converted native son who gives up his indigenous soul to the “soft-hearted” Christian way of passivity. He will not kill animals in the hunt for food, even though he has aged parents under his care that he is obligated to feed under mandates that hark back to traditional Lakota ways. Zitkala-Sa identifies his father as a famous warrior, making the choices of her character harder, and increasing the cultural and political stakes of his decisions. Even the children, who are the backbone for continuing Sioux culture, are drifting away, abandoning the old ways. Torn between the Sioux world and the white man’s way, the Soft-Hearted Sioux “did not grow up the warrior, huntsman, and husband he was to have been” before the white man came (112). The point of the tale is that the
death of Sioux culture is inevitable without the youth to continue the beliefs and ways, which is the symbolic meaning of the eventual death Zitkala-Sa renders to the Soft-Hearted Sioux. The youth is too “soft” on Sioux culture for him to survive, and symbolically since the youth of the community is at risk, for the Lakota cultural traditions to survive without a concerted effort to preserve them.

Instead of learning the traditional ways of the Sioux warrior, he turns away, and for “nine winters he hunts for the "soft" heart of Christ, and prays for the huntsmen who chase the buffalo on the plains” (112). There is evidence he becomes a minister; he comes back carrying “the white man’s Bible in his hand, and [has] the white man’s tender heart, in his breast [when] he returns to his own people” (112). He appears “wearing a foreigner’s dress...,” a reference to a Catholic priest’s religious garb (112). Zitkala-Sa laments that he never becomes a “husband.” Without marriage and sex, he will not have children in order for him to participate in and for the children to carry on the vital parenting traditions of his village, and nation. The young man leaves the Lakota community in line to become a warrior, a stable and contributing member of the community, but he returns back to his people, both tricked and transformed into a trickster.

There are rites of passage ceremonies into manhood in Lakota traditions, which the Soft-Hearted Sioux missed since he was away. These events signal children’s entrance into the adult world, their acceptance into the web of their communities’ life, and cement them into the indigenous world view. The rituals of transitioning from childhood to adulthood are observed, and when they are over, new male and female members are welcomed into the village group to assist the other adults with the continued
survival of the Nation. Andrew Wiget in *Native American Literature* describes three types of “puberty songs” that are sung for such occasions:

- Directional Songs require in their texts that certain acts be performed. A second type of puberty song is instructional, since the puberty rite is often the vehicle for communicating to the new adult the esoteric knowledge associated with tribal mythology and ritual practice. A third type of puberty song is the dawn song, sung in the morning of the last day of the ritual. (34)

One of the tragedies of Zitkala Sa’s writings about her time in boarding schools, which ties to the meaning in "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," is that she misses three years of crucial childhood rites of passage ceremonies that would have kept her nestled within her Sioux cultural heritage. In the section “School Days,” she gives readers a heart-rending account of a time in boarding school when she arrives as a young child and cannot figure out the eating customs. Social, spiritual, and political distress came when Zitkala-Sa at least tried to integrate herself into some aspects of her captive society; attempting to learn and perform some of the ceremonies. The importance of ceremony in Sioux life is clear when Zitkala Sa is distraught about being unable to participate in the Eating By Formula Ceremony. No one taught her the ritual, that when the small bell is tapped, the children draw out their chairs, remain standing until the second bell is sounded and then they get into their seats. Everyone in her new Wahichu World moved in community, in ceremony, except her, a tragedy by Indian inclusive community standards.

Not knowing the ceremonial procedures left Zitkala-Sa out; it left an indigenous child crawling back into her chair, realizing that even to eat required more ritualistic knowledge than she possessed. Once the third bell sounded, she did not even have the spiritual energy to eat. She could only cry, for herself, for her people, for her loss – of self and of ritual, a profound source of power. At a young age, Zitkala-Sa and her indigenous child companions are trapped in boarding schools suffering at the hands of Wasichu
America’s “cultural imperialism” in denying the children the comfort of their own traditions as they grow into adulthood (Deloria, Jr. For This Land 52).

When viewed from the light of the trauma of community isolation, and the severity of it from an Indian world view, the Sioux father’s condemnation of his soft-hearted son’s religious aspirations to become a priest is more understandable. As far as the father is concerned, the son, especially under the circumstances, has a procreation responsibility to the Sioux Nation to perpetuate the people and to keep the traditions alive. Considering the dire circumstances of native people at the hands of whites more is at stake than the needs of one individual to give self-expression to ways differing from the ways of his ancestors. From within the parameters of the indigenous world view, community members need to participate in the proper rituals of the Nation in order to keep everything in balance. Non-participation in group values and accompanying rituals is detrimental to the whole. It tips things disastrously out of balance.

The Soft-Hearted Sioux son forsakes the ways of his ancestors, by disrupting and discounting the rituals; when he hears “the chanting of a medicine-man within the teepee” of his father, he “wishe[s] to enter in and drive from his home the sorcerer of the plains...” (117). The young Sioux male falls victim to what Vine Deloria, Jr. describes in “Missionaries and the Religious Vacuum” as the “missionaries' approach to Indian tribes in an effort to bring them into western European religious life. Their primary message sought to invalidate the totality of Indian life and replace it with Christian values (Deloria, For This Land 23).” Through the conversion of the son to the white man’s ways, Zitkala-Sa shows that the wisdom of countless generations is blocked from assisting in the healing of the father, a situation symbolic of the turning away from
tradition by many of the Sioux people, resulting from the conversion activities of the missionaries. He ignores the wisdom such chiefs as Flat Iron provides: "From Wakan-Tanka, the Great Mystery, comes all power. It is from Wakan-Tanka that the holy man has wisdom and the power to heal and make holy charms." §81 Perhaps the Soft-Hearted Sioux forgets the ways of his ancestors due to preferring the "civilizing" strategies employed by the Catholic Church which Raymone DeMallie reminds us sent “priests and brothers of the Jesuit Order of Saint Francis [who] arrived on the Rosebud Reservation...in 1886... believing that [they] might play a pivotal role in the civilization of the American Indian” (DeMallie 120 – 121). §82 Zitkala-Sa appears not to agree with the "civilizing" results.

Staying in balance, in peace and especially under the conditions of assault and war, includes listening to the wisdom of those who have come before you, those who have the experience to interpret the meaning of the world. Zitkala Sa’s soft-hearted, colonized native man can no longer hear with "Sioux" ears. He chases away the Medicine-man, the symbol of Sioux wisdom and balance, the voice of culture and experience. His father warns him that the continuity of Sioux life will be broken, with devastating results, but the out-of-balance son will not listen to his father: “‘Ha, ha ha! My son, I cannot live without the Medicine-man!’” (115). The Soft-Hearted Sioux turns a deaf ear to those who would help the young to recognize the traits of the new white Trickster among the Sioux.

Through Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical writings, it makes tragic sense that her fictional Soft-Hearted Sioux man, seeing the power of the wasichu, wishes to share in it. As missionaries encountered Indigenous nations, many native people converted to
Christian religions, trustingly, believing in the “soft-hearted” message of the clergy. Given the circumstances, it is understandable that some native people would hope that washichu was coming with a “tender heart” (112). And, of course, as with oppressive colonial incursions, some indigenous people hoped that by joining the religion of the oppressor, they might be spared oppression, or protected from the military by the missionaries. For native people and others who could not or would not face facts, the “soft-hearted” belief in white intentions was, as Zitkala-Sa argues in “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” wishful or delusional thinking. Nabokov points out that many Native people “were not averse initially to Christianity. Before the white man appeared, [Native Americans] absorbed waves of religious thought” (51). Native Americans could do this because, according to an Indian world view, their hearts were open, inclusive of difference, and respectful of the beliefs of others for “to [traditional Native Americans] a fresh form of worship does not negate the old” (Nabokov 51).

The Soft-Hearted Sioux devalues his indigenous beliefs due to exposure to the Christian dogma and its exclusive framework of religious reference that teaches believers that no other religious thought is valid. But, Zitkala-Sa asks readers to consider that he is drawn to the religious beliefs of the Wasichu because of a natural indigenous openness, trust, and curiosity to learn more about them. “The great value Native Americans placed on their own traditional beliefs made them especially curious about the magical need of the new Medicine man, the Son of God, Nabokov explains” (Nabokov 51). However, Zitkala-Sa narrates that culturally normal indigenous spiritual curiosity about and trust in the new "abstract power named God" is misplaced as far as the welfare of Sioux culture is concerned (114). It is only when the protagonist rejects the power of his traditional
medicine man, derogatively calling him the "sorcerer of the plains" and "turn[s] [to] the leaves of [his] bible" in shifted faith that the Sioux man's life sinks into death and oblivion (113).

In *Stories*, Native American characters use magical words or actions, chants and rituals that give them enough power to better resist the negative influences of the new white culture. The "soft-hearted" Lakota man, if he had not lost so much of his Sioux soul, could have consulted the Medicine Man he so rudely drives away. Zitkala-Sa’s message is that if he had not turned away from the power of his ancient traditions, he could have acquired a song to sing when he realizes that he needs to regain his powers to hunt and take care of his elderly father and mother. He “believe[s] his [traditional] prayers [are] not unheeded in heaven,” but he forgets that he needs to be in balance with his culture and its respect for all living things on Earth to be able to be successful in the hunt (119). In the world of Zitkala-Sa’s story, the Christian prayers of the Wasichu are not working in the Sioux world; worse, the new traditions are destroying it.

Lame Deer, 1900-1970 was born the same year *The Atlantic Monthly* published the first of Zitkala-Sa’s writings, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” “The School Days of an Indian Girl,” and “An Indian Teacher among Indians.” He recalls hard times on his South Dakota Sioux reservation. Lame Deer writes that not only were living conditions impossibly hard on the reservation, Sioux people could not even die in dignity: “[I]n 1920 they wouldn’t even allow us to be dead in our own way, we had to be buried in Christian fashion. It was as if they wanted to take my mother to a white boarding school way up there (*Native American Testimony* 313).
Chants, such as the one the Soft-Hearted Sioux rejected, were designed to remove evil spirits in the way of making successful kills and are sung multiple times, usually accompanied by rattles or drums. Some songs are sung alone, but most are sung in groups. How songs are sung depends on their purpose and the intended outcome. The repetition of lines and/or the whole song generates increased power, like energy building. The power the songs generate can be directed to one area or spread out over distances; designed, among many uses, to heal, uplift, praise, or to modify or destroy. The level of success of chanting rests with the power of the chanters, or the circumstances the chanters are in. If the power of the evil is stronger, then the singer’s efforts will not overcome the sorcery. If the singer’s spirit is stronger than the evil, then the evil will be given “the wink,” or ”wither,” or “sail off like a feather.” Chants and songs, among other magical methods, were used to re-balance out-of-balance circumstances.

Besides the use of power songs or chants, successful hunting also depended upon the hunter’s continuous respect for the sacrifices of the animals, and making the proper rituals when a hunter killed, took the spirit of, an animal. Realizing that the people are dependent on nature’s bounty for survival causes Native people to have respect for killing, and to kill only by necessity, but to kill nevertheless. Life is sacred, but Native Americans believe the animals understand that they are giving their lives so the people might live.

“Iktomi and the Coyote”

In “Iktomi and the Coyote,” when Iktomi was ready to begin eating Coyote, he stopped long enough to honor Coyote with the proper ceremony: “Humming a dance-song, one from his bundle of mystery song, Iktome hopped and darted about at an
imaginary dance and feast” (41). When an animal is taken for food, it is natural for its fur or hair to be used for clothing. In this way, its entire being is respected. Within the circle of life, this is the natural order of things.

Although *American Indian Stories* "demonstrates" as P. Jayne Hafen describes as "[Zitkala-Sa's] conflicts with colonial powers," it is still due to Zitkala-Sa's linguistic acculturation into English by the colonizer that she *can* bring the Native American discussion to the table, without having a white translator (Hafen x). Zitkala-Sa writes in *Old Indian Legends* that she "tried to transplant the native spirit of these tales - root and all - into the English language, since America in the last few centuries has acquired a second tongue" (vi). This shows she is aware of the challenges of translation, cultural integrity and continuity, and political purpose and knows that she is linguistically positioned to do the literary work of cross-cultural dialogue. She posits that "the old legends of America belong quite as much to the blue-eyed little patriot as to the black-haired aborigine” (*Old Indian* vi). She came to a certain level of accommodation with the inevitability of the continued white presence in Indian Country, a space rather like the practical one Chief Sitting Bull suggested when he saw there was no hope of expelling Europeans from Lakota lands, through violence, treaties, or otherwise: "Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children." It is with the decision to use English as a cultural battering ram of persuasion that she moves on in *American Indian Stories* to be the first Native American writer to put forward her thoughts "without the aid of an editor, an interpreter, or an ethnographer" (Fisher vi). But, once the independent decision is made to present her writing on the world's stage, Zitkala-Sa had
to cope with the struggle of finding a free voice in the midst of oppression, and this issue must surround any attempts researchers make to interpret her texts.

Through mastering English and an astute use of translation, Zitkala Sa retains the magic of the oral tradition within her breast, so she is able to channel the electrical charge of Native American storytelling and bring it into print. She freeze-frames American Indian storytelling energy, locking it onto and into the pages of the stories of her experiences in the White world and also into the transcriptions of Lakota legends. We have to enter the indigenous world of storytelling, magic and song to access the meaning in her stories and legends, and to understand the Native American cultural traditions on which her stories rest. Using native magic for a little while, “before she los[es] faith in the dead roots,” Zitkala-Sa finds a way to cope with the tortures of the white world, even turning the circumstances somewhat to her literary advantage. Using a source of women’s power, she “sp[ins] with reeds and thistles, until [her] hands [are] tired from their weaving, the magic design which promise[s] [her] the white man’s respect” (“School Days” 76). She then “enter[s] an oratorical contest among the various classes” and after winning first place in the competition, she “receive[s] from her fellow-students a large bouquet of roses,” a symbol of their respect (“School Days” 76 - 78). Hopefully, researchers can now examine her work with an indigenous view to better hear what she is saying.

It is through this mastery of English, in written and oral forms, and the memory and retention of the magic and ritual of the oral storytelling from the elders in her wigwam that she is able to produce *American Indian Stories* and *Old Indian Legends*. She blends the rhetorical and cultural traditions of the two worlds, creating documents
that are new world creations, concrete examples of the open mind, heart, and spirit of the original First Contact intent and message of Native People that there was room enough on Turtle Island for the European newcomers to find communal living space. Her literature lives as a testimony to the complex melding of oral and print, accommodations between ancient traditional cultural norms and culturally new learned ideas, and the sophisticated employment of these rhetorical and cultural strategies for commentary, protest, resistance, assimilation, and also change. Under the circumstances, which are during a still tense post-Indian war climate and its close aftermath period of difficult reservation life, she accomplishes the seemingly impossible.

In order for Zitkala-Sa's *Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories* to speak in the 21st century, there is an element of mysticism that must be employed because researchers must conjure up the spirit of her words as though we know what they are saying to us from the printed page. However, in reality, although we spend decades perfecting the technique of communing with dead or absent authors, the truth of the matter is that, no matter how accurate or inaccurate, the analysis, we are divining meaning from times past, without authors such as Zitkala-Sa to tell us if we are right. We are, therefore, dependent on the researched meaning and finding of “the truth” Indian Country citizens and their allies hope we reach and write about in relationship to *Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories*.

In the end, it is a truth based upon the closest possible channeling of the spirit of Zitkala-Sa and her literature. But, this need for channeling is true of all past traditions in literature; for when there is an absent author, there is no source for direct explanations. So, as critics of Zitkala-Sa’s work, literary theorists are participating in a metaphysical
relationship to her and the meaning of her writing; we are forced to participate in a
mental leap into an alternate indigenous cultural space/time continuum. It is from this
alternate place of criticism combined with analytical research spaces that we will unravel
her conceptions of and responses to the tricks.

We must, at the very least, try to hear and respond to Zitkala-Sa's call to enter the
indigenous sphere of reference when we contemplate and write about the meaning in Old
Indian Legends and American Indian Stories. When we write, it is optimal to use
language that is straight-forward, to avoid participating in literary fellowship with people
Vine Deloria, Jr. describes as:

“[M]anning the barricades in science, religion, and politics who have one thing in
common which they do not share with the rest of the citizenry: they are
responsible for creating a technical language, incomprehensible to the rest of us,
whereby we cede to them our right and responsibility to think. They in turn
formulate beautiful sets of lies that lull us to sleep and enable us to forget about
our troubles, eventually depriving us of all rights. (Deloria, Jr., Red Earth 35)\textsuperscript{86}

Zitkala-Sa crafts multicultural language to speak to the other side, to share,
explain, and defend Lakota culture and traditions. But, she doesn’t stop there, in what
might be a safe zone of engagement, and the even safer one of anthropological
preservation. No, she chastises and educates us readers, as she preserves texts and calls
Americans to accountability, demanding that we “see” the atrocities of violence and
cultural loss embedded in the allusions, symbols, metaphors, personifications,
onomatopoeia, and autobiographical testimonies in the rich language of the stories and
tales. Her boarding school education, according to her painful testimony is very
culturally, spiritually, and mentally costly, but it is also the instrument by which she fords
the barriers of language and culture. As researchers and writers interested in Native
American lore brought to print, we need only follow in her moccasin print of English
language reconstruction and preservation in order to glean how indigenous entities play around the edges of and dwell within print and oral traditions. In the end, it is Zitkala-Sa’s use of the magic of oral storytelling combined with her mastery of written language that explains and bridges the cultural gap. It is her power to meld the spoken and written word onto the page that is the magic.

Using a critical approach that considers Zitkala-Sa's writings as employing "trickster" methodologies is essential in order to uncover the meaning in much of her allusions, symbols, references, metaphors, alliterations, expressions, and other uses of language. In short, researchers must analyze Zitkala-Sa's rich and masterful use of English both by employing the formidable literary academic arsenal academics have at their disposal and by familiarizing themselves with key nuances of Lakota traditions. This responsibility lies with researchers and is the ultimate "trick" involved with reading *Old Indian Legends* and *American Indian Stories*. And, as with all tricks, it is when the veil is removed from in front of the sleight-of-hand movements, which is the equivalent of Zitkala-Sa's ability to encode deeply cultural, social, historical, and political messages in the texts, that readers can finally see the mechanics of how the trick all works.

It is now our job to uncover her “tricks.”
Chapter 3 Notes


9 The Dakota people make up a branch of the western named "Sioux Indian Nation." Dakota is the named the Yankton Band people call themselves. Zitkala-Sa was born in 1876 and raised on the Yankton Dakota reservation in southeast South Dakota.


12 Calvin Martin, “The Metaphysics of Writing Indian-White History,” 27-34.


14 There is the issue of terms. Whenever it is reasonable to do so, I will use "Lakota" to refer to the combined groups of the Sioux Nation, a group whites termed "Sioux" after contact. I will use "Sioux" and "Indian" when I am quoting and immediately describing Zitkala-Sa's writing because those are terms she uses. There are times I will use "Sioux" and “Indian” when it is a part of historical or government references or designations (past or present).

In my discussion sections, I interchange the reference use of "Indigenous, American Indian, Native American, Native, Native people." All terms refer to the original people who lived and now live in North America before and after European contact. "First Nations People” is usually used by the Indigenous
community in Canada. There are times I use "Indian, Indians or American Indian or American Indians" when there is a historical time period usage necessary (such as with quotation work) or culturally-sensitive reasons (some Indigenous writers and members of the community prefer the terms and use them).

I am aware of the wider discussion constantly going on in Indian Country and academia concerning naming references. I am not seeking to set precedence, nor resolve anything. I'm just explaining my choices. The issue of names is an ever-evolving, on-going, and complicated discussion.

15 Battle of Rosebud was June 17, 1876 in Montana territory between Lakota warriors and US Army troops under the command of General George Crook as part of the ongoing campaign to take the Black Hills region from the Lakota. Crook won the battle but sustained heavy losses that prevented him from joining his troops with Custer’s for the Battle of the Little Big Horn. See: Jerome Greene, ed. *Lakota and Cheyenne: Indian Views of the Great Sioux War* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1994), chapter two: “Battle of Rosebud Creek, June 17, 1876.”

The Battle of Big Horn was between Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors, under the command of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, and US Seventh Calvary troops, under the command George Armstrong Custer on June 25-26, 1876 in Montana on land that is now part of the Crow Agency. The soldiers were defeated but the event signaled the army's relentless pursuit of the area's Indian nations, resulting in the institution of the reservation system in the region. See: Herman Viola and Jan Shelton Danis, *It Is a Good Day to Die: Indian Eyewitnesses Tell the Story of the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2001). James Welch and Paul Stekler, *Killing Custer: the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994).

16 White's Manual Labor Institute in Wabash, Indiana was a residential Quaker boarding school founded in 1853 as part of $40,000 in endowment money donated by Josiah White of Philadelphia, founder of the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company. The trust's intent was multiracial, written to accommodate "poor children, white, colored and Indian." The property was purchased from the Miami Indians. The last graduating class was in 1985. Children came there from primarily the Pine Ridge, Cheyenne-Arapaho, and Yankton Agencies. John Parker and Ruth Parker, *Josiah White’s Institute: The Interpretation and Implementation of His Vision* (Dublin, IN.: Printis Ps, 1983).

17 Chief Sitting Bull (c. 1837 – 1890) - Principal Chief of Hunkapapa Lakota (1886 – 1890) and a Medicine Man. He was wary of white culture, counseling the Lakota to carefully choose parts of it that were useful and reject those that were not. He defeated George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. He was an adherent of the Sun Dance or Ghost Dance ceremonies. He spent four months in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. He was killed by Indian police officers on the Standing Rock Reservation, December 15, 1890. See: Charles Ohiyesa Eastman (1858 – 1939), *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1918, reprint Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1991); Joseph Manzione, *I am Looking to the North for My Life: Sitting Bull, 1876 – 1881* (Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1994) and; James Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1991).

18 Chief Spotted Elk (c. 1825 – 1990). Principal Chief of Mineconju Lakota (1874 – 1890). His superb skills at diplomacy, politics, and settling disputes among the Lakota were major assets. He was killed by US soldiers at the Wounded Knee Creek massacre, December 29, 1890.

19 On December 29, 1980, Major Samuel Whiteside and Colonel James Forsyth commanding a US 7th Cavalry unit of 500 men surrounded Chief Spotted Elk and a community of 350 Mineconju and Hunkpapa Sioux, primarily unarmed women and children, who had camped at Wounded Knee Creek. When a shot rang out during a scuffle between two soldiers and a Lakota man, the cavalry open fired with rifles and four Hotchkiss guns, slaughtering at least 150 Lakota men, women, and children and wounding another 50.

20 Henry Knox (1750 - 1806), first United States Secretary of War, was assigned the task of the oversight of Native Americans living on lands the US continually acquiesced due to national policies of not honoring land treaties.


23 Zitkala-Sa, "America's Indian Problem," American Indian Stories, 185 - 195.

24 John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation." United States Magazine and Democratic Review; Volume 17, Number 1, (July - August 1845), 5 - 10. While writing an article in favor of the annexation of Texas into the union, O'Sullivan first wrote the term arguing for the position that it was "the fulfillment of our [European settlers] manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." Web. June 24, 2010.

Earlier concepts of American soil being provided to the settlers by divine providence, later termed "manifest destiny," are found in such works as William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation where he pays tribute to "the special work of God's providence" that allowed the Pilgrims safe landing in Plymouth, Massachusetts, or God's "Plantation" provided for the settlers, in 1620. See: Thomas Hietala, Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003).


27 For a comprehensive examination of the treaties and outcomes, see Francis Paul Prucha, American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).


30 Richard Voss, Victor Douville, Alex Little Soldier, and Gayla Twiss, "Tribal and Shamanic-based Social Work Practice: A Lakota Perspective" (Social Work, 44.3, 1999): 228. Name choices are so significant in Sioux culture that there is a ceremony called the Naming Ceremony "to show recognition and respect for kinship bonds" when "a Lakota is often given the name of an ancestor and is expected to take on the qualities of that relative."


34 Haunani Kay-Trask, From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999), 172. When I was in Maui in 2000, several Hawaiian women, due to our
bond as indigenous women and the women honoring Hawaiian and mainland ties, taught me to make grass
skirts from large ti leaves, leis from fresh flower heads, and instructed me in the proper way to do a hula
dance. One night, when my new friends found out I was a traditional Native women's singer and pow wow
dancer, I was invited back stage to be with the multitude of dancers and drummers who were presenting for
a large hotel-sponsored outdoor cultural demonstration.

35 Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American

36 Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, eds. Recovering the Word: Essay on Native American Literature

37 Paul Radin, The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology (New York: Philosophical Library,
1956,) ix.

38 Patrice E. M. Hollrah, The Old Lady Trill, the Victory Yell: The Power of Women in Native American

39 Elaine A. Jahner, "Lakota Genesis: The Oral Tradition," Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and

40 Before whites arrived to the Great Plains, there were millions of buffalo. However by the end of the
19th century, they had been driven to near extinction with estimates of only 1,000 left on the plains.

41 See: William F. Cody, True Tales of the Plain (New York: Cupples and Leon, 1908) and Louis S.
Because of his marksmanship, William Cody was hired by the Kansas Pacific Railroad to kill buffalo. The
railroad fed large work crews that were building the railroad lines.

42 The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (AIRFA) Public Law 95-431, passed by the 95th
Congress, August 11, 1978. It included the language: "...it shall be the policy of the United States to protect
and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the
traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiians, including but not
limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through
ceremonials and traditional rites."

43 As an example of Sioux agency under difficult circumstances, the current tribal council on the
Rosebud Indian Reservation has instituted raising buffalo herds for a food source and Professor Ione
Quigley of Sinte Gleska University is doing research into the presence and use of indigenous vegetables
and herbs for food and healing that are growing freely on the reservation’s prairie.

44 The primary battles between the Sioux and the US cavalry took place between the 1854 conflict at
Fort Laramie, Wyoming and culminating in the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre at Wounded Knee Creek,
located on the Lakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

45 Kenneth M. Morrison, "The Bible and Traditional Indian Literature," Dictionary of Native American
Literature, Andrew Wiget, ed. (New York: Garland, 1994) 133.

46 Barbara Babcock and Jay Fox, "The Native American Trickster," Dictionary of Native American

47 Barbara Babcock, "A Tolerating Margin of Mess, 152.


52 Zitkala-Sa, "Iktomi and the Coyote," *Old Indian Legends*, 37 - 43.

53 Martha J. Cutter, "Zitkala-Sa's Autobiographical Writings, 39.


60 Vine Deloria, Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999) 144.


63 When I was at the Rosebud Agency in 2009, Delores Kills in Water showed me very large brightly and beautifully painted buffalo parfleche bags that her grandmother had made to store food and clothes.


81 Chief Maza Blaska (Flat Iron), Oglala Lakota chief.

Lame Deer was born on the Rosebud Reservation and became a Wicasha Wacan, Holy Man. His reflections can be found in Fire, John/Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).


CHAPTER 4

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ORAL TRICKSTER TRADITION AND ITS USE IN
THE WRITINGS OF WILLIAM WELLS BROWN, HARRIET JACOBS,
AND MARTIN R. DELANY

While the Native American community was speaking through trickster tales and
legends about the vagaries of life’s human condition, or eventually, like Zitkala-Sa,
writing reflections on a changing American landscape, the African American free and
enslaved community brought the rhythms and vocals of Africa's trickster tradition with
them to the New World. African American themes of self-education, self-reliance,
survival, enslavement, resistance, evasion, and triumph are reflected in trickster tales, as
well as in songs, speeches, and poetry, and run the gamut of examining the totality of
life's interests. But one of the most pervasive subjects addressed is the nineteenth-century
African American community's concern with obtaining liberation from its physical
enslavement and from white American oppression generally.

Looking Behind the African American Trickster Storytelling Veil

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask. Paul Laurence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask,” 1896

On the African American linguistic road to the eventual mastery of English and
its expression in the written word, songs, such as spirituals, as well as stories served as
early trickster rhetoric. Spirituals had English lyrics that were easy to learn, an important
feature for many African immigrant people who had the challenge of communicating
across various language barriers. Learning songs more easily paved the way for people to
learn English, some of them well enough to become storytellers— those people who
eventually mastered the complex intricacies that would allow them to employ trickster teaching methodologies.

The songs offered the chance for linguistically disparate groups to learn, or manipulate if they already knew enough English, words to form cohesive bonds around embedded resistance themes and to find comfort in cultural music markers that harked back to African sounds and rhythms. African music essentially operates with a polyrhythmic meter base with multiple rhythms crisscrossing each other, which differs greatly from European classical and folk music's strictly measured beats. Since African music prizes the spontaneous innovation of musicians and singers, it fuses within it a sense of individual freedom while still operating within the parameters of the art form. In other words, it values and encourages individualism and still promotes cohesive group dynamics, characteristics that would have been very appealing, and socially, psychologically, and politically helpful to an enslaved community. The earliest trickster storytelling operated within the seemingly anarchistic nature of the polyrhythm music base, covert acquisition of English through lyrics, and subversive content in the words of the slave songs, both work and religious in nature. The songs were sources of linguistic development, cultural cohesion and historical memory, covert resistance information, and spiritual uplift.

An example of this linguistic, cultural, and political development would be “No More Auction Block,” which had several possible meanings (Appendix A). It could be understood as being a wishful song, hopeful of the day when enslaved people would be liberated: "no more auction block [sales of blacks], no more peck of corn [inadequate, monotonous or limited diet], no more driver's lash [to bear as cruelty], no more pint of
salt [rubbed into lashed wounds], no more hundred lash [torture, maiming, rape, and murder], no more mistress' call [unending forced labor]”. However, in keeping with the necessity to deceive the oppressor, to keep him out of the insider loop, the lyrics can also be sung and heard as an aggressive assertion of self-determined liberation: [There will definitely be "no more auction block," words asserted in no uncertain or wishful context.] The interesting line constantly repeated as the chorus, is “many thousand gone,” likely referencing the many "thousands" or millions of people who were captured and taken out of Africa and placed on America's "auction block" of enslavement. But, in keeping with the double-meaning references, the buried trick on the masters is that "many thousands gone" signals to African American singers and listeners that they should take the opportunity when they could get it to join the ranks of the many thousands of runaway enslaved people "gone" from bondage. Darryl Cumber Dance explains in the chapter on “Folk Music” in From My People that songs about escape are “aggressive songs of a people determined to be free” (71). 

Before the written word freeze-framed African American oral protest, the Oral Tradition, which Henry Louise Gates, Jr. terms "The Vernacular," commemorated the eventual “many thousand days” gone by in freedom, as well as mourning the "many thousand days" African Americans spent as enslaved and oppressed people. The meaning in the storytelling in songs by African Americans is as varied as the imagination is capable of contemplating the wrenching spaces extant between states of freedom and oppression. Early enslaved people cleverly developed a system of songs that carried The Trick, the continued embedded commentary and protest rhetoric of the trickster tradition. African Americans continued to sing these spirituals on through the post-bellum period as
a source of solace and a form of protest, and they are still sung in African American church, educational, and social gatherings today.\textsuperscript{2} We shall see later in this chapter how Brown, Jacobs, and Delany use a rhetorical cadence that very much echoes the strident trickster themes of resistance and escape that are expressed in these types of revolutionary songs. The “aggression” is also contained in the almost musically orchestrated symphony of African American characters’ rebellious trickster actions that Charles Chesnutt composes in \textit{The Conjure Woman} which we will explore in the final chapter.

The deception exists not only due to the polyrhythm and double meaning present in the lyrics, but also operates in the slow cadence of the notes of most songs, for "No More Auction Block" has a mournful wailing musical sound. The song is perfect for confusing outsiders and lulling oppressors into believing enslaved people accept their situation or only, safely, bemoan it with the notes of a song. Because of the built-in trickster element, oppressors missed that oppressed people were using the lyrics as encoded militant messages wrapped around innocuous rhythms and tones. This same complex and deceptive methodology, with its double-meanings and encoding, operated in the later African American trickster storytelling. This genre is one which transplanted Africans created as they moved from singing together to acquiring individually complex English language skills with which to communicate across divergent linguistic lines.\textsuperscript{3}

Enslaved African people invented a language they used to communicate with each other and with enslavers and to critique an unjust system. Various terms for the general early African American English usage are: Pidgin English, Dialect, and Creole. But, its use for insider communication as well as outsider (including with trickster subtext)
transmission is definite. There were powerful and moving spirituals that, although whites did not have knowledge of the true meanings, demanded that white American enslavers release African Americans or advocated that they foment group insurrection, individually fight back, run away, or endure, waiting on a day to “overcome.” In many cases, the songs were not sung in the presence of whites. It was not until northern white missionaries entered the South by 1861 that African American spirituals began to be published in missionary journals. Even then, one wonders how many of the masked messages were seen or “heard” by whites.

In "Go Down Moses," Blacks compare their plight with the bondage of the Jews in ancient Egypt, detailed in the Old Testament that was being quoted to them by whites (Appendix B). Enslaved black people, much to the dismay of whites if they had known the "insider" meaning of the lyrics, viewed themselves as children of God with a righteous cause, an aggrieved and wronged people like the ancient Jews depicted in the song. As many Blacks saw it, Christianity held lessons in human rights, God’s mercy and blessings for them, and called good people to do battle with evil forces, like the enslavers. So, they encoded storytelling messages into the lyrics.

“Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho” is a battle song where “the walls” were the chains and captivity of slavery and the battle was the hoped-for combat for freedom which would make “the walls [of slavery] come tumbling down” (Appendix C). The Spirituals, in an era before writing, could scream the message of injustice; they were very combative and likely brought a sense of solace to those suffering through states of brutality and violated rights. As more and more enslaved people became acquainted with
and fluent in English, they created a wide body of songs that surreptitiously carried the tales of justice, resistance, and freedom.

The song “The Gospel Train” (or “Git on Board, Lil’ Chil’ren”) references one of the most dangerous undertakings and deceptive activities during enslavement, the Underground Railroad, the name given to the escape routes abolitionists operated (Appendix D). The locations were often people's homes or business establishments used to conduct black people out of the slave states to the free northern states or Canada. The term was used in songs as a sign of hope and, sometimes, as an actual signal to those escaping to begin their journey. Coded messages, such as "there's room for many" indicated that escaping slavery was always an option whenever it was possible or that more people could join the group actually leaving. "I hear the train a-comin'" was used to transmit prearranged signals as to when and where escapes were to take place and also referred to the reality of the existence of safe passage "underground" to locations on the "railroad train" of escape, the Underground Railroad. In the guise of religious metaphor, and under cover of religious zeal, real or manufactured, words operated with trickster precision and paved the linguistic way towards action. Sophisticated uses of songs as intercommunity trickster dialogue arose as part of the militant arm of the ongoing overt and covert warfare of enslaved black people against enslaving and abusive whites.

The songs often took the form of spirituals because whites allowed enslaved blacks to sing what they thought were safe Christian reflections of faith in English, forbidding the enslaved community to sing African songs or conduct discussions in African languages. Black people combined African styles of singing, like call and
response vocals and handclapping, with the new religion to create the spirituals or chants, thus creating agency, making the music and lyrics a reflection their own needs and circumstance. Whites, outsiders to the intimate social construction of enslaved communities, did not realize, often until too late, that the songs had a religious and military double meaning. The insider status and meaning of African American lyrics smoothed the linguistic way for the transition to trickster storytelling. As enslaved Africans' English evolved into storytelling, with the assistance of the early songs and lyrics, trickster resistance themes reflected their continued strategies for dealing with their social and political situation and remained imbedded in the oral and later written literature. The “vast storehouse of stories” Africans possessed arrived in America and, with the necessary cultural adjustments and additions, was transformed into the African American storytelling tradition (“Folktales,” Gates and McKay 102). The New World tradition “helped [African Americans] to maintain on the new continent at least the broad outlines of their original world view” (“Folktales,” Gates and McKay 102). The songs exist alongside the trickster storytelling tradition and are an important foundation upon which African American oral trickster folklore development in English rests.

Trickster’s Need for Secrecy

The African folktale trickster theme of maintaining secrecy that teaches the necessity of taking great care with what people say in dangerous circumstances understandably found its way into African American storytelling. In A Treasury of African American Folklore, Harold Courlander includes African and African American stories about “a talking (or singing) animal or object that refuses to talk when its
discoverer brings witnesses” (582). Courlander’s African example of this theme is a “talking skull” tale from the Nupe people of Nigeria.

A hunter goes into the bush. Suddenly, he comes upon an old human skull and asks it, “What brought you here?” To the hunter’s surprise, the skull answers, “Talking brought me here.” Astonished, the hunter runs off, going to the king. When the hunter arrives, he says, “I found a dry human skull in the bush. It asks you how its father and mother are.” The king replies, “Never since my mother bore me have I heard that a dead skull can speak.” The king summons his three wise men—the Alkali, the Saba, and the Degi—and asks them if they have ever heard of a talking skull, to which the men answer, “No.”

The king and wise men decide to investigate the hunter’s claim and they hit upon a plan to verify the hunter’s story. They send the hunter back to the site where he says he saw and talked to the skull, but they also dispatch an armed guard detachment to accompany the hunter. The guards have instructions to kill the hunter on the spot if the hunter has lied to the king.

When the hunter and guards find the skull, the hunter says, “Skull, speak.” The skull is totally silent in response. The hunter tries again, but the skull is silent again. The hunter spends the entire day begging the skull to speak, but the skull refuses to answer.

Finally, at sunset, the guards tell the hunter he has one last chance to make the skull speak or suffer the consequences. But, the hunter’s efforts are fruitless. The skull remains mum so the guards kill the hunter in accordance with the king’s command.
When the guards have departed, the skull opens its jaws and asks the dead hunter’s head, “What brought you here?” The dead hunter’s head replies, “Talking brought me here!” (582)

In African American Folktales, Roger D. Abrahams includes an African American version from Alabama called “You Talk Too Much, Anyhow” (274).

An enslaved man comes upon a talking turtle beside a pond. The enslaved man greets the turtle and is shocked and pleased when the turtle responds. However, the turtle is not as enamored with the encounter and says, “[Y]ou talk too much.” Missing the turtle’s implication, the enslaved man runs straight back to “master” and blabs about the talking turtle. Master’s response is, “[Y]ou’re just lying.” The enslaved man insists it’s true, so the two men return to the pond to verify it. However, master promises he is going to “beat the slave half to death” if the turtle can’t talk.

When they arrive, the turtle is still there but won’t say a word when called upon to do so. Master gets angry at the enslaved man, takes him “back to the house and beats him half to death.” A little while later, the enslaved man returns to the turtle and asks why the turtle didn’t answer. The turtle replied, “Well, that’s what I say about you [N]egroes, you talk too much anyhow” (274-275).

One day I was sitting in the Black Student League office when I was an undergraduate student at Temple University during the Black Power era in the late 1960’s. One of the League members told a version of the “talking animal” trickster tale to a group of us who were collating the pages of the League’s newsletter, “Maji Maji.” I knew he told the tale expressly to underscore the need for secrecy concerning the information to which we were privy as members of the League.
“The Talking Turtle”

One day Lester was out on an errand for Massa that required that he go to a part of the plantation that he'd never been to before. After Lester took care of the errand, he headed back to the Big House, but decided to take a short-cut. The pathway he took ran down beside a pretty big pond.

As Lester strolled past the pond, he heard a deep voice say, "Good afternoon, howdy do." Lester stopped and looked around, but he didn't see anyone. "Odd," he thought. However, since he didn't see anyone, he didn't stop for long. But, before Lester went only a few more steps, he heard, "I said, 'Howdy do there'" in that same deep voice.

This time Lester located where the voice was coming from and looked down. There, on the edge of the bank of the pond, was a large round turtle. Lester stared at the turtle and the turtle stared back at him. Then Turtle said, "What are you looking at? Haven't you ever seen a turtle before?"

Lester's mouth popped open he was so surprised. "Well, you could say, 'Good mornin' like I said to you," Turtle said. When Lester could manage to say something, he said, "Lord have mercy, did you just talk?" Turtle said, "Yes, of course I can talk and I'm talking to you."

Lester was astonished. He said, "You kiddin' me! a talking turtle! No one is going to believe this!" As soon as he said that, Turtle cut Lester off and told Lester that he couldn't tell anyone about him and especially that he could talk. "Why can't I tell anyone about you?" asked Lester. "Because it is a secret and if you do tell, something bad is going to happen." Turtle replied. So, Turtle and Lester chatted for a little while, about the weather and such. But, finally, it was time for Lester to report back to Massa. "I gotta
go," Lester said. "Ok, Lester, but remember not to tell anyone about me," said Turtle.

"Sure, no problem," Lester said, and they parted.

Well, it didn't take Lester but five minutes in Massa's company before Lester started bragging about how Massa wouldn't believe what Lester had seen. "What are you talking about, Lester?" Massa demanded as he listened to Lester blabbing on about some talking turtle and a big pond. "You aren't making any sense whatsoever."

Finally Lester slowed down and said, "Massa, Massa! You won't believe what I saw! There's a turtle that can talk and it lives right in the big pond on the south side of the plantation." Massa said, "Lester, you have lost your mind. You haven’t seen a talking turtle. There's no such thing." "Oh, yes there is," Lester insisted, "and, I'm going to prove it to you."

So, Lester walked and Massa rode down to the pond and stood at the side of the bank. Just then, Turtle crawled up right in front of them. Lester turned to Massa, pointed to Turtle, and shouted, "Massa, there he is!" Then, Lester looked at Turtle and exclaimed, "Turtle, Good afternoon to you!" and waited for Turtle to say something back. Turtle just silently stared back at Lester.

Massa said, "Lester, you got me all the way down here in 95 degree heat to see a stupid turtle! That turtle better say something or I am going to whip your hide for wasting my time." Lester looked at Turtle and pleaded, "Please, Mr. Turtle, say something! I know you can talk!" But, Turtle just silently stared back at Lester.

Finally, Massa raised his horsewhip and beat the living daylights out of Lester before Massa turned around, mounted his horse, and headed back to the plantation house.
After Massa's hoof beats were out of hearing, Lester stared down at Turtle and said, "I know you could hear me ask you to talk. Why didn't you save me and say something?" Turtle replied, "I told you it was a secret, and if you told anyone else, something bad was going to happen. But, you wouldn't listen and you told, so something bad did happen—to you. You could have avoided that whipping if you had just kept your big mouth shut.

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs has a key scene when someone who assists in her escape cautions Jacobs to keep her involvement a secret. In *Blake; or, the Huts of America*, Martin R. Delany addresses the vital need for enslaved African American people to practice secrecy while they are pursuing liberation. We shall see Jacobs and Delany using this type of secrecy trickster storytelling trope later in this chapter.

**Trickster Overcomes Oppressive Forces Using His Wit**

African Americans told allegorical trickster stories about animal characters that use their wits to overcome the challenges they faced. One purpose for the oppressed vs. oppressor trickster tales is certainly internal, as a guide for humanistic living codes to be practiced among the group. But, also due to the dangerous and abusive circumstances of enslavement and the post-bellum era, African Americans couched trickster storytelling into resistance or escape terms that they hoped oppressors would not recognize. There is no fast or fixed profile for which type of animals are the oppressors or oppressed; they sometimes change positions depending on which message needed to be conveyed. It is the use of clever wit by one of the animals to avoid abuse or oppression that is the important aspect, not which animals play the parts. An example of this type of allegorical
tale from Georgia is “No Chicken Tonight” from the collection, *African American Folktales* (Abrahams 216 – 217).

Brer Fox had been trying his best to catch Brer Rabbit, but Brer Rabbit had craftily eluded capture for some time. Tired of being outwitted, Brer Fox hit upon a plan.

The next time Brer Fox saw Brer Rabbit coming down the road, he called out to him to stop and talk. Brer Rabbit said he was too busy; he agreed to have a conversation but advised Brer Fox to keep his distance. Brer Fox went on to explain that Brer Bear had chastised him for not maintaining a friendly relationship with his good friend. Brer Rabbit responded by inviting Brer Fox to his house to have dinner. Brer Fox gladly accepted.

The next day, Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit got up early, raided the garden, and prepared a fine meal for their expected guest. When Fox entered the yard, the Rabbit family sat down at the dinner table and waited for Brer Fox to make his presence known. However, Brer Fox did not knock on the door. Brer Rabbit spied Brer Fox’s tail sticking out from the corner of the house where he was lying in wait to pounce. However, Brer Rabbit did not fall for the ruse.

The next day, Brer Fox sent Mr. Mink around to Brer Rabbit’s house to deliver the lie that Brer Fox did not come to the house because he was sick. He also sent word for Brer Rabbit to come to his house for dinner that evening. Brer Rabbit agreed. When he arrived for dinner, Brer Rabbit heard moaning and saw Brer Fox sitting in a chair in his house wrapped up in a flannel throw and looking very weak. However, Brer Rabbit noticed Brer Fox had a dishpan and carving knife on the table with no sign of a prepared dinner anywhere.
Once inside the house, Brer Rabbit looked around at the arrangements and speculated that they must be having “chicken for dinner” to which Brer Fox confirmed that chicken was being served. Brer Rabbit said he had to have calamus root as a seasoning for the chicken and promptly dashed from the house and hid outside in the bushes to watch and see what Brer Fox would do. Brer Rabbit didn’t have long to wait for Brer Fox to reveal his intentions. Brer Fox quickly threw off the cover and crept outside of the house to the front yard. He found a hiding place in the shadows and crouched down to wait for Brer Rabbit’s return so he could pounce.

Brer Rabbit assessed the situation for a little while. Finally, he called out, “Oh, Brer Fox! I’ll just put your calamus root out here on this stump. You better come and get it while it’s fresh.” Brer Rabbit then galloped off home. (216 – 217)

As we shall see later in this chapter, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs uses this allegorical trickster theme of the weaker, oppressed figure, her, using her wits to out-think the oppressor, Flint, as she protects her family members, avoids personal calamity and death, escapes capture, runs away, and plans and executes strategies to remain free. These themes also appear in the actions of Clotel and her female relatives in William Brown’s novel *Clotel* although, strikingly, Brown’s black female characters are not as successful tricksters as Jacobs who mirrors the ending of “No Chicken Tonight” and gets away. Clotel and all but one of her relatives never escape which is a more realistic ending for an African American trickster tale based upon historical fact. Brown adjusts the folklore outcome to death, thereby actualizing the direst aspect of trickster possibilities: Trickster takes enormous risks against his or her foe, gets killed in the process and against classic trickster tradition, Trickster *does not* live or
experience a resurrection in order to learn a lesson or enact revenge. *Clotel* needs to be bi-classified as a new designation: the African American novel and allegorical trickster tragedy.

John and the Master Tales

African Americans certainly noticed the ignorance of or indifference towards African American cultural traditions and arrogance shown by the enslaving and post-bellum racist white community. African Americans told stories about the situations and the difficulties inherent in their relationships with this group of racist whites. “John”—or other single name monikers—is usually the name for the free or enslaved black male protagonist who is placed in a subordinate, unfair, or abused position in relationship to a white male. The white male antagonist is called “Massa, “Ole Massa,” “Marster,” “Mister,” “Boss”—or other internal monikers in a more modern age such as “The Man” or “Boss Man.” The female equivalent monikers “Misses,” “Miss Jane, etc.”—or post-enslavement internal monikers such as “Miss Ann,” “Boss Lady,” or “Missy.” Under the guise of humor, this class of tale highlights the black community’s enraged reactions to enslavement or discriminatory limitations and its willingness to confront injustice and often take dangerous steps to right wrongs. The stories’ situations are bitingly satirical and are designed to make a mockery of America’s racist practitioners and practices. Plot lines unveil the cruel actions of people who perpetrate wrongs. Black males are usually forced to engage in ridiculous behavior patterns in order to twist free of racist restraints.

Using humor, the stories, ironically, underscore the unfunny, terrible consequences enslavement and injustice have on the African American community. The white males, as enslavers or men with the power to wield unjust laws backing their
immoral behavior, display deeply flawed character traits such as, among others, dishonesty, greed, lust, sadism, and lying. The tales put selfish, cruel white males in charge of the destiny of black men, their families, and communities. Invariably, the plots, actions, and character choices are designed to show that black people are aware of the immoral and unjust behavior of white racists who are tormenting them; resentful of the laws or customs of the people and systems which are oppressing them; thinking about ways to undermine or limit the effects of racist injustice and cruelty; intent on seeking some type of redress for the wrongs done to them, even if the attempts only result in small victories or fail; and aware that subtle acts and subterfuge are weapons against oppressors and might have to suffice as temporary “satisfaction” until an oppressive system is destroyed.

The tales use humor as psychological combat techniques to bolster troop morale and encourage them to march one more day in the cause supporting political and social change. The stories are also told purely for internal African American amusement value; they are a way to laugh as folks put their shoulders to the grindstone of life’s struggles and ironies. The stories also might, if whites happen to overhear them and “get” the trick, surprise the enemy, put in a few well-placed mental licks, and bring “Massa” or “Mister” low for a time. On occasion, by storytellers pricking whites’ consciences, the hope is that the tales might change racist white people’s minds or alter their actions. This is the transformative project for such writers as William Wells Brown, Harriett Jacobs, Martin R. Delany, and Charles Chesnutt, who use African American trickster folklore in some of their writings.
In Zora Neale Hurston’s African American folklore collection, *Mules and Men*, she recorded a John and Master tale that has an enslaved man getting the best of “Ole Massa.” The tale relates how Ole John was enslaved and worked for Ole Massa, but the irony is that John had magical fortune-telling powers and used them to enrich himself at the expense of the white males in the near-by town who paid for John’s supernatural services. Ole Massa became extremely jealous of John’s wealth and devised various violent schemes to strip John of his goods. In jealous and envious rages, Ole Massa even sadistically killed John’s grandmother and his horse. Ole Massa even tried deceptives methods to kill John. However, John was too clever to fall for Massa’s plot to kill him by trapping John in a bag, throwing him into a river, and drowning him—from which John made a “magical” escape and appeared back alive even wealthier than before. Finally, John convinced Massa that he, too, could get wealthy if he let John tie him up in a bag and throw him into the river. John told Massa that method was how he had mysteriously acquired his latest haul of riches. Of course, the magical come-back-alive trick did not work for Massa, so John was able to rid himself of a cruel tyrannical oppressor.

There is an important supernatural element to this tale in that John is able to overcome his circumstances, even significantly improve them, using magic. John has power the white men do not have and for which they are even willing to pay John a great deal of money—their main currency of power. Due to injustice, John cannot wield power in the material world, so as a conjurer, he “seeks to accomplish practical objectives through appeals to the spirit world” (Anderson x). John is successful at gaining the resources white men are denying him and killing his sadistic master because his “mojo,” his “tricking” is strong (xi). We shall see the folklore theme of magic and the
supernatural included in *Clotel, Incidents, Blake*, and heavily used by Charles Chesnutt as a primary literary device in *The Conjure Woman*. Anderson explains that conjure’s “transformation from African religion to American magic made it into a microcosm of the African American experience that combined elements of loss with a persistent drive to survive in the face of persecution” (25).

Here is a different kind of “John and Mr.” trickster tale from *African American Folktales*. “Horses Stay Ourside” is a story of gross injustice and “persecution” where the black man does *not* prevail; he is double-teamed tricked by two white men—one being St. Peter!—out of his place in heaven. Historically, African American attempts at violent rebellion were not successful. Trickster tales where an enslaved man kills a master and gets away with it or even triumphantly, overtly outsmarts a white man and the white man knows it are rare. The allegory is more consistent with the type of masked messages in John and the Master tales. “Horses Stay Outside” is a particularly ironic commentary concerning the standard expectation that heaven is finally the place abused and oppressed African Americans can expect equal treatment in the eyes of God—or so they are told. It appears by the story’s existence, not every black person was convinced.

In “Horses Stay Outside,” a black man goes to Heaven by land and knocks on the door. St. Peter comes out and says, “Who is that?” The black man answers in trust, “This is me.” St. Peter asks him, “You riding or walking?” The black man answers, “I’m walking.” St. Peter responds, “Well, you can’t get in here unless you’re riding.”

The black man leaves and about five miles down the road, he meets up with a white man. The black man enquires, “Mr. White Man, where are you going?” The white man responds, “I’m going to Heaven.” Naively, the black man helpfully shares the
knowledge he’s gained, “You can’t get in there walking. I just left there. Let me be your horse and you get to a-straddle me and I’ll go riding and carry you up to Heaven. You knock on the gate. When St. Peter asks you who you are, you tell him it’s you, and he will say, ‘Both of you come on in.’”

The white man says, “All right, get down.” The white man straddles the black man. The black man goes running back up to Heaven with the white man on his back. When they arrive, the white man knocks on the door. St. Peter says, “Who is there?” The white man says, “This is me.” St. Peter asks, “Are you riding or walking?” The white man says, “Riding.” St. Peter says, “Well, hitch your damn horse outside and come on in.” *(African American Folktales 281 – 282)*

Being historically locked out of all avenues of equality and advancement for centuries did not prevent African American storytellers and authors from speaking out and writing about the injustices they saw or experienced.

I heard a “John and Master” tale, “Master Keeps His Word,” in the early 1970’s when I was a member of Temple University’s Black Student League. *(Appendix E).*

One collection of the most famous early African American trickster stories documented is the Uncle Remus tales Joel Chandler Harris says he collected from the formerly enslaved community. Harris greatly reinterpreted the stories for white sensibilities and need and published them in numerous volumes. *(The stories usually involve an animal who has resources for life and health and who encounters and dupes another animal that is much smarter and more astutely socially knowledgeable than the other one. In the Harris collection, Rabbit is often the trickster. He outsmarts Fox and takes his bag of freshly killed game in “Mr. Fox Goes A-Hunting but Mr. Rabbit Bags the*
Game” and tricks Sis Cow for milk in “Miss Cow Falls a Victim to Mr. Rabbit” in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*. Rabbit is relentlessly being hunted by Fox who single-mindedly seeks to kill him. He is also in a perpetual state of wrangling story-to-story with other animal community members for food and limited resources and, lacking fangs or claws, Rabbit is usually at a severe disadvantage concerning the likelihood of obtaining adequate sustenance for himself, his wife, and children. Therefore, Rabbit is notorious in the Uncle Remus collections for relying on his wits as a trickster method and weapon in the struggle for survival. The allegorical relationship of the stories of Rabbit’s struggle for survival to that of the real-life plight of the enslaved or destitute post-bellum African American community is obvious. On that score, sadly, the “authenticity” of the folklore’s message of one aspect of the African American experience of struggle cannot be questioned. The close interactive, interpersonal relationships among the animals are an African and African American storytelling trope that Harris encountered and preserved. “Uncle Remus,” the storyteller and “black man who knows his place, [and] never threatens” and his seven year old white child listener is Harris’s literary artifice, woven like white glue throughout the tales to hold the African American voice in place (Hemenway, “Introduction, 22).

Using tales, whose structure and purpose were imported from the African trickster storytelling tradition, African Americans commented on the immorality and greed of white captors or ruthless employers who forced African Americans to produce resources but who would not set them free or, if free, refuse to equitably share in the profits. The stories usually insult the oppressors' intelligence along the storytelling way. African American trickster stories, like the song lyrics, are linguistically cloaked, and the ones
that treat the horrific topic of being enslaved are, ironically, often funny because the
offenders are tricked and humiliated by characters that are in supposedly helpless,
subservient, and very vulnerable positions. Because plot lines manipulate characters and
outcomes so that the weak prevail over abuse and tribulation, the tales are emotionally
and psychologically satisfying for African American storytellers and their listeners.

The subversive tactics the characters employ against enslavement and for
autonomy are described in the sentiments and signals in the songs and tales and served
the black enslaved community in very complex ways. The messages in the oral medium
gave self-respect, dignity, hope, military tactics, emotional support and numerous other
liberating systems enslaved and free black people caught in limited circumstances could
employ to maintain sanity in an enslavement world turned topsy turvy.

The African American Literary Trickster Tradition and the Presence of Trickster in
Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter; Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By
Herself; and Blake, or the Huts of America.

Once African Americans began to write personal narratives and novels, the
African and African American trickster storytelling genre made its way into such texts as
William Wells Brown's novel, Clotel, or The President’s Daughter (1853); Harriet A.
Jacob's narrative, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself (1861); and
Martin R. Delany's novel, Blake or the Huts of America (serialized in parts, 1859 and
1861-2, first reprint 1970). Brown, Jacobs, and Delany’s works preserve the African
trickster heroic literary tradition as Trickster leaped shores from Africa to America to
reside in their African American texts. What makes these texts “African American” is
that Brown, Jacobs, and Delany introduce readers to heroes of African descent, real or
imagined against autobiographical or biographical experiences, which have their African
souls and memories intact enough to apply African American community soul force to the problem of combating nineteenth-century America’s legal, political, spiritual, and social oppression. The authors have what Sterling Stuckey calls “a lingering memory” that “enable[s] them…to include all [African Americans] in their common experience of oppression in North America” (4). 13 All three authors make a decision to write texts that demonstrate the commitment of their heroes to cooperative struggle, group survival, self-sacrifice and freedom delayed for the time it takes to ensure the liberation of others. All the major characters in the three books are clever, strong, and resourceful enough to figure out how they could leave everyone else behind and break for freedom. After all, it was certainly much easier to escape as an individual than to have to worry about the safety of people in your group. But, lighting out for individual freedom is not how Brown, Jacobs, or Delany crafted the heroic actions in their books. Their heroes are intelligent, noble, brave, and aggressive. The notable issue with understanding the authors’ projects is that they write about how nineteenth-century African American heroes approach and solve their epic challenges. Their heroes do it in an African-inspired trickster way. The African American characters in all three books, like most tricksters who are in need, run away, disguise themselves, hide, lie, and gender-switch. However, the African American epic trickster heroes in these works also gather intelligence, elicit support from the enemy’s camp, procure and use weapons, kill, build bunkers and hide-outs, carve out territory, raise troops, draw up battle plans, pass for white, mask themselves, and plot revenge. Brown, Jacobs, and Delany’s African American epic tricksters are versatile, insightful, cunning, and enraged avengers for justice. These authors—and we shall see the same trickster folklore pattern used by Chesnutt in The
*Conjure Tales*—engage in a joint literary mission to turn African American epic trickster heroes loose on American soil.

These three works contain at least four subtexts embedded inside the narrative plots---social, political, philosophical, and ethical. These subtexts reflect the continued use of the African and African American trickster tradition. This tradition includes at least two aspects: interrogation and subversion of oppression and its abuses and suggested behavior patterns and lessons that could be used to extricate African Americans from their dilemmas. More traditional narratives and fiction written at the time, while clearly reflecting the authors’ worldviews and history around them, did not tend to parallel the lives of those written about. As early African American writers wrote the trickster traditions into fiction and narratives, their work embodied and often paralleled their own lives. The three writers have the following backgrounds:

William Wells Brown’s first novel was *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter*, published in England in 1853. It is the first novel published by an African American. He was born enslaved in Lexington, Kentucky in 1814, but escaped to free Ohio in 1834. Once free in the North, he became a staunch abolitionist activist against enslavement and oppression as a prolific author, speaker, political agitator, Underground Railroad conductor, and community resistance organizer. He traveled to or lived in major northern American cities, the Caribbean, and several European capitals to agitate and speak against enslavement, attend abolitionist conferences, and raise funds for the cause. He taught himself in the field of medicine and operated a medical practice in Boston. Brown’s experiences gave him a unique insight into the mixed black and white issues and
the struggles African Americans experienced with enslavement which he addressed in *Clotel*. He died in Chelsea, Massachusetts in 1884.

Harriet Jacobs’s book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself*, published in 1861, was the first narrative written and published by an African American woman. Jacobs was born in 1813 in enslavement in North Carolina, but after enduring great hardships, she escaped to Philadelphia in 1842. After arriving in the North, Jacobs wrote extensively, engaged in abolitionist activities, and co-founded an abolitionist reading room and later an African American freedom school. She wrote and published an important autobiographical narrative of intelligence, determination, courage, fortitude, and sacrifice. Jacobs died in Washington, DC in 1897.

Martin R. Delaney’s book *Blake, or the Huts of America*, published in serial form between the years 1859 – 1862, was the first novel written by an African American to be published inside the United States. Delany was born free in 1812 to a free African American woman and an enslaved father, a man who later purchased his own freedom. *Blake* is notable for its African American hero who escapes enslavement, travels throughout the South and to foreign locales, and endorses and foments armed resistance and black self-determination as the solution to the enslavement problem in America and parts of the Diaspora. Delany was a prolific writer, newspaper owner, journalist, physician, soldier, and staunch abolitionist. He was one of the first black men accepted to Harvard Medical School. Many people consider him the theoretical father of Black Nationalism. He died in 1885 in Ohio.
In addressing each of the three texts, I will pay close attention to the four areas of
the social, political, philosophical and ethical arenas in which the authors utilize the
trickster position to subvert the American enslavement system.

The Presence of Trickster in William Wells Brown’s Novel, *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter*

On the surface, *Clotel*’s overt plot line uses conventional fictional narrative to tell
the tale of an enslaved half-black and half-white woman, Currer. The tale goes on to
center closely on her two mulatto daughters, Clotel and Althesa while more closely
interrogating enslavement with shorter embedded stories inside of the larger narrative.

The main plot of *Clotel* traces Currer, Clotel, and Althesa’s difficult journey
gripped in the bonds of American chattel slavery. The women suffer horribly in
enslavement and the novel is, appropriately, a tragedy. It is also crucial to understanding
*Clotel* that Brown publishes “a sketch of his life” he titles “Narrative of the Life and
Escape of William Wells Brown” as the entranceway to the reading of *Clotel*. He later
chronicles the close details of his tragic physical and social suffering in enslavement in
his full autobiography, *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave. Written By
Himself*, published in 1847. In the *Clotel* opening “sketch,” Brown writes about how “at
an early age [he] was separated from his mother” (77). In the later *Narrative*, he uses
stronger language and says he was “stole[n] as soon as [he] was born” by Dr. Thomas
Young. Like those he gives to his fictional *Clotel* heroines, Brown had a white father,
George Higgins (Brown, *Narrative*, 13).

Young made the horrendous decision to split up Brown’s family which consisted
of his mother and her six children. In Brown’s words of obvious agony, “My master sold
my mother, and all her children, except myself. They were sold to different persons in the
city of St. Louis” (Brown, *Narrative*, 26). Instead of being able to enjoy a stable and loving domestic experience with his mother and siblings, after several sales, Brown spent most of his youth in Missouri, hired out to work on steamships plying the Missouri River. Brown “establishes his narrative position as an authority who knows slavery from inside the institution” (Lewis, *Telling Narratives*, 39). The pain, anger, and suffering acutely alluded to in Brown’s narrative is echoed in the agonizing dialogue Delany writes for Henry Holland in *Blake* when Holland discovers his beloved wife, Maggie, has been sold South.

As Clotel and her daughters struggle mightily for freedom in the novel, it is a minor leap to make the metaphorical connection between Brown’s circumstances and those of his fictional characters. In the autobiographical “Sketch” that opens *Clotel*, Brown is interested in telling “secrets,” for “secrets are at the heart of African American narrative literature and are a legacy of slavery” (Lewis, *Telling Narratives*, 7). The “Sketch” is certainly a divulgence of the horrors contained in the underbelly of the enslaved South. With the conjoined autobiographical material and *Clotel*, truth, the enemy of “secrets,” is nestled in testimony alongside fiction. Brown’s methodology makes it much more difficult to read *Clotel* as merely an imaginative over-reaching abolitionist project. Brown most effectively rips the veil off of the vile face of slavery’s deceitful acts. By doing so, he is able to add a wider perspective to presenting a fictionalized presentation of the challenges under which the African American community had to live.

The other side of Brown’s literary project consists in notifying readers that African Americans endured and *resisted* enslavement, whether readers needed to hear it
through truth or fiction. He wanted readers, as Jacqueline Mattis points out, to “appreciate the political relevance of the daily, often furtive, acts of resistance undertaken by individual African American in their efforts to influence systems of power” (265).  

The trickster aspect, reflected in both Brown’s specific life activities and the wider behavior patterns of African American antebellum resistance, is a key critical analysis point to use when examining *Clotel*.

It is important in analyzing *Clotel* to appreciate that Brown was a free man living in the North when he wrote it, having audaciously escaped enslavement in January 1834. By 1836, he was living in Buffalo, New York, attending meetings of the Western New York Anti-slavery, delivering anti-slavery lectures, and boarding abolitionists and anti-slavery lecturers in his home. Brown outwitted pursuing enslavers and lived free for nine years from 1836 – 1845, working on a steamboat on Lake Erie. He assisted runaway blacks to escape to Buffalo, New York, Detroit, and Canada. Brown was a real-life rebellious “trickster” hero, taking the form of an abolitionist activist for freedom and Underground Railroad conductor. The novel is both an indictment of slavery’s terrors and a tribute to African American perseverance and liberationist activities.

As the novel unfolds, Brown draws upon his intimate knowledge of the patterns of behavior that were necessary for enslaved individuals to survive and defy enslavement. When examined below the surface of the *Clotel* narrative, Clotel’s primary mulatto characters’ responses to their enslaved condition provide much fodder for a trickster reading, which will be developed further below. The women of *Clotel* twist and turn with agitated chaffing and, as Brown and millions of African Americans did, the women apply a significant amount of resistance to their condition. Gates and McKay point out that
Brown “transforms [Clotel] into a combative trickster figure” and shows that Brown is “testing the limits of gender conventions in fiction” (*Norton* 160).  

Brown’s characters refuse to stay in the “places” the slave system has allotted for them, which is to function as docile objects of sexual enslavement desire. Judging from Brown’s characterizations, he is aware that “from the time of black women’s first appearance on the New World stage, [their] moral character was beleaguered by vituperative stereotypes,” so he takes literary steps to rectify the misperception (Weir-Soley, 12). The women are constantly setting in place rebellious schemes that will afford them some modicum of breathing space from oppression. This defiant movement by Clotel and her daughters belies the negative stereotype Brown wished to banish - that millions of enslaved black women, and by extended metaphor the entire enslaved black community, were too helpless, brutalized, or docile to take steps to help themselves.

The notable aspect of Brown’s writing that places *Clotel* in a unique literary category is that Brown writes in a very original form for an American novelist of his time. He employs three distinct literary genres inside *Clotel* – prose, poetry, and African and African American-inspired trickster storytelling. Brown uses the trickster tradition to illustrate and punctuate the veracity concerning the horrors of his characters’ lives in slavery. He transforms the traditional novel’s style, breaking up the standard paragraph prose structure by inserting poetry, stories, and African American tales of enslavement resistance. These inserted stories lie just below the surface of the larger thread of the *Clotel* narrative and testify in ways that contain African and African American oral storytelling trickster tropes.
Brown’s trickster storytelling insertions serve as the necessary proof for his claims about his heroines’ complicated and dire circumstances. Clearly, for Brown, the unbroken structure of the novel genre is not a clear, forceful enough voice to speak for the African American enslavement condition. An older, wiser, and more powerful voice, which is that of the African American Trickster, must speak from the secreted places in which Trickster dwells in the smaller stories to help free the women from the tighter constraints of the more formal novel’s structure. These inserted storytelling moments connect Brown to the African and African American trickster tradition of critiquing the abusive use of power, passing wisdom through storytelling, and seeking to transform behavioral codes through verbal moral persuasion. He highlights in detail the actions of the villains and the heroic counter maneuvers used by members of the oppressed community to outwit the oppressors.

Obviously and understandably outraged by the many and varied insults of enslavement, Brown drops trickster stories, which are like moralizing nuggets of African and African American wisdom, into Clotel’s overarching narrative, nudging readers to enter into a contemplative moral space. The shorter tales within the larger narrative issue an additional moral punch to the intellect to prevent anyone reading from slipping into a predictable romantic romp through a tragic mulatto tale. Brown presents a novel, with the internal stories woven in as further proof of the larger work’s argument that slavery ensnares, destroys, mutilates, negatively alters, or taints its captured population and its enslavers, and perpetuates a web of murder, violence, betrayal, deceit, subterfuge, moral decay, and lost or stolen dreams.
In short, Brown writes about an institution filled with vile trickery of every variety. *Clotel’s* characters definitely act to seek their freedom, so the over-arching plot does drive his outrage at enslavement. But, it is the embedded stories that allow Brown to serve as an African storyteller on American soil and to detail more fully enslavers’ gross physical and mental tortures, to tell the stories he did not, perhaps had rather not, or even *dared not*, place inside the larger tragic mulatto tale.

Why embed more graphic depictions of the horrors of enslavement inside what is already tragic enough tales of the misfortunes of stunningly beautiful and talented women brought down by evil forces arrayed against them? *Clotel* is, if nothing else, a very clear moral narrative with a message that enslavement is monstrous and has very negative consequences for the women – the forces of enslavement drive most of them to tragic, violent, and youthful deaths. But Brown is not satisfied with this predictable conclusion, for there are hallmarks of the novel that drive home the point that he does not want readers to miss the women’s and other characters’ trickster machinations against enslavement and dismiss the novel as being solely romantic fiction. Towards this end, Brown embeds short grisly stories within the larger *Clotel* women’s story of the tortures of enslavement and the resistance black characters mount to it. This strategy forces readers to confront all manner of harsh enslavement realities, in case the story of the tragic plight of lovely mulatto women is not enough to convince them of the expanded horrors enslaved men and women faced.

In key subsections, Brown serves as an African American voice of protest and tells stories in a voice synonymous with the type of “Hear me, hear me tell a story” griot cry present in African and transplanted African American trickster storytelling. With his
novel not only reflecting reality but reporting on it as well, he narrates the real-life story of a runaway male slave who is the object of “a slave hunt [which ] took place near Natchez, a few days after Currer’s arrival [in the town]…” (132).

Brown quotes a Natchez newspaper, a *Free Trader* article about of the murder of a fugitive enslaved man once he is caught by a lynch mob of pursuing white males. He relates the grisly, disturbing details of the Natchez lynching, relating that the black man’s body is entirely “consumed” by fire to the point of non-existence, which is a strong metaphor for the disappearance of African American freedom, humane social bonds, and all proportions of equal justice. And, of course, the disappearance can be physical, mental, or social, depending on the nature and extent of the “lynching.”

At the conclusion of the *Free Trader* accounting, Brown asserts that, “[n]early 4,000 slaves were collected from the plantations in neighborhoods to witness this scene” and “[n]umerous speeches were made by the magistrates and ministers of religion to the large concourse of slaves, warning them, and telling them that the same fate awaited them, if they should prove rebellious to their owners” (134). This is the point in Brown’s testimony when Brown (who, remember, is dangerously writing from within the timeframe of enslavement) informs readers, with a clear sense of pride, that enslaved black people are, indeed, “rebellious. There are hundreds of [N]egroes who run away and live in the woods. Some take refuge in the swamps…” (134).

Brown’s boastful assertion that there are numerous runaways is borne out by thousands of runaway slave newspaper advertisements, the enactment and enforcement of fugitive slave laws, and the presence and employment of heavily armed “pattyrollers.” The necessity of the brutal breaking-in process and subsequent, constant violent ill-
treatment of slaves signifies that African Americans resisted enslavement at every juncture in the process. To do this, they used clever, subversive trickster techniques as well as open rebellion methods. It is with a closer trickster reading of *Clotel*, as well as of *Incidents*, and *Blake*, that many of these understudied, hidden trickster intents and resistant techniques come to light.

Continuing with his use of factual testimony to the horrors of enslavement, nestled within the trickster stories in the larger *Clotel* narrative, Brown quotes a December 6, 1838 *Vicksburg Sentinel* article that chronicles the story of “the hiding-place of a slave who had been captured” (135). He states that a “runaway’s den” was accidentally discovered by whites (135). According to the narrative meaning, the runaways, a black couple, were clever enough to conceal their whereabouts very “artfully” (135). The couple devised a home setting hidden in an underground bunker and stocked it with household items. They carved out a space and place where they could freely live as a domestic couple. Brown highlights the difficult task of maintaining positive, stable domestic ties in enslavement, and the drastic extent to which enslaved men and women went to have them, including running away, is one of the crucial issues Brown raises. The denial of natal bonds was one of the most strictly enforced aspects of American enslavement. Enslavers would read the couple’s capture as a triumph. However, black readers would also note that, if successful, running away could result in domestic possibilities. The trick is to not get caught.

This tale is also Brown’s contribution to debunking stereotypes of the passive, ignorant slave, content with his or her lot, incapable, unimaginative, or unwilling to break free of the confines of enslavement. However, Brown is also honest, stating that runaway
attempts, like his and his mother’s real-life efforts, do not always have flawless happy endings. Running away during enslavement was extremely difficult and rife with failed attempts. In the story, only one runaway, the woman, escaped. In Brown’s case, when he ran away, he had to leave his mother behind in a state of enslavement.

Obviously, in general, escaping enslavement by running away was complicated, fraught with danger, and, sadly, as with the article’s couple, could be heroically tragic. One of the behavioral traits of tricksters involves running away. They escape the source of oppression or pain by distancing themselves from the field of play. When this runaway strategy is applied in real life as it was during enslavement, the stakes rise to the level of life and death - the same as it does with Trickster. Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins share that “[s]lave flight evolved into a complex and arduous maneuver for freedom and manhood. It involved scheming, evasive actions, shifting tactics, and a well-thought-out consideration of the gains and losses involved, as complex as any military procedure. In other words, running away was not easy.” (8)

Black readers, although surely saddened by a tale of lost opportunity for the black male to escape, would have “heard” the tale’s ending differently from many whites. Stories about attempts to run away signaled that “slaves and free people in the Americas, against all odds kept alive the will to survive” (Hine and Jenkins 2). For many black readers, a runaway tale signaled that the spirit of freedom was alive and well in the African American soul. The irony is that many of Brown’s white readers would have likely missed one of Trickster’s tricks that, when killed, Trickster always rises from the grave. As Hine and Jenkins explain, “[B]lack people did not let centuries of enslavement kill their hopes for freedom” (2). The African American trickster endured.
As we shall see, *Incidents* and *Blake* also have a runaway theme involving the principal characters making multiple bids for freedom and enduring failed attempts until most of them are finally successful. This type of obstinate behavior, the refusal to submit to oppression or confinement, is a trait of the self-determined African and African American trickster bent upon having things turn out his or her way - or die trying.

One of the crucial purposes of *Clotel* is that Brown wants readers to appreciate that “[n]o country has produced so much heroism in so short a time, connected with escapes from peril and oppression, as has occurred in the United States among fugitive slaves, many of whom show great shrewdness in their endeavors to escape from this land of bondage” (211). Since this is the case, in Chapter xix, “Escape of Clotel,” Brown writes about William and Clotel’s daring trickster escape where Clotel “assume[s] the disguise of a gentleman” and William disguises himself as Clotel’s servant (214). The larger Clotel narrative of trickster gender-switching, masking, and nail-bitingly dangerous actions by Clotel and William is a brilliant fictional re-working of Ellen and William Craft’s real-life harrowing slave escape. However, what is more subtle is Brown’s Trick with a Pig storytelling opening that presages Clotel and William’s narrative.

**Trick with a Pig**

Before he springs the narrative of how Clotel and William pull the wool over enslavement’s smug white participants’ eyes, Brown relates a tale about an ordinary, unarmed slave’s triumphant trickster behavior over oppression. The story is about “[a] slave [who] was one day seen passing on the high road from a border town in the interior of the state of Virginia to the Ohio River (211). In other words, Brown is telling a pre-tale
of the cunning trickster’s escape, implying that Clotel and William are not the only ones capable, desirous, or daring enough to come up with clever ruses to escape enslavement.

The black man in Brown’s opening tale feigned that he was a faithful slave who “…was driving before him a very nice fat pig, and appeared to all who saw him to be a laborer employed on an adjoining farm” (211). The coded and loaded word is “appeared,” for knowledgeable black readers would suddenly be on the inside of the joke. They would know that Brown is saying whites cannot see past black appearances in order to afford blacks equal rights and justice. Black readers know that the enslaved man is engaging in a trick, and Brown lets blacks in on the trick early with a chuckle, because he begins the particular story with the enslaved man walking to freedom right under whites’ noses, writing that the man is “passing on the high road to the Ohio River” (211). The enslaved man has the moral “high road” a euphemism for the moral righteousness of his position and for the high intelligence that makes him clever enough to execute a trick to get past the barriers of enslavement.

Brown is writing a John and Master tale and ensures his hero’s triumphs are all the more impressive by making sure he is sufficiently humble. The trickster “[has] neither hat upon his head or coat upon his back,” so Brown lets readers know the black man, like many traditional African and African American tricksters, has no weapons at his disposal except his wits (211). So, in the first two sentences, the tale sets up a clever, unarmed enslaved man poised to outsmart white males all the way from Virginia to Ohio. The gist of the trick is that because whites miss that the slave is an intelligent person, the slave is able to walk a pig all the way to Ohio without being caught.
Brown has “a white man” stupidly ask the slave about his movements and admire the pig, never realizing that the slave is simply walking to freedom right under the white man's nose. Of course, making a fool out of Master is the point of traditional *John and Master* trickster stories. The slave and the pig “travelled more than fifty miles” with the slave meeting duped white men who stopped him to ask, “Where do you live, my boy?” and stupidly let him go when the slave answered, “Jist up de road, sir” (211). The enslaved man, the Trickster, walks the pig all the way to freedom right under the masters’ noses using just his wits and daring.

Brown tells this trickster tale as his entrance into *Clotel’s* larger continuing female trickster saga. Brown is not satisfied with one *John and Master* tale chronicling the smart, successful slave’s persistence against oppression.

**Trick with a Horse**

Right after Brown tells the *Trick with a Pig* story, he launches directly into another story I will call *Trick with a Horse*: “A few weeks later, and [certainly with deliberate irony] on the same road, two slaves were seen passing; one was on horseback, the other was walking before him with his arms tightly bound, and a long rope leading from the man on foot to the one on horseback” (211-12). As per the codes of African American trickster expectations, sure enough, white males suspiciously stop the black pair as they travel, along “the road” to liberation. When a white male asks the mounted black man if he is shuttling “a runaway rascal,” the rider answers, “[Y]es, sir, he bin runaway, and I got him fast” (212). Of course, the people who have been “got” are the white males gullible enough to be fooled by the ruse. Brown rubs the stupidity in by having a white “farmer” examine the horse, rider, and roped man situation and comment,
“You are a trustworthy fellow, I imagine” (212). The rider solemnly answers, “Oh yes, sir; marser put a heap of confidence in dis nigger” (212). The trickster inference, of course, is that the farmer, representing Southern white manhood, should “trust” black men, but they do not. So, for the purposes of John outwitting Marster, and Brown reinforcing the concept that white America is blind to the character and quality of black men, the farmer is incapable of understanding the reality that is staring him in the face.

Brown steps outside the direct story and gives readers a name for this particular dupe. He writes that “this they called ‘ride and tie’ (212). The “they” who named the trick isn’t clear. However, African American readers would certainly find it ironic that the farmer placed his faith and trust in the black man only when his actions reinforced the image the white man wished to see. Brown wants to make sure white readers are clear that behavior such as that demonstrated in the “ride and tie” is not just the stuff of fiction, and that African Americans resisted their condition, using the best means they had at their disposal.

Brown marches the trickster heroes towards freedom and tells readers that the two men nearly reach Canada. This would be the triumphant happy ending but, unfortunately, enslavement is much too complicated a predicament for the heroes to overcome by one masking trick. Before they reach Canada, the men encounter slave catchers. The tale’s heroes must face continued challenges to their success and persevere onward, which are signals to both African American and white readers, just for different educational reasons. One of the men is captured, tortured until he reveals his master’s name and location, and then chained in a room with the enslavers overnight. The whites are overjoyed at the prospect of collecting a significant reward and celebrate themselves into
an alcohol stupor. But, in their revelry and stomach-turning celebrating, they underestimate the intelligence of their captive. This sets up the trickster dynamic.

The black man assesses his situation, finds the padlock key in the pants of one of his captors, and frees himself. He can easily climb out the window while the white males are in a total stupor, but he pauses. He is bitter about his inhumane treatment, so he decides to enact a trick upon his tormentors. He “undressed himself,” literally and figuratively divesting himself of his slave trappings (213). He took the clothes of one of the white males, “claiming them as symbols of free men and prosperity” (213). Once he has reclaimed his dignity and self-respect, the black man finally climbed out the window to freedom. As a result of his intelligence, daring, bravery, patience, and planning, “he was on the high road to Canada,” re-dressed and camouflaged as a trickster figure liberated by his wits and wiles.

The Historical Trick of “Gradual Emancipation”

Trickster resistance swirls and dances in and around Clotel. Brown explains the trickster presence with, “Slavery is a school in which its victims learn much shrewdness” (Clotel, 218). And, for the benefit of Northern white readers’ education, Brown points out that “even the slave who escapes from the Southern plantations, is surprised when he reaches the North, at the amount and withering influence of this prejudice” (Clotel, 218). As a free black abolitionist living in the North, Brown was in a prime position to make this rather unflattering observation about northern sensibilities, or the lack thereof. The fact was that black people in the northern states, although those states had emancipated their slaves by the time Brown wrote Clotel, were still struggling with general white attitudes that had not arrived in the racial arena where whites had truly embraced blacks
as equals. For instance, in the nation’s first capital, Philadelphia, and in the state of Pennsylvania, slavery was the law all the way until the unethical and deceptive wording of “An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery” passed in February 1780. Since all slaves who were alive in Pennsylvania, about 6,000 at the time, had to remain slaves after the act was passed, the word “gradual” had significant meaning. The act also had a caveat that stated that any child born on that date had to remain a slave for 28 years after the act was set in place. This meant that an African American baby born in Philadelphia at that time would have to wait until 1808 to be free. Pennsylvania set the “gradual” tenor and tone.

In New York State, Brown’s home after he freed himself, legislators passed a July 4, 1799 version of a “gradual abolition” law based on the Pennsylvania model. New York kept males enslaved until 28 and females until 25. Anyone who was an enslaved person before July 4, 1799 remained a slave for life. The “trick” in the statute’s wording for a child born during the close period was that the documents described the child as being a “Servant” for the legal period and, by force, bound by “Service.” Black people were still legally toiling away in involuntary servitude in New York State by as late as 1827. So although slavery had been legally terminated by the time Brown arrived in the North in 1834, it was just barely gone. Hugh Davis explains the political and social situation Brown so aptly describes:

A half century after the American Revolution, slavery had nearly disappeared in the North. Yet legal freedom seldom translated into fundamental rights and opportunities for blacks. Comprising only a small fraction of the northern population, they confronted pervasive and deep-seated racial prejudice among whites, who tended to favor colonization, expulsion, or segregation for African Americans. (6)
Nestled inside Brown’s African American trickster storytelling are the kernels of racial commentary and wisdom that were necessary for many members of a nineteenth-century white American reading audience, north and south, to contemplate and digest concerning the insult and injury many black Americans experienced. The issue of assisting southern and northern audiences with recognizing their humanistic responsibilities towards African Americans is a primary theme that runs through Charles Chesnutt’s short story collection, *The Conjure Woman*, which, as we will see in the next chapter, moves Brown’s conversation further along to explore the post-Reconstruction, Jim Crow era.

Brown returns to the primary *Clotel* narrative line with the tragic death of Althesa from yellow fever and the equally tragic suicide of Clotel’s granddaughter, Ellen, “who had been bartered away like cattle in Smithfield market” (248). In her depression and distress, Ellen kills herself by ingesting poison. Jane’s death comes next due to the shock of having her lover, Volney Lupac, murdered in front of her. The man who kills Lupac out of cruelty and jealously had originally purchased Jane and imprisoned her in an “upper chamber” of his home where Jane had to bear “a daily visit from her master…” (249). Ellen’s imprisonment in a “chamber” and sexual harassment and abuse are African American women’s enslavement themes that Jacobs more fully fleshes out in *Incidents*.

Clotel arrives in Richmond, Virginia unaware of the tragic family deaths, still seeking Mary. However, Clotel’s search is stymied because a disturbance breaks out among the slave population and all strangers became the focus of attention. By locating Clotel in Richmond during a rebellion, Brown is able to imbed Nat Turner’s rebellion, one of the most famous examples of African American resistance.
The Legend of Picquilo

Brown merges the larger female tragic mulatto narrative with the male story of Turner, “a full-blooded negro,” and Picquilo, another “large, tall, full-blooded negro,” with a stern and savage countenance… (253). While Clotel risks certain death, bravely re-entering the jaws of the South on a rescue mission to find and save her female relatives, the book’s mulattoes are not the only resisting community. Brown points out that “Full-blooded” blacks are also plotting liberation. In highlighting the cooperation of all color, class, and gender segments of the enslaved community in violent and non-violent trickster resistance, Brown anticipates the more widely explored theme of Delany’s novel, Blake, as we shall see.

Brown has Turner link up with Picquilo who bears “Marks on his face [that] show he [is] from one of the…tribes of Africa” (253). Picquilo’s “only covering was a girdle around his loins, made of skins of wild beasts which he had killed; his only token of authority among those that he led, was a pair of epaulettes made from the tail of a fox, and tied to his shoulder by a cord”(253).

To show that Picquilo retained his cultural memory of Africa and African traditions, Brown informs readers that Picquilo was “[b]rought from Africa when only fifteen years of age to the island of Cuba,” and “was smuggled form thence to Virginia” (253). It is noteworthy that Picquilo was “smuggled” illegally by white slave traders into the U.S. after slavery importation became illegal. He resided as a free man for “two years in the swamps” (253). The reference is to the Great Dismal Swamp, located in Virginia and North Carolina. Thousands of free and escaped slaves lived there primarily during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1856, three years after Clotel was published in
1853, Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Dred; Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*. Dred, the protagonist, is an angry, formerly enslaved man, and lives in the “Maroon” Dismal Swamp community. Dred, like Picquilo, leaves the swamp to make violent combat sorties out into enslavement locations to rescue black men and women in peril or to exact revenge for enslavement wrongs.

Picquilo’s story is of autonomy, cultural continuity, and brotherhood, in contrast to Turner’s dire predicament which caused him to foment open rebellion. The setting and metaphor of the swamp as both locations for living safely in freedom, metaphorically representing the state of slavery’s deadly morass, and offering a cloak for violent excursions to fight enslavement is used in *Clotel, Incidents*, and *Blake*. That a swamp can stand for several figurative and literal literary allusions is one of the strange, tragic ironies of enslavement that Brown, Jacobs, and Delany are able to capture.

The legend of Picquilo states that "He had met a [N]egro woman who was also a runaway; and, after a fashion of his native land, had gone through the process of oiling her as the marriage ceremony” (253). Picquilo and his wife built a home in the swamp, for Stuckey points out that “for decades before and generations following the American Revolution, Africans engaged in religious ceremonies in their quarters and in the woods unobserved by whites” (24). However, the married couple’s narrative is stunningly antithetical to the fate of the mulatto characters in *Clotel*’s main plot. Picquilo escapes detection, lives free, has status and prestige, marries, and has a stable home. He finds a place of safety among comrades and carries a weapon, “a sword, made from the blade of a scythe,” which was punishable by death outside the Dismal Swamp (253). Clotel, Alethesa, Ellen, and Jane’s light complexions and beauty exacerbate their circumstances
and more rapidly push them into the darkness of slavery’s worst nightmare for women, forced to become unwilling concubines.

The sunlight of Picquilo’s circumstances emanates from his “full-blooded” dark-skinned status and embracing of “his dress, his character, his manners, his mode of fighting, [all of which were] … in keeping with the early training he had received in the land of his birth [Africa]” (253). Brown describes Picquilo as “a bold, turbulent spirit; and from revenge imbrued his hands in the blood of all the whites he could meet” (253). Even buried as an insert in a novel about the tragic demise of lovely mulatto women trapped in enslavement, Brown’s non-condemning or at least matter-of-fact account of Picquilo’s blood-lusted “revenge” killings of whites stands out.

Hunger, thirst, fatigue, and loss of sleep, he seemed made to endure as if by peculiarity of constitution. His air was fierce, his step oblique, his look sanguinary. Such was the character of one of the leaders in the Southampton insurrection. (254)

There isn’t any subtlety in Brown’s admiration of Picquilo’s “character” and boldness, as a rebellious, valiant resisting force. What women could not do, Brown created Picquilo to do. In Picquilo’s story, Brown wrote coded messages concerning what he thought black men of “bold, turbulent spirit” ought to be doing.

Unlike Picquilo, as per expectations for nineteenth-century genteel “ladies,” Brown does not arm Clotel and her female relatives. They do not hide guns or knives in the folds of their clothing and take violent vengeance against their transgressors. Brown does not even suggest that they are thinking such thoughts. But, inside the guise of the larger story-telling framework, and not even with the use of subtle irony, Brown presents readers with the kind of black male hero who will, can, and does take violent action against enslavement. Brown’s insertion of a Nat Turner-like rebel hidden under the veil
of the trickster Picquilo’s story informed his readers that there were many more “Nat Turners” out there with violent and justified vengeance on their minds. Brown informs readers, in case they did not know, that there were black resistors who were not unarmed, caged, or helpless mulatto women.

Brown winds up Clotel’s daring attempt to locate Mary with Clotel’s audaciously successful escape from prison when she “suddenly darted past her keeper, and ran for her life” (257). Brown has the female protagonists in Clotel evincing evasive and subversive behavior patterns, eluding and tricking the enslavement and its proponents. Clotel and her family members are wily tricksters, but realistically, facing superior forces allied against their ultimate success. One level of Brown’s triumph in Clotel is reflected in the women's effort to be free, but the ignoble irony lies in the fact that mid-nineteenth century enslavement standards dictated black women had to make the effort at all.

The important work Brown is able to accomplish in Clotel is to reveal, through the indomitable spirit of the multiple black characters he presents, the courage, fortitude, determination, inventiveness, and intelligence African Americans brought to bear on resisting their enslavement circumstances. Brown testifies in his 1897 post-war Narrative that “During a residence of eight years in this city, numerous cases of extreme cruelty came under my own observation;--to record them all, would occupy more space than could possibly be allowed in this little volume” (Brown, Narrative, 28). Of course, the implication is that in the 1897 autobiography, he is asking readers in the age of Jim Crow to ponder just how many monstrous enslavement acts had been committed in Clotel and the prior 200 years. Brown demands that people of conscience contemplate the extent to which past bad acts inform African American circumstances in their present. Of course,
people of foresight and vision, then and now, would and will consider how the messages in the autobiography and novel require deep humanitarian consideration at any time in the course of history.

The Presence of Trickster in Harriet Jacobs’s Narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself*

> Who can blame slaves for being cunning. They are constantly compelled to resort to it. It is the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of their tyrants.
> Harriet Jacobs

The broad details of the American slavery system were known both in the past and in the 21st century. But the day-to-day experiences of particular people were—and still are—unknown to many Americans. Some epic resistance struggles, for example the actions of Anne Frank during the World War II Holocaust as a prisoner for two years in a blocked-off attic, are well known from both her diary and from films about her. Frank has become an iconic figure for human struggle. By retrospective contrast, however, the story of Harriet Jacobs’s perseverance and resistance, imprisoned in a tiny crawl space for nearly seven years, was little known until publication of her autobiographical narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself*; and, the details are still not widely known to this day. As a work of pre-Civil War literature, *Incidents* serves as a “bridge” between publications trying to eliminate slavery and those that came later, for example those of Charles Chesnutt, who served to enlighten people about the post-Reconstruction era of segregation.

Jacobs begins her life behind a veil of innocence concerning her bondage. She lives with her parents in “a comfortable home” that she writes is an illusion and she eventually is appalled to discover that she “[is] a piece of merchandise” that has only
been “trusted to [her parents] for safe keeping….“(5). For Jacobs, this shocking discovery that she is enslaved—not a free person, as she thinks—is a betrayal of the first order.

The enslaved woman’s sexual plight is the central running theme of *Incidents*. Jacobs's narrative shows that enslaved black women are suffering in a particularly sexually abusive manner. Stephanie Li in *Something Akin to Freedom* highlights the plight of African American women in enslavement, explaining that a “gendered perspective helps us to recognize the added burdens slave women confronted, burdens that significantly impacted the nature of their resistance to bondage, and allows us to examine critically the type of choices they made” (9). Li’s book is an examination of the choices some enslaved African American women made to remain enslaved versus run away. Li makes the observation that “the development of a home space is crucial to understanding the goal of freedom expressed by many slaves, both male and female. I seek to chart a tradition of women who defined the goal of freedom as one involving the preservation and development of family and social bonds” (Li 8). Jacobs makes the decision to remain and “preserve” her “family and social bonds” at great personal sacrifice, physical discomfort, and the possibility of facing death or severe bodily harm if she is discovered.

Jacobs’s narrative bears witness to floggings, whippings, lies, betrayals, abusive language, sexual exploitation, natal separation, and public auctions that are inflicted on Jacobs or her fellow enslaved community members. She makes sure that through her narrative testimony, their voices are also heard. Like African tricksters of old and the New World African American adaptations of trickster behaviors, Jacobs assumes the power to alter her situation. She uses the medium of culturally-infused narrative trickster
storytelling to unveil the acts of betrayal, telling of lies, and forcing of people into lives of uncertainty that were battering rams of enslavers’ cruel methods. For Jacobs, it was a delicate cultural and moral balancing act she had to maintain with her nineteenth-century readers. The material she was presenting was very violent and sexually-charged. Jacobs narrative writing strategy meant, as Miranda A. Green-Barteet correctly argues in “The Loophole of Retreat,” that Jacobs “can argue against slavery and challenge the nineteenth-century domestic ideologies that did not account for enslaved women without offending her audience” (55). I argue that how Jacobs accomplishes this delicate feat of telling her story “without offending her audience” is her astute use of African American allegorical trickster storytelling strategies that have a long history that is traceable back to Africa, of informing audiences of unpleasant political, social, and ethical “truths” in covert ways that directly spare listeners’ delicate feelings.

For some enslavers, exemplified by Flint’s behavior towards Jacobs, physically whipping or maiming women were not always optimal tactics of subjugation if the aim was to keep enslaved people in physically healthy shape. Rather twisting their minds with psychologically cruel tactics served to preserve the strength of the body but weaken the will by inflicting mental and emotional pin. Psychology as a discipline did not exist at that time, but contemporary words which could describe the activities of the enslavers would include such words as “sadistic,” “anti-social/psychopathic disorder,” “non-empathetic,” etc., crossing psychological boundaries which in “normal” circumstances would not be tolerated. Jacobs refers to this contradictory way of living when speaking of Flint’s trying to hide his sexual activities with her from his wife and the rest of the community—because he knows he is crossing unacceptable personal boundaries.
What makes *Incidents* unique is that Jacobs is the first American woman to combine the narrative form with African and African American trickster storytelling techniques in writing. She uses the narrative form to inform readers *that* and *how* she and her female relatives suffer terribly in enslavement. She employs trickster storytelling techniques for relating the details concerning the *methods* she uses to resist and escape her particular suffering in enslavement. *Incidents* is an African American trickster tale threaded within and throughout the narrative, the two forms fused into a new literary form detailing the manner in which Jacobs endures and resists enslavement, frees herself and her children, and goes onward to live and contribute her special gifts to the world.

*Incidents* is very different from William Well Brown’s earlier project with *Clotel* because Jacobs remains primarily focused on this feminist theme, whereas, Brown uses embedded trickster storytelling to widen the feminist critique to include a nearly balanced examination of the plight and responses of enslaved men as well as women. Jacobs’s autobiographical political mission to unveil black women’s struggle with sexual abuse has her marching her pen straight forward with primary purpose. *Incidents* also differs from *Clotel’s* storyline in that Jacobs’s trickster strategies result in her compete and total freedom in the end, whereas, *Clotel’s* female protagonists struggle mightily and nobly under Brown’s pen, but full emancipation in the bright sunlight of a free state eludes them. Brown’s project is still admirable, of course. He crafts a resistance trickster tale for his primary female characters that rises to epic nobility with the *efforts* they make to free themselves.

Jacobs accomplishes the liberationist task of freeing herself in spite of superior, armed forces arrayed against her and the overwhelming odds against her success. She has
the might of the laws and social practices of the entire southern portion of the United States legally arrayed against her, so she has to outwit and out-maneuver millions of men and women who are enforcing a 200-year entrenched system of oppression. She also has to flawlessly negotiate judging which minds, hearts, and intents of Northerners to trust with the safety of her eventual freedom or she would find herself, like many of her kinsmen, imprisoned and dragged back to the South in chains. The Fugitive Slave Act was passed on September 18, 1850 which worried Jacobs enough that she fled to New York City first to hide, then on to Massachusetts where she was offered sanctuary. Jacobs was not free from capture in the North until 1852 when Cornelia Grinnell Willis of New York paid $300 to free Jacobs from bondage.

Even though Jacobs is unable to develop fully the family she originally aspires to have, she does have two children to whom she is so devoted, she refuses to escape when she can. There is also the issue that some women, and men, were not healthy or physically sound enough to walk or run to freedom. Understandably, they had to employ another form of resistance that was “the most common form of absconding [which] was not actually running away at all, but what might be termed truancy, absenteeism, and in some cases lying out” (Franklin and Schweniger 23). In keeping with Li’s insightful reasoning to explain why Jacobs voluntarily hides in an unbearably tiny crawlspace to contemplate her battle plan, she is using African-inspired African American trickster community reasoning. Jacobs’s project is to get her and her children out and she is not leaving until her plan of action has a reasonable chance of succeeding with a larger community effort.
Jacobs is fortunate—she escapes—but her desire to place the “preservation and development of family” as her first priority explains why Jacobs spends nearly seven years in that attic. It takes that long for her to figure out how she is going to get her family members out. Li’s theoretical point, and Jacobs’s metaphorical one, is that for millions of enslaved African American women, they chose to spend a lifetime in Jacobs’s metaphorical attic of enslavement for the sake of having a “home space,” what Orlando Patterson calls “natal ties.” Some enslaved women, and men, made the choice to delay leaving enslavement until it was feasible for a group of people to get out. Li argues that scholars should reconsider choices like these in the light of other choices she terms in her book title, *Something Akin to Freedom* (Li). Jacobs makes the decision to risk capture rather than break natal ties with her children as she plots her bid for freedom. But, it is not enough for Jacobs that readers find out that enslaved black women are trapped in a sexual hell not of their making, which would have shocked many of her nineteenth century white female readers. In addition to this revelation, Jacobs informs readers that enslaved individuals are intelligent enough to strategize and courageous enough to execute dangerous escape plans, and once free, they are clever—tricksters—enough not to get caught again. She writes about how she contributed socially and politically to society once she arrived in the North which highlights the humanistic tragedy and waste involved in enslaving brilliant and productive women and men. Her book is an indictment of American enslavement with a gendered focus on the particular suffering of women, but it is also a wider humanitarian project.

There was already a mid-nineteenth century “listening” audience in place who could and would have likely been very interested in reading Jacobs’s triumphant
narrative. She was, after all, the first African American woman at the time to write and publish a narrative about enslavement and escape, and narratives or news of this nature were popular reading topics for black and white people with abolitionist interests. There were scores of narratives of enslavement published as books, pamphlets, or in newspapers prior to *Incidents*, but although extremely important documents, they were stories primarily transcribed by whites. From among the self-written African American males’ narratives, Jacobs’s is notable because her book was the first one written “by herself.” That a black reading public was present to receive *Incidents* is evidenced by the fact that beginning as early as 1827, “antebellum free Negroes established thirty-two newspapers in the North and one periodical in the South (the *New Orleans L’Album Litteraire*)” (Berry and Blassingame, 63). The number of subscribers, both black and white, for Frederick Douglass’s *Douglass’ Monthly Magazine* which began publishing in 1858 was between 3,000 to 4,500 spanning eighteen states and two foreign countries (Berry and Blassingame, 63). Although a black and white reading public was in place for Jacobs’s writing and the book received favorable reviews by the antislavery press, *Incidents* came out the year the civil war began. Likely due to the result of unfortunate timing, the book was not a commercial success, only had an initial printing, and disappeared into obscurity. It was first reprinted in 1973 due to the increased interest of the academic community in reclaiming women’s writing.

In 1987, Joan Fagan Yellin edited and introduced an edition published by Harvard University Press which was the start of Yellin’s archival research interest in Jacobs that has produced the impressively edited and annotated collection, *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers, Volumes 1 and 2.* She has also written a biography of Jacobs, *Harriett*
Jacobs: A Life.\textsuperscript{26} The volumes document, among many other things, Jacobs’s life in freedom which included her extensive letter writing; anti-slavery and women’s rights activism; founding and development of an abolitionist reading room in Rochester; civic, religious, and community affiliations and service; and status as founder and fundraiser for the Jacobs Free School, an African American school in Alexandria, Virginia. “Writings by and about Jacobs, her brother, John S., and her daughter Louisa—all of whom were activists—reveal important information about African American political circles in antebellum, Civil War, and post-bellum Philadelphia, Boston, Rochester, Savannah, New York, and elsewhere, displaying the intersections of these circles with interracial reform movements such as abolitionism and feminism, as well as with the dominant culture” (Jacobs Papers, Yellin, 3). In the biography, Yellin describes Jacobs as “a weapon in the struggle for emancipation” (3). The two volumes and biography are a treasure trove of written literature that shows Jacobs to be a multi-faceted, talented, and brilliant American who, thank goodness, was able to contribute to enriching the American landscape. Jacobs’s feminist intent and heroism stand in stark relief against earlier African American epic male-centered narratives and fiction where African American men are the primary figures that agitate for and escape to freedom. Narratives by Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Josiah Henson, Henry Bibb, and Solomon Northup are a few of the enslavement narratives that were available in print for Jacobs to read once she arrived in the North.

Jacobs makes sure that through her narrative testimony, the other enslaved community’s voices are also heard. In this way, she fulfills the African and African American epic mandate to not, if at all possible, leave family and community members
behind. She could not physically bring them all out with her when she escaped in 1842, but she takes the time to write them into her trickster narrative of flight which, as in the folktale “The People Could Fly,” is an African American metaphorical trick. Through her, like magic, readers are given the privilege, or forced, to “hear” the voices of all the other enslaved women and men Jacobs could not take with her on the physical plane.  

Of course, the characters in her narrative represent the entire body of enslaved individuals about whom, besides herself, she also writes. Even when she reaches freedom, she reaches out and remembers them; they are still part of her family, and she publishes their voices close to twenty years later in 1861. Elizabeth J. West’s African Spirituality in Black Women’s Fiction situates the importance of Jacobs’s cultural act of remembering:

> The importance of memory and the act of remembering, in both continental African and diasporic African societies, has been conveyed by numerous recent historical and anthropological studies as well as countless fictional works by African and African-descent authors. From centuries-old African rituals that invoke ancestral spirits to African American religious testimonies, black people have maintained cultural practices that call on the community to remember. A cultural and communal act, remembering preserves metaphysical order.” (14 – 15)

Part of the story Jacobs is telling, besides the many physical assaults of enslavement, is the psychological trauma of knowing she is not a free and autonomous woman, not able to make social or sexual decisions about her life, liberty, or the pursuit of her own happiness. She expands the dialogue about her individual oppression to include the specific sexual horrors endured by other female slaves she knows. It is an abusively gendered situation for black women that Lydia Maria Child called in her preface to Incidents the “peculiar phase of Slavery [that] has generally been kept veiled” (Child 4).
Jacobs unveils the resistance struggles surrounding her personal hell of enslavement—and the black community’s—by laying out the particulars of the inhumane acts that have ensnared her in the web of enslavement’s deceptions. Jacobs catalogues the trickster methodology she uses to extricate herself from that web. When she writes about slave narratives, Jennifer C. James explains that it is the “[i]nternal characteristics—intelligence, cleverness, spirituality, fortitude—[that] provided the psychological emancipation from slavery that would lead to physical liberation” (James, A freedom, ii). These are also bedrock qualities of African American trickster lore. Jacobs’s actions and writing techniques breathe fire and life into Trickster, and one of the ways she accomplishes this task is through her word choices.

Jacobs’s narrative language choices she uses to describe enslavement are not subtle. She wields forceful terms as if they are weapons. She charges herself with the difficult literary task of carefully choosing the most accurate words that she thinks will impart the mental and emotional horrors of enslavement in such a way that the words show the situation is torturous within and beyond the boundaries of the physical abuse. She writes about enslavement circumstances and enslavers in these unflattering terms: “angry master, whip him, no scruples, take my children, wily doctor, revenge himself,” and “gave me a stunning blow” (20, 20, 35, 39, 83, 110, 39).

When Jacobs wants to describe her character, her desires, hopes, or dreams, she chooses positive words, such as being at her “good grandmother’s house,” or experiencing a “love-dream” when she hoped to “marry” her African American “intelligent and religious,” and “free-born lover” (58, 38, 42, 38, 38).
She uses specific terms to show how she overcomes oppression. Jacobs is “resolved” to be free and “triumph over [her] tyrant,” intelligent and wise enough to have “suspicions” about her circumstances, and has “calculated” many of her actions and those of others (95, 55, 94, 60). She says, she “succeeded” and that her “story ends with freedom” which is the ultimate happy ending for a heroic trickster quest (115, 201).

Her writing is brutally forthright and also satirical and bitterly ironic as she paints the picture with words. The unjust and immoral actions Jacobs is forced to endure at the hands of enslavement by Flint are so antithetical to her concepts of living a free and self-determining life as to be gut-wrenching, and her vocabulary choices reflect this opinion. She deftly uses dialogue and descriptions to demonstrate the irrationality of a system built on greed, lies, lust, coercion, collusion, sadism, and brute force. Although she calls herself “one of God’s most powerless creatures,” she, ironically, “resolved” with all the force of will of an African and African American heroic trickster “to never be conquered (19). She manipulates language to show, as though words are physical bricks, the roadblocks of living in enslavement only to use words again as though they are sledgehammers in order to demonstrate exactly how she has demolished or plans to knock down the barriers to freedom.

Thus, Jacobs goes to work using words as trickster weapons to undermine the tents, bulwarks, proponents, supporters, executors, and executioners of enslavement. She is “demonstrating that despite her enslavement, she [makes] choices for herself, she [does] not passively accept the dominion of others” (Li, 6). That she succeeds in finding a way out of the dilemma has Nellie McKay postulating that “the success of [Jacobs’s]
efforts offers a compelling case for the effectiveness of literally facing down a great evil in the system” (xi).

Like Jacobs, Benjamin, her uncle, cannot bear enslavement and audaciously runs away twice. He is caught once; however, he bides his time and escapes again. Using his fair complexion as a subversive trickster maneuver to pass for white, Benjamin dupes the white public all the way from Baltimore to New York, thereby obtaining his freedom. This “passing” for white subterfuge is akin to the one Clotel and William employ in Clotel in order to become free.

One of the hallmarks of traditional trickster tales is that Trickster has the ability to change forms when the need arises. The lesson involved points to the ignorance, shallowness, or short-sightedness of white observers who cannot detect the internal essence of blacks, the objects of their gaze. Trickster triumphs with masking because observers refuse or are unable to recognize the true nature of reality, so an African American passing trickster is able to inhabit places and spaces in which he or she would not ordinarily be able to go.

When used as a trickster device of “deception” during the enslavement period, “passing as white” was the equivalent of donning a subversive cloak to infiltrate behind enemy lines. The participant in the trick stealthily entered the world of white privilege and society, uninvited. Like a covert operative, the black person clandestinely slipped past the color line, nestled him or herself into white social or political space, and entered extremely dangerous political and social territory. It was a place where a black man or woman was not wanted, as surely as a combat soldier with subversive or spy intentions entered into hostile territory. And, as students of military science know, the penalty for
combatants getting caught subverting an enemy power is death. This penalty was no less true of courageous passing black persons such as those Brown and Jacobs memorialize.

Flint is ever vigilant for ways to circumvent Jacobs's defenses and notices she is "...teaching herself to write," and shifts his strategy to giving her written notes. By using writing against Jacobs to cement further control over her, if successful, he would have effectively robbed her of the hard-won agency and pride she had derived from learning to read and write. However, Jacobs is cleverer than Flint. She resists the entrapment effort by claiming that she could not read the salacious notes, relying upon the expected illiteracy expectations masters had for enslaved individuals. She is able to use a key trickster method, lying, to slip out of the tightly woven web of slavery's choke-hold on her.

Avoiding the traps of sexual exploitation Flint has laid for her was no small feat which she reveals when she writes that "to her knowledge, [Flint is] the father of eleven slaves" and clearly has designs of placing her into that unwanted bind, too (35). Jacobs knows of Flint's sexual abuse of other female slaves even though she describes that knowledge as "the secrets of slavery" that "are concealed like those of the Inquisition" (35). This is the “secret” information Jacobs seeks to bring forth to readers, to release from what Child termed as being “veiled,” and as enslaved women knew, revealing secrets was dangerous: “the institution of slavery engendered secrets because it created a group of people (masters) who could forbid another group of people (slaves) to share certain kinds of information thus assuring that the information would be shared outside the masters’ presence” (7). It is interesting how Jacobs turns the “Talking Turtle” secrecy trope on its head. She knows that secrecy is enslaved people’s friend when they are trying
to outwit masters, but secrecy is enslaved people’s enemy when the masters are trying to outwit and oppress enslaved people. Trickster strategies require sophisticated considerations.

Jacobs does not spare complicit Southern white women in her reporting of the actions of white male enslavers and sexual transgressions. She indict white women who are participants as being part of “this bad institution [that] deadens the moral sense, even in white women” (36). Although she, graciously, writes that some southern white women do not encourage or condone the beastly sexual behaviors of their husbands, Jacobs is just as clear that in order to enjoy the luxuries enslavement affords them, southern white women are invested in slavery's continuation, abusive outcomes be damned. Jacobs exposes the reality that, although they are wearing different masks and the white male exercises ultimate power, there are still two complicit oppressors in the Big House causing enslaved female pain, isolation, and misery: the Master and the Mistress. This is one of the veils Jacobs lifts in *Incidents*.

With "deliberate calculation," she enters into a sexual relationship with the white neighbor, Mr. Sands. She considers that "[i]t seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment" (55). But, there is also "something" unutterably sad and anger-provoking about listening to the words of a woman who is clearly selecting the least wretched alternative to death or severe injury as she makes choices about the agency she will or will not have over her mind, body, and soul. Jacobs is denied the husband of her choice and the safety, security, and dignity of a home of her own, but she refuses to submit to Flint in totality. Jacob
analyzes the trick bag of her situation and concludes that Sands is her best option for protection, which only another white male in the South can provide, even if it is only during a time while she is pregnant with Sands' children.

The tenor and tone of Jacobs's writing makes it clear that she is well aware of the tragic irony of having to sacrifice her chastity, moral principles, and social reputation on the altar of enslavement's practicalities. She is aware that she is engaged in a moral, intellectual, and physical struggle with enslavement, representational in the body of Flint. Although galled, sickened by the abuse, and angered by her lost opportunities, she does not allow the oppression to crush her mind and spirit. She takes action, insinuates herself into the social sphere of Sands, tells Flint about her pregnancies, and quietly revels in the knowledge "that [because she] favored another,[it] was something to triumph over [her] tyrant even in that small way" (55). It was often in the "small way[s]," such as the millions of acts of resistance that were available to enslaved individuals, that provided self-worth, delivered satisfaction, promoted a sense of honor, and, in Jacobs's particular case, as well as for countless others in her time, led to eventual emancipation.

Unfortunately, the toll on the individuals along freedom's road was high. Even though Jacobs acts with self-determining aggression to avoid sexual submission to Flint, there is still the reality that her moves to unite herself and her destiny to Sands are a loss of mammoth humanistic proportions. Jacobs cherishes the tenets of the Christian faith's principle of marriage as a sacrament entered into by men and women and honored and recognized by the community. Jacob mourns the vise-like dilemma in which she finds herself when she writes, “I wanted to keep myself pure; and, under the most adverse
circumstances, I tried hard to preserve my self-respect, but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery, and the monster proved too strong for me” (54).

Jacobs's trickster fight with the evil “monster” of slavery takes on epic proportions as she describes the struggle as one where she is "forsaken by God and man" (54). Within the parameters of what she can do, and considering what narrow options were realistically open to her, Jacobs's plan to thwart Flint's endeavors is rather ingenious. Given the untenable moral and sexual bind she is experiencing, devising and executing any workable plan of resistance is an act of applied intelligence, multi-level strategizing, and maintaining of nerves of steel. She bravely faces down Flint and courageously enlists Sands in her plot. Like the triumphant pathway to enlightenment or freedom for any heroic trickster, Jacob's narrative is filled with moments when she arrives at difficult insights into and conclusions about slavery, the enslaved people in it, slavery's creators and participants, and the tricks she deems necessary for her to use to extricate herself from slavery's grasp. There is no ambiguity in understanding Jacob's assessment that "the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (56). The slave woman's actions rise to the standard of the heroic trickster, significantly above the standard of the ordinary.

The situation between Flint and Jacobs is akin to a dastardly, unjust, and chilling cat and mouse game. It is a classical trickster scenario where a weaker animal uses his or her wits to escape oppression, such as in the tale “No Chicken Tonight” with Flint being the fox and Jacobs being the outclassed, outweighed, and trapped rabbit. Jacobs has to remain constantly vigilant and tirelessly active; she is at war. As we shall next see in
Blake, Delany issues a violent battle cry and also calls the African American trickster tradition to arms.

As with any war, there are two sides, and in Jacobs's case, one side was Flint, his slave-holding colleagues and their pernicious laws, and their network of slavery-supporting minions; the other side was made up of Jacobs, the enslaved members of her immediate community and their resistance behaviors, and the wider abolitionist sympathizing Americans. As Jacobs neatly lays out, the two sides engaged in a point and counter-point struggle.

She writes that she brings her dilemma up for discussion to what serves as her war tribunal, saying that "[a]fter much discussion my friends resolved on making another trial" (80). The "trial" or trick Jacobs and her supporters devised was for Mr. Sands to buy Jacobs, and once that occurs, Sands can then free Jacobs and the children. But, Flint and slavery's codes are not so easily circumvented, for Flint recognizes Sands's offer for what it is - a trick. Flint does not fall for the ploy and nastily informs Jacobs that he sees through the ruse.

Flint represents the worst aspects of unfettered abuse of power and unchecked moral turpitude. Jacobs narrates what it is like to be the recipient of such government-created, sanctioned, and enforced evil behavior. About one of the most disturbingly vicious moves Flint makes, Jacobs writes that Flint physically assaults her son. Jacobs is forced to engage in so deadly a struggle it engulfs not only her life, but also the lives of her children, both of whom face the constant threat of injury, separation, or death. She faces the ugliness alone, for she lives with Flint, not Sands, and due to the laws of
enslavement, Jacobs's children are not Sands’s children, by marriage or by ownership, so Flint can inflict on the children any abuse he wishes.

All children born to Jacobs, under the legal codes of slavery, no matter who the biological father is, belong to Flint. Jacobs’s original hope that Sands represents a buffer between her and Flint only works in a limited capacity. The convoluted complexity, gravity, pain and suffering of Jacobs’s situation comes starkly into focus when she examines Benjamin’s prostrate and injured body which appears dead after Flint’s attack.

The narrative is filled with measures Flint takes to try and subdue Jacobs and with the trickster counter-measures Jacobs takes to avoid submission and sexual exploitation. It is the trick and trickster nature of the relationship that gives pause for sobering thought. The lengths to which Jacobs must go in order to have even the smallest modicum of control over her life and body are shocking. So, besides bearing and coping with physical torments and abuse, she has to focus her mind towards the effort to solve the complex entrapment scenarios Flint devises. Her mind is never at rest; she is denied even the solace that comes with being at peace with one’s own thoughts. Jacobs must contend with the enslaved person’s double-bind mental burden of dealing with the evils of white oppression while at the same time intellectually trying to carve out a life for him or herself.

Given the physical and mental abuse of enslavement, there is a need to address the often-heard enquiry, “Why didn’t slaves just run away?”, a concern that Jacobs eloquently addresses: "I could have made my escape alone, but it was more for my helpless children than for myself that I longed for freedom. Though the boon would have been precious to me, above all price, I would not have taken it at the expense of leaving
them in slavery” (89). So, since she forgoes "the boon" of freedom in order to remain with and protect her children, it means the torturous wrangling with the monster of enslavement is Jacobs’s lot. She looks enslavement clearly in the face, assesses her situation by analyzing the variables, plans her actions, and weighs the consequences. Then she chooses the best options available to her. She factors in the odds of success for herself as well as for those family members who depend upon her. Like a general assessing battle options, she has a clear-eyed vision of her situation and clarity of purpose to rescue herself and her children.

Instead of crushing her resolve, Flint's behavior hardens Jacobs to the purpose of agitating for freedom, or at least for greater autonomy within slavery's confines, while patiently working towards a day of liberation. She is bolstered by the history of perseverance, rebellion, faith, and family ties that existed even "before Nat Turner's time" (91). After harking to powerful father and male resistance figures, Jacobs indicates that she is re-entering the fray and "rushed on with renovated hopes" (91).

Hope is one thing, and vital to maintain; but, dealing with reality is quite another situation. While Jacobs is hoping for change, she must still contend with the very “wily” Flint who is constantly concocting new deceits for her to overcome (83). Flint issues Jacobs an ultimatum of either accepting placement in “a cottage” and being available for his abuse, or, the alternative is as he says to Jacobs, “[Y]ou and your children shall be sent to your young master’s planation, …and your children shall fare like the rest of the [N]egro children” (84).

The quality of outdoor plantation life physically differed greatly from the kind of life enslaved people endured toiling in “The Big House.” Flint threatened Jacobs with the
prospect of seeing her children forced to labor in the fields or outdoor areas of a plantation under the direct control of an overseer. It was a kind of life that was notoriously dangerous and difficult, much more so than life lived inside the plantation house. However, Jacobs knew that acquiescence to Flint’s blackmail tactics would mark her doom. She writes, “I knew that my master’s offer was a snare, and that if I entered it escape would be impossible” (84). After carefully weighing her limited options, Jacobs chooses shipment to the plantation but only as a stalling ploy to bide time in order to plan her next move. Regretting the necessity to risk plantation life, nevertheless, she knows herself well enough to reflect that this is the action she must take.

She is locked in combat mode and her insight into things shows in her comment, "My master ha[s] power and law on his side" (85) But, her answer to the abusive presence and application of that power against her is, "I ha[ve] a determined will”; and, by inference, she references the larger African American struggle with, "There is might in each [slave]" (85). Jacobs's statement screams from the narrative's pages, framing and encapsulating the courageous actions she, and others like her, took to fight enslavement.

Essentially, Jacobs recognizes that, as a gambit, accepting the limits of plantation life means it will make it much harder, if not impossible, for her and the children to escape. She realizes that it is a move that is more of a liability than offering the opportunity to operate from a stronger position. Therefore, Jacobs switches strategies and hatches a plan to vanish. Jacobs outmaneuvers Flint by hiding in her grandmother’s attic to physically extricate herself from the field of play. The immediate result of Jacobs's aggressively self-determining act is that Flint realizes Jacobs is not to be found. Obviously, Flint calculated that he could watch the grandmother's house and easily
capture Jacobs when she, inevitably, returned to visit the children. Seeing that Flint takes
the bait and is placing the children with her grandmother, the outcome of her gambit,
Jacobs is smugly pleased and comments on how well the ploy works, “[O]f course [my
grandmother] willingly did” (97).

Jacobs confronts the "monstrous" master class’s oppression and, thus, she thwarts
the laws of enslavement. This marks a decisive turning point in the feminized variation of
the trickster John and the Marster tales trope Jacobs is using and her story becomes the
battle of “Harriet versus the Marster.” She realizes a significant trickster victory over
Flint: she runs—she is out of his reach, the children are out of his house, and away from
being easy prey to his physical abuse. She places herself under the direct care of her
grandmother, and is close enough to her children that she can view them in circumstances
without Flint dictating her every move. Of course, this is only a partial victory; for as
Yellin describes, Jacobs "was temporarily sheltered by sympathetic black and white
neighbors, then for years was hidden in a tiny crawlspace above a storeroom in her
grandmother’s house" (Incidentsxv). At no time was resisting enslavement an easy
undertaking. It is only one battle on the way to winning the war, but for enslaved people
in Jacobs's position, it is the day-to-day determining acts of subversion that make up the
mosaic of their resistance.

Once Jacobs removes herself from Flint's grip, a host of supportive characters
surrounds her and acts on her behalf. When she initially leaves the plantation house and is
on the run, she is offered assistance from her grandmother's black female boarder, Sally,
who risks severe punishment for collusion, saying, "Let me call your uncle" to help (96). Knowing that acquiescing to such a move would result in horrific consequences for Sally
and her uncle if they were caught aiding her, Jacobs declines the offer. Instead, Jacobs leaves her grandmother’s house and the assistance of Sally and “[goes] to the house of [a different black female] friend who [is] to conceal [her]” (96).

At this point, Flint becomes aware that Jacobs is missing, and sounds the alarm. Jacobs is a hunted woman with a $300.00 reward for capture placed upon her head:

$300 REWARD! Ran away from the subscriber, an intelligent, bright mulatto girl, named Linda, 21 years of age. Five feet four inches high. Dark eyes, and black hair inclined to curl; but it can be made straight. Has a decayed spot on a front tooth. She can read and write, and in all probability will try to get to the Free States. All persons are forbidden, under penalty of law, to harbor or employ said slave. $150 will be given to whoever takes her in the state, and $300 if taken out of the state and delivered to me, or lodged in jail. Dr. Flint (97)

Even though the stakes significantly change when Jacobs runs away from Flint, she still has not escaped the reach of the state. She is at the mercy of the predatory and serpentine nature of slavery, a metaphor she implies when she writes how "her pursuers came into such close vicinity that [she] conclude[s] they [have] tracked [her] to [her] hiding-place" in the black female friend’s house (98). Using the snake metaphor for the grip of slavery as she hides in the bushes outside her friend’s house, she writes, "Suddenly, a reptile of some kind seizes] [her] leg" (98). And, she extends the metaphor to try and explain the terrible nature of enslavement with, "The pain I felt soon indicated that the bite was poisonous" (98). Most assuredly, the "bite" of enslavement was still "pain[fully]" gripping Jacobs because her bid for freedom was still that of a runaway, trapped right in the same town and prevented from escaping by a hostile mob, led by Flint, who is intent on her capture. However, it is her community of supporters, enslaved and free whites, who facilitate her concealment and salvation. There is a complicated web of trickster subversive activity on Jacobs’s side, by both black and white participants who agitate the system, which is triggered by Jacobs’s attempts to gain her freedom.
Jacobs returns to the black friend's house, and "ask[s] her to prepare a poultice of warm ashes and vinegar, and [Jacobs] applie[s] it to [her] leg, which [is] already much swollen" (98). Her friend welcomes her back at great personal risk, tends to her medical needs, and takes a further dangerous step. When the poultice does not work, "[Jacobs's] friend ask[s] an old woman, who doctor[s] among the slaves, what [is] good for the bite of a snake, or a lizard" (98). The woman had to have left her house in stealth and at great risk of being followed, Jacobs was further involving another black person in the deadly scheme. When the black friend is finished, she has to have made her way back while bearing suspicious items on her person, evidence of her collusion. There is also the serious possibility the woman, if she is not a stealthily competent subversive, could lead hostile whites to a conjurer, possibly a free black woman, who is a valued member of the community.

While the town's whites are likely turning a blind eye to the conjurer's medical activities or even using the conjurer themselves for healing treatment, Jacobs's pursuers would certainly have a negative and punitive view towards anyone caught aiding and abetting the escape of a slave. Jacobs's friend is taking an enormous risk resisting enslavement. Jacobs's web of trickster players extends into realms of active black support not always explored in detail in historical literature. Jacobs’ friend represents black female resistance behavior under extremely difficult circumstances.

The successful movement towards autonomy or freedom for slaves requires a combination of individual pro-action, subversion, and community support. The steps people have to take require that they operate with care, balancing ideological positions, levels of risk, and satisfying personal needs. Worried about the danger and stress her
actions are causing her relatives and friends, Jacobs "succeed[s] in cautiously conveying some messages to [her] relatives" (99). But, even though Jacobs does her best to limit her supporters' exposure to catastrophe while she pursues freedom, her relatives, succumbing to the pull of natal ties, want her to surrender and return to the fold. However, such enticements and "counsel had no influence" on Jacobs (99). She gives her reason for this position in combat terms, saying, "When I started this hazardous undertaking, I had resolved that, come what would, there should be no turning back. 'Give me liberty, or give me death,' was my motto" (99). Knowing full well that Patrick Henry's 1775 declaration was white Americans' proud justification for rebellion against British tyranny, Jacobs slyly casts her anarchistic sentiments and runaway trickster behavior in white terms that readers can comprehend. She becomes the noble trickster hero of her tale, courageously facing the monsters of injustice, brutality, and abuse. And, it is likely a surprise to her nineteenth-century white audience to learn that she is not alone. Jacobs, like the revolutionary warriors she cleverly uses as props in her trickster saga, has an army of black, and sometimes white, troops supporting her insurgency efforts.

When it becomes too unsafe for Jacobs to stay with her black friend, she has to move. A white female “kindly lady” who frequents her grandmother’s house learns of Jacobs’s runaway status and offers to hide her. Jacobs takes pains to make sure readers know the “friend” who assists her is a southern white woman, explaining that “[t]he husband of this lady held many slaves, and bought and sold slaves. She also held a number in her own name; but she treated them kindly, and would never allow any of them to be sold. She was unlike the majority of slaveholders wives” (99). The white woman offers to help, but cautions Jacobs that she “must be very careful, for my sake as
well as your own” (100). The white woman stresses the vital importance of secrecy, like the trickster storytelling trope of the “Talking Turtle’s” message. The woman says, “[Y]ou must never tell my secret; for it would ruin me and my family” (100).

Whether she knows it or not, the white woman is a member of the *Underground Railroad*, the network of black and white people willing to assist escaping enslaved people flee to the Free states, alluded to in “The Gospel Train” lyrics. While hiding Jacobs, she participates in a trickster ploy to deceive Flint concerning Jacobs’s whereabouts. Flint comes to her house looking for Jacobs and the woman lies to Flint. After he leaves, the woman tells Jacobs:

> He is so sure you are in New York, that he came to borrow five hundred dollars to go in pursuit of you. My sister had some money to loan on interest. He has obtained it, and proposes to start for New York to-night. So, for the present, you see you are safe. The doctor will merely lighten his pocket hunting after the bird he has left behind (104).

The narrative clarifies that, however triumphant the resistance language is in places, rebellion against slavery is not for the faint of heart. Her trickster troops are courageous, bold, resourceful, and liars when needed. As Jacobs writes, a picture emerges of all of the rebellious trickster supporters as being cunning, subversive, and engaging the foe under deadly dangerous conditions. At a point during the time Jacobs first runs away, she and the enslaved community members spread the disinformation that she has fled to Philadelphia or New York. However, as the narrative clues readers, like Ananse, the African Spider Trickster who lurks in ceilings and corners, Jacobs is actually hiding in the white friend’s storage closet. Predictably, Flint is, like a fool of trickster lore, searching for Jacobs high and low. Jacobs is “indulging” in the kind of smirking amusement that comes with having a rare *John Overcomes the Master* wily trickster dupe
gone well—and for readers who recognize it as such, she is sharing the rare chance for laughter with us.

The entire trickster tale is a rare, if not unique, detailed re-creation of the interplay, right down to the conversational level, of how her escape is planned and executed. The narrative contains the who, the major and minor participants on both sides are listed and described; what, the plot is explained every minute step of the way; when, time frames are carefully laid out; where, locations are pinpointed and assigned strategic weights; which, strategies are introduced and used, modified, or discarded; how, battle strategies, interactions, and outcomes are laid out in unapologetic and graphic detail; and why, philosophical, moral, and ethical principles are presented to readers throughout the narrative.

The narrative is a cleverly crafted tribute to trickster resistance methodology. The story is an excellent how-to insider's manual for trapped women to foster and execute subtle, calculated acts of insurgency resistance to enslavement. As we shall see later in this chapter, the resistance trickster technique is different from the male martial battle plan blueprint that Martin R. Delany uses when he writes Blake.

As time progresses in Jacobs's stages as a runaway slave still hiding in her own southern home town, it becomes too dangerous for her to remain in the closet of the white woman's house. When Jacobs must traverse the town to get to her grandmother's house, which will be her new location, Betty and Jacobs come up with the idea of using a disguise as a sailor to mask Jacobs’s identity. Masking, or literally physically disguising themselves, was a ploy sometimes used by slaves to escape. The term also means, in
plain sight, hiding one's thoughts, facial expressions, speech, and body language from the oppressor. When successful, such masking can offer a certain level of satisfaction.

The circle of knowledgeable slaves widens with Jacobs's childhood friend, Peter, and Aunt Nancy's seaman husband let in on Jacobs's circumstances. Jacobs explains that for her escape plan to work "it [has] been necessary to let him in on our secret" (112). The number of co-conspirator tricksters grows much larger by midpoint in the narrative where Jacobs includes another touchstone of rebellious slavery lore - the swamp. She writes in reality and metaphor that when she attempts to escape via Nancy's husband and on his boat, the sailor takes Jacobs to "Snaky Swamp" as their first stop (112). Jacobs chooses the danger and discomfort of the "swamp" and its challenges, declaring that "even those large, venomous snakes were less dreadful to my imagination than the white men in that community called civilized" (113). This section in Incidents where the "swamp" is being used as a dual metaphor for both the terrible tribulations and dangers of enslavement and for a place of safety and combat staging location recalls the story of Picquilo in Clotel. As we shall see, it is also used again in Blake when Henry Holland meets with the High Conjurers in the swamp.

At the suggestion of her uncle Phillip, Jacobs comes to the conclusion that it would be more efficacious for her to hide in her grandmother's house, secreting herself inside of a small crawlspace in the attic. To have some idea of how miserable the option is, Jacobs writes, "It was kind of [her friend, Peter,] to conceal from [her] what a dismal hole was to be [her] home for a long, long time" (113). The "long time" turns out to be nearly seven years of evading capture while enduring horrific physical discomfort and
while employing trickster behaviors in order not to get caught. She describes her "hole" of confinement, as a place much like the "swamp":

The air was stifling; the darkness total. A bed had been spread on the floor. I could sleep quite comfortably on one side; but the slope was so sudden that I could not turn on the other without hitting the roof. The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such sleep as the wretched may, when a tempest has passed over them. (114)

In the aptly titled chapter, "Competition in Cunning," Jacobs most clearly lays out the terms of engagement for how she finally confronts Flint head on. After she runs away, Flint, and the other whites in the town are led to believe Jacobs has escaped to New York City; but, of course, this is just a ruse. Also, to keep the white community's attention focused elsewhere, Jacobs and the black community have to feed the enslavers disinformation because "Dr. Flint ha[s] not given [Jacobs] up" (128). She knows Flint's "cunning nature" and that he has a "trap laid for [her]" (128). Jacobs "resolve[s] to match [her] cunning against his cunning" devising a "cunning" trick of her own. She writes Flint a letter, gives it to Peter, who in turn gives it to "a trustworthy seafaring person" to mail back to Flint, giving it a New York City postmark (128). With "cunning" plans and patience, and assistance from the Underground Railroad network, Jacobs tricks Flint into believing the "letter to be genuine" as she keeps up an "illusion," which [makes] [her] and [her] friends feel less anxious" (132). Here, Jacobs is using the allegorical trickster tale trope of the weaker animal outwitting the stronger one such as we saw depicted in "No Chicken Tonight" when Rabbit outsmarts Fox in order to keep from being eaten.

Finally, after "nearly seven years," during which she "affirms that [she] lived in that dismal hole," Jacobs executes the plan that makes her escape. It requires a whole host of trickster players working in tandem and cooperation who keep "dangerous secrets" (149). However, the group keeps their secrets and Jacobs successfully, but not without
innumerable, hair-raising close trickster calls of being caught, escapes to Philadelphia and then relocates with the children to New York City. She remarks with continued bitter irony how, in order to be emancipated, she has to be purchased once she arrives in New York. At the end of her journey, and in freedom, Jacobs pauses to "recall" the trickster trail of slavery's grip and arrives at the conclusion, “It has been painful to me in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could” (201).

Jacobs' network of clandestine freedom-fighting operatives— her grandmother, Peter, Phillip, Fanny, Betty, the Southern white woman, the white ship captain, and other members of the Underground Railroad— are real. They serve as a metaphor for the number of people who were actively involved in undermining the vast system of enslavement. That it was undermined by the observant, self-determining, and brave actions of the enslaved community, with the cooperation, assistance, and applied power of well-meaning whites, is a key allusive point to the narrative. Surely, following Jacobs's line of reasoning, if one diminutive, young female slave and her tiny army of tricksters are brave and clever enough to thwart slavery, then it is logical to conclude that educated, determined, and powerful whites can strike slavery a crippling, if not killing, blow. Thanks to Jacobs's narrative, there is a clearer picture of how enslaved black freedom fighters and the white community's army of resistance forces united to oppose and trick the monster of American slavery. According to Jacobs, the institution was addressed in the finest of the trickster tradition by black and white people committing millions of acts of courage, morality, and resistance, rendering 21st-C entury America a better place to live because of them.
The Presence of the African American Trickster Tradition in Martin Delany’s *Blake; or, The Huts of America*

The elevation of the colored man can only be completed by the elevation of the pure descendants of Africa; because to deny his equality, is to deny in like proportion, the equality of all those mixed with the African organization; and to establish his inferiority, will be to degrade every person related to him by consanguinity; therefore, to establish the equality of the African with the European race, establishes the equality of every person intermediate between the two races. This establishes beyond contradiction, the general equality of men. Martin R. Delany, “Capacity of Colored Men and Women as Citizen Members of Community”

There were several debates raging, by blacks and whites, concerning what to do about the condition of African Americans prior to and at the time Martin R. Delany’s book *Blake; or, the Huts of America* was published in serial from 1861 - 1862. One position argued for separation or emigration, and voluntary migration or forced relocation to Liberia was a strong contending location. A second view agitated for non-violent compromise, assimilation, or amalgamation while remaining on American soil. A third strategy, *Blake’s* premise, was for blacks to engage in armed revolt against the system, and Delany uses *Blake* to explore what a march towards freedom might look like with a black male military commander assuming the supreme leadership position and directing the actions of an army of all-black troops. *Blake*, in a very similar philosophical vein to *Incidents*, is a how-to military manual for resistance. However, unlike Jacobs's argument that blacks should solicit or accept the assistance of blacks and whites, Delany's *Blake* crafts a primary position fostering black interdependency, and isolationist acts of self-help, and its movements operate within a primary political and social sphere of black self-determination. There is another significant distinction between *Blake* and *Incidents* in that Jacobs’s narrative heralds female agency in contrast to Delany’s strident masculine project. *Blake* is a complex examination of two philosophical outlooks many people had concerning the best ways for black and white abolitionists and resisters to combat
slavery: nationalism versus emigration, assimilation versus separatism. Prominent African American and white writers of the period discussed and argued the merits and demerits of the positions, but Delany was the first African American to craft a novel that addressed these two themes. Delany created a principal protagonist, first named Carolus Henrico Blacus, later changed to Henry Holland, and then, finally, to Henry Blake, a character Delany uses to explore anti-slavery philosophical principles examined and explained from an African American point of view. The Carolus Henrico Blacus persona is a full-blooded free born West Indian man who is kidnapped, enslaved, and transported to Louisiana. Blacus has family ties, a land base he calls home, self-identity, and dignity; he has much to celebrate, but he also has much to lose. Once Blacus is denied his free status, whites change his name to Henry Holland, stripping him of his ancestral name and forcing him to accept, at least on the surface, a "slave name" assigned by an owner. In his third and final naming transition, when he becomes a freedom-fighting organizer, Henry Holland becomes Henry Blake. Henrico Blacus lost his bodily freedom, but he did not lose his locus of self.

Delany’s perspectives on slavery explode out of Henry Blake's psyche, spread out all over the construction of Blake, and spill out through commentary on the American, Canadian and Cuban landscape. Delany indicta a huge swath of the northern hemisphere for its participation in the oppression of the black community. Like most of his compatriots, Blake has to enter into elaborate deceptions and masking in the presence of white people in order to maneuver around the countryside. He does not find the succor of the Underground Railroad network of blacks and whites to nurture him along his roadway to freedom. It is blacks living in swamps, slave “huts,” fields, and haciendas
who take him in, feed him, and conspire with him to rebel and foment insurrection. Delany’s Blake screams black self-determination, independence, and self-initiative, and self-support: White Folks not needed, thank you very much. Lewis explains that Blake could depend on there being “extensive black communication networks [for assistance], feeding on a variety of sources, [that] sped information from planation to plantation, country to country, often with remarkable secrecy and accuracy” (Lewis, *Telling Narratives* 7).

Henry does not subscribe to a Christian faith-based approach to tolerating the vicious vicissitudes of slave life. Blake takes acquiring his own freedom and the liberation of other blacks into his own hands, being a more “God helps those who help themselves” kind of man, rather than relying on the uncertain timing of waiting for prayer to do the trick. The novel is a testimony to the clever ingenuity of a man determined to outwit the worst schemes enslavers throw at him. There is, of course, the theater of the slave-ship deceptions as Henry and his confederates, without force, out-wit whites bent on slaving; however, this is but one of the many ruses Delany’s irrepressible hero executes to remain fluid in a frozen waste-land of black inopportunity. Carolus Henrico Blacus—“Henry Blake” is an authentic black folk hero - brave, brilliant and bold—and, what makes Blake really special, a characterization sprung from an authentic black man’s mind. He is the creation of what Robert Carr marks as “the birth of a modern revolutionary black spirit” leading an army of “black rebels gone back to the bush” as Delany takes on the job of “writing a new black man into being” (Carr, *Black Nationalism* 41, 48, 45). 31
The story, which is the detailing of the complicated struggles Henry Blake has in freeing himself and others from enslavement, begins with his learning about how, while he is absent, his beloved wife, Maggie, has been sold away from their owner's home in Natchez, Mississippi. Henry is tricked out of his chance for marital happiness and some modicum of a natural family life, but he does not take the cruel affront lying down. No, he sets out on a quest to free himself, rescue his wife, prove his prowess as a man, reclaim his dignity, be a husband who can protect his wife, and be a father his son can admire and look up to. The novel is a project that debunks three main stereotypes of the time concerning black male myths: the happy slave, the cowardly black man, and the black man incapable or not desirous of maintaining permanent male-female relationships. This was a revolutionary position for Delany to take in an age when “[s]laves could not marry because they were legally incapable of giving consent, because the relation of husband and wife was inconsistent with that of the master and slave, and because the slave had no status as a person before the law” (Chakkalakal, Novel Bondage 3).  

Delany argues against the prevalent laws and customs. One of Delany’s favored methods of resistance was legal redress “rather than other readily available discourses such as Christianity or sentimentality, to make his case against slavery and foster a consolidated African American community” (Zuck 40). He goes even further to offer a blueprint for black male intent and action to maintain a wife and family and protest against the dire natal circumstances in which enslaved men find themselves. In Blake, Holland searches unceasingly for his wife after she has been sold away from him because “slavery [did not] destroy black men and women’s inherent identities as gendered human beings, with certain ideas, values, and beliefs that influenced how they responded to
specific social/historical events” (Hine and Jenkins 2). Delany characterizes Daddy Joe as the “husband” of Mammy Judy and when Holland finds out Maggie has been sold, he exclaims, “My wife is sold away, my wife is sold away from me,” and “I and my wife have both been robbed of our liberty” (Blake 16). The novel is filled with testimonials to black husband-and-wife relationships, in and out of enslavement.

Delany gives Henry a hero's pedigree. He creates a champion, fully equipped with the intelligence, bodily strength, and courage he needs to face the monster of slavery. But, a key to the tale is that Delany is careful to paint Blake a "black - pure Negro" champion. Of course, there is a very noticeable biographical resemblance between Delany and his hero, which can account for Delany's understanding of a man with the noble traits of "handsome, manly, and intelligent, [and] a man of good literary attainment" (17). Like Henrico Blacus, Delany was born free in 1812 in Charles Town, Virginia because his mother, Pati, was a free woman; the disposition of African Americans during slavery was determined by the free or enslaved status of the mother. Pati Delany was forced several times to defend her children's free status in the South and even eventually had to move to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania from Virginia in order to ensure their permanent freedom.

The problem that caused them to flee to the North was the discovery that Delany and his siblings were learning to read from the New York Primer and Spelling Book when learning to read was an activity against Virginia law. In Incidents, this “problem” of reading is one Harriet Jacobs has to keep hidden from Flint. But unlike with Delany’s situation, ironically, Flint wants Jacobs to read because he wishes to use reading as a sexually abusive weapon against her. Flint writes salacious, sexually suggestive notes to
Jacobs, so she is placed in a position to have to suppress her intelligence and pretend she does not know how to read or write. Delany’s family must physically flee; Jacobs must mentally depart.

Delany’s father, Samuel Delany's status was enslaved at the time of his son's birth; however, the senior Delany purchased his freedom in 1823. Like Delany's pure African bloodline heritage, Henrico Blacus's origins were of "pure Negro" ancestry; except that for Blacus, the black origins were in the West Indies section of the Diaspora. Delany's maternal grandparents, Shango and Graci, were of Mandinka descent; it is said that Shango was a prince, which may have contributed to his being freed after a time.

Delany's paternal grandparents were of Gola descent; his grandfather was said to be a Chieftain who escaped slavery and fled to Canada for a time, and died fighting enslavement. Delany's personal and family background give credence to reading the experiences and actions of Blacus, Holland, and Blake as those of an "authentic" black man struggling through several difficult and complex stages and challenges of dealing with antebellum American chattel slavery. As with Delany, all three of the "Henry" personas value freedom for themselves and for their family members, so much so that when Henry Holland discovers that his wife, Maggie, has been sold away, he enters a long quest to find and free her.

As Holland travels throughout the South, Canada, and finally Cuba, where his name becomes Blake, seeking Maggie, he encounters enslaved blacks to whom he preaches the merits of subversive action and revolt and teaches the people he meets how to carry it out. One of the important themes contained in this first African American novel printed on U.S. soil is Delany's Pan-African message of uniting seemingly
disparate geographical locations where slaves are living, in what is currently termed, the African Diaspora. Blake, through Delany, is a theoretical strategist and constantly discusses the best possibilities for free black life that extend beyond the borders of the plantation. Through the liberation movements of Holland, Delany promoted “the policy of racial pride” and hoped that bold black male action could “unite the splintered aspirations of the peoples of the African diaspora” (Sundquist 188). He carefully interrogates the various situations in the States, Cuba, and in Liberia. In Blake, Delany is offering “visions of a modern black state” or at least exploring how blacks might go about constructing it (Sundquist 188). It is Delany bringing to the fore and examining the myriad arguments going on nationally and internationally at the time concerning what to do about enslaved African people and the system that was oppressing them.

In Blake, Delany wades into the fray and offers a unique perspective on the problem and his suggestions for a solution: that black people must revolt against slavery's tyranny using all the means at their disposal, including and especially violence, and that they must do it with their own efforts and not rely on the assistance of white actions or white legal systems. Delany's philosophy and message that it should be a "pure" black hero who conceives of, plans, and leads the black community to freedom is evident. However, his message is significantly antithetical to the more prevalent abolitionist favoritism of promoting the anti-slavery verbal and print voices of the mulatto community. In an essay Delany wrote in The North Star on December 8, 1848, p. 2 called “True Patriot,” he speaks for the noble black “patriot”: 
Anticipated and preconcerted by an inquisition of prejudice and slaveholding influence, the colored man of this confederacy, especially the bondman, is doomed to ignominy, whatever may be his merits.

Though they speak, act, petition, remonstrate, pray, and appeal, yet to all this[,] the wickedness of the American people turns a deaf ear, and closed eye. Hence the American colored patriot lives but to be despised, feared and hated, accordingly as his talents may place him in the community-moving amidst the masses, he passes unobserved, and at last goes down to the grave in obscurity, without a tear to console his loss, or a breast to heave in sympathy. (Delany, Levine 139-140).

Since the United States mounted a multi-faceted approach to oppression during enslavement, the enslaved community had to be versatile in its responses, so “over the course of political history in the United States, black nationalism has appeared in a number of disguises” (Robinson Black Nationalism 1). Delany's lead character's continuously morphing persona between being Blacus, Holland, and Blake, and being all of them at the same time, is analogous to the kind of multi-front strategizing that was necessary to face the complicated, difficult, and polymorphous system of enslavement with which blacks had to contend. Delany's hero is bold. In Delany’s hands, there is no chance Blake is going to pass through life in “ignominy” and die in “obscurity.” Blake is a dark-skinned hero who is crafted to be flexible, clever, pro-active, subversive, vengeful, and violent when necessary, possessed of some of the main traits of the general trickster. But, to be successful, he also had to combine honesty, loyalty, sensitivity, righteousness, and patience with those traits which makes Blacus/Holland/Blake a Black Freedom Fighting Trickster bent upon securing the liberation of his people "by any means necessary."

Carolus Henrico Blacus, or Henry Holland while enslaved, begins his journey to freedom, again, from a place of enslavement in the home of Colonel Stephen Franks of
Natchez, Mississippi. Holland is married to Maggie and they have a small son, "Little" Joe. But, in keeping with one of the cruelest tricks used in order to "keep slaves in their place," punish them, or profit from them, Holland returns to discover that Franks has sold Maggie and she has been transported to Cuba. This type of natal separation cruelty was catalogued in Brown’s Narrative and Clotel and by Jacobs in Incidents, and was often a theme in the many enslavement narratives pre-dating Blake. In Maggie's case, the sale, which separates her from her husband, child, mother, and community members, results from the indignation of Mrs. Arabella Ballard who, interestingly, is "the wife of Judge Ballard an eminent jurist of one of the Northern States" (4). It is a "Northern" woman who instigates the horrific sale after she is appalled to witness Mrs. Franks treating Maggie with sisterly behavior.

Although Delany does not come outright and state that Maggie is Mrs. Frank's sister, he uses the terms that imply the relationship. He writes that "[t]he conduct of Mrs. Franks toward her servant was more like that of an elder sister than a mistress, and the mistress and maid sometimes wore dresses cut from the same web of cloth. Mrs. Franks would frequently adjust the dress and see that the hair of her maid was properly arranged" (6). And, instead of finding ethical solace that she can intervene, facilitate the purchase of Maggie by her husband, and then agitate to have Mr. Ballard set Maggie free, Mrs. Ballard "was...determined to subdue [Maggie's] spirit" (6). The historical and current discussion of who is to blame for American slavery often centers on laying the sole focus on the enslavers in the South. And, of course, the largest number of functional practitioners was southern owners, but, as Delany builds into the narration with Mrs. Ballard's treachery, it is Northern collusion that allowed the South to function as long as
it did. For example, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 could not have been successful at returning escaped African Americans back to the South without the cooperation and participation of Northerners. Delany closely examines the good-North-bad-South dichotomy involving slavery and makes sure to share the blame. However, there was a legal loophole in the act about which the South did not agree. Technically, if slaveholding Southerners “willingly” brought enslaved persons with them “on extended travel or residence on free soil,” the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 or 1850 did not apply (Wong, *Neither Fugitive*, 3). The statutes only applied to recapturing “escaped slaves” (Wong 3). This is the legal scenario Jacobs write about concerning her brother William’s escape in *Incidents*, when Sands takes him north to Canada on a trip and William walks away, escaping.

As Henry Holland makes his march towards reclaiming Maggie and his independence, he must grapple with many areas of politics, social structures and strictures, and weigh issues involving ethics. When he hears about Maggie's sale, Holland nearly swears and is rebuked by Judy who invokes a Christian sensibility saying, "So, Henry, yeh ain't gwine swah! hope yeh ain' gwine lose yeh 'ligion? Do'n do so; put yeh trus' in de Laud, he is suffishen fah all!" (15). Delany introduces a very sensitive issue - the discussion of the role Christianity plays or should play in the lives of the enslaved community. Henry mouths one of the perspectives with:

"Don't tell me about religion! What's a religion to me? My wife is sold away from me by a man who is one of the leading members of the very church to which both she and I belong! Put my trust in the Lord! I have done so all my life nearly, and of what use is it to me? My wife is sold from me just the same as if I didn't" (16).
Judy's answer, grounded in Christian principles, is “Come, come, Henry, yeh mus'n talk so; we is po' weak an' bline cretehs, an' cah see deway uh da Laud. He move' in a mystus way, his wundahs to puhfaum" (16).

For many enslaved individuals the solace and hope they received from their Christian faith was real. It served to give them patience and a belief that the future, whether on Earth or in the Hereafter, would be brighter. But, however pious they were, the “standard-bearers of early African American literature” were not blind to the gap between white America’s religious “words and its deeds” (Gates and McKay 128 – 129). “Representing themselves as faithful adherents to the humanitarian ideals of Christianity and the American Revolution,” these writers “explored the chasm” that also existed “between [America’s] propaganda about freedom and its widespread practice of slavery” (Gates and McKay 129). Christian-based optimistic faith, prayer, and patience blended with millions of rebellious non-violent acts of subversive resistance, such as the formula for Harriet Jacobs's salvation, was a combative strategy that worked for her and many people in the enslaved community. However, that level of reliance on faith for liberation did not appeal to men and women who felt the theory or practice of using directive, violent confrontational action was more strongly needed.

Holland, like many slaves—and the newspapers of the time were filled with advertisements seeking the capture of runaway slaves—found enslavement intolerable and takes the chance, sooner rather than later, to break for freedom. For as Holland explains, "I'm tired looking the other side; I want a hope this side of the vale of tears. I want something on this earth as well as a promise of things in another world" (16). Delany highlights the crucial and touchy debate, still ongoing, about the role and
influence of Christianity in the African American community. But, from examining the scope of the narratives, *Incidents* and *Blake*, a wider view can be considered. Jacob's battle strategy of choice had to include extricating herself and her young children from enslavement, and she chose to do it so they had the most advantageous chances of arriving in a free state alive, and together. She never asserted or instigated a direct confrontational stance that included, as best she could arrange, a "dead or alive" possible outcome. She was unbelievably patient, as in spending six years hidden away in a tiny attic enclosure, and waited for her best chance to execute her plan to take everyone out alive. Jacobs is the subtle trickster. After all, “to accept survival over suicide is not, however, the same thing as being docile” (Berry and Blassingame 11). Conversely, although it is also done in measured stages, Holland takes a more direct, faster, and personally risky approach to freeing himself. He speaks his mind in anger and justified righteousness to Franks about the dastardly deed Franks did with selling Maggie. Holland defiantly spits these bitter words at Franks:

I'm not your slave, nor ever was and you know it! And but for my wife and her people, I never would have stayed with you till now. I was decoyed away when young, and then became entangled in such domestic relations as to induce me to remain with you; but now the tie is broken! I know that the odds are against me, but never mind! (19).

Delany's defiant hero's words speak to decided nationalist, revolutionary, abolitionist sentiments Delany held himself and are representative of liberationist sentiments and activities of his and prior times. Active politically, Delany attended the 1835 National Convention of Men of Color held in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. He advocated for an African American emigration colony to be founded on Africa's east coast to be called, "Black Israel." In 1843, Delany published a black-owned newspaper, *The Mystery*; and in 1847 in collaboration with Frederick Douglass, he co-founded the
abolitionist newspaper, the *North Star*. Holland emerges from Delany's likely admiration of a pro-active perspective such as the more flamboyantly confrontational freedom-fighting actions taken by such community members as Nat Turner, the blacks aboard the Amistad, Frederick Douglass, William and Ellen Craft, Harriet Tubman, and Henry "Box" Brown. Their stories of daring-do, capture close-calls, action-oriented and even deadly self-sacrificial behavior were qualities more prominently featured in Delany's text than the more quiet stories of silent forbearance, subtle insurgency, non-confrontational ingenuity, studied and patient watchfulness, and delayed movement of the *Clotel* primary saga and Jacobs' narrative.

If there is anything certain to learn about the dichotomous nature of the discussion between the uses of confrontational and violent versus non-confrontational and non-violent trickster methods for liberation, it is that, as seen in *Clotel*, *Incidents*, and *Blake*, both methods were necessary, useful, and successfully employed. It was all manner of overt and covert "tricks" the black community perpetrated on enslavers and the system, and their successful responses, swift or deliberate, to the "tricks" that were perpetrated on them, that made the positive difference over time. Amalgamation, assimilation, verbal assault, engaging in physical defense or offense, inflicting property damage, maintaining openly acknowledged or surreptitious natal ties, employing propaganda techniques, instituting legal suits or defenses, running away, and mounting terrorist raids were, each and every one of them, outrageously brave activities for enslaved African Americans and their white supporters to take.

In keeping with Holland’s having rapidly made up his mind to search for his wife, even at the cost of leaving his small son behind, he is constantly alert for any
opportunity to make good his escape or die trying. His situation comes to a head swiftly because his defiance offends Franks who says, "Do you threaten me, sir! Hold your tongue, or I'll take your life instantly, you villain!" (19). But, Franks's masterly death threat doesn't cow Holland into submission. Holland replies, "No, sir, I don' threaten you, Colonel Franks, but I do say that I won't be treated like a dog. Shoot me, sell me, or do anything else you please, but don't lay your hands on me, as I will not suffer you to whip me!" (19). Holland delivers Franks the most dreaded confrontational stance and verbiage slave holders could see and hear; frightened, Franks, "[r]un[s] up to his chamber, [and] seize[s] a revolver..." He hysterically says to Mrs. Franks when she asks him, Colonel! what does all this mean?", "Mean, my dear? It's rebellion! A plot—this is but the shadow of a cloud that's fast gathering around us!" (19 - 20). Of course, Franks's slave owner hysteria and fear of "rebellion" and "a plot" was grounded in fact for there were several very violent insurrections which Franks would have heard of, such as the 1811 New Orleans, 1822 Denmark Vesey, 1831 Nat Turner, and 1839 Amistad revolts.

Driven by fear and trepidation to rid himself of Holland, a state Franks causes between Holland and himself due to his ignoble slaving, Franks sinks to devising an underhanded scheme to sell Holland to a slave trader. Holland is nearly sold on the open market, but before that happens, Franks changes his mind because he discovers there is a "plot" afoot by his wife and her friend, Mrs. Winter. The two women plan for Mrs. Winter to purchase Holland and take him to Cuba where Holland might be able to find Maggie and, as Mrs. Franks says, "...[He] may be fortunate enough to get the master of [his]] wife to become [his] purchaser" (22). When Franks learns of the trick his wife and her compatriot have up their sleeves to at least ameliorate Holland's natal suffering,
Franks takes immediate countermeasures, stops the market sale, and reacquires Holland from Harris. Franks naively thinks he can foster some type of re-established dominant master/submissive slave relationship with Holland, saying:

'Now, sir,' said Franks to Henry, who had barely reached the house from the auction block, 'take this pass and go to Jackson and Woodville, or anywhere else you wish to see your friends, so that you be back against Monday afternoon. I ordered a postponement of the sale, and thinking that I would try you awhile longer, as I never had cause before to part with you. Now see if you can't be a better boy!' (27).

Holland, "eagerly tak[es] the note," and with the implication that Franks does not know he can read, Holland "turn[s] away" and discovers he is in possession of an open-ended letter that gives him permission to move about the country at will, what Delany termed a "charte volante" (28). It read: "Permit the bearer my boy Henry, sometimes calling himself Henry Holland--a kind of negro pride he has--to pass and repass wherever he wants to go, he behaving himself properly. It was signed, "STEPHEN FRANKS" (27).

So, Franks, in his arrogant underestimation and studied ignorance of the depths of his cruelty towards Holland, Maggie, their child, and extended immediate and larger enslaved community, unintentionally gives Holland the means for escape. Franks intended for Holland to use the pass to travel to a neighboring plantation where Franks had a white contingency group ready to grab Holland and enact a permanent sale to a trader. Holland accepts the precious pass and "carefully deposit[s] [it] in his pocket wallet[,]" thereby preparing to turn a major transgression back on the master with a significant trick of his own. Holland, suspecting the double-cross by Franks, uses the pass and some money he has saved up to inflict more easily the second greatest blow masters can receive, second only to death. Holland runs away. And, not only does he avoid Franks's trap, but Holland then begins his transformation to the "Henry" who tells a secret
gathering of black men: "I have laid a scheme, and matured a plan for a general
insurrection of the slaves in every state, and the successful overthrow of slavery!" (39).
The men in Holland's group are enthusiastic about the idea of being the catalyst for their
own freedom, but they are not exactly clear about how the execution of the momentous
outcome should proceed. But, Holland has the details of his plan which is to advocate for,
create, and trust in a black spy network. Holland explains:

All you have to do, is find one good man or woman--I don'[/]t care which, so that
they proved to be the right person--on a single plantation, and hold a seclusion
and impart the secret to them, and make them the organizers for their own
plantation, and they in like manner, impart it to some other next to them, and so
on. In this way it will spread like smallpox among them. (41)

Delany's hero's instruction to his comrades to "impart the secret" to "the right
person" is a purposeful planning directive that is necessary to set up as a fundamental
first step to insurrection. Why? Historically, if one was plotting activities to free oneself
or engages in undertakings against the system, one of the realities facing slaves was the
distinct possibility, as with the failure of Denmark Vesey's undertaking, that fellow slaves
would deliberately or inadvertently divulge the plot to the masters, become despised
tricksters amidst their fellow slaves. So, Delany has Holland, like any good general, take
a step-by-step, fundamental approach to laying out the battle strategy for fomenting
revolution against American chattel slavery.

Locating a few good men—and while Delany does acknowledge that black
women were and should be members of the revolutionary army, their role is minor
compared to the men—is not the only directive Holland has to give. He also instructs the
troops "...that they must have money, if they want to get free. Money will obtain them
everything necessary by which to obtain their liberty" (43). Well, that observation is all
well and good; except, Holland is addressing the most monetarily deprived and fiscally depressed individuals on American soil at the time. But, knowing all armies operate on money, Holland has a plan for financing his revolution, originating from a cleverly revised moral reading of the Christian bible and a philosophy he declares he "[doesn't] gain anything by" (16). He tells his listeners:

The money is within all of their reach if they only knew it was right to take it. God told the Egyptian slaves to 'borrow from their neighbors'--meaning their oppressors--'all their jewels;' meaning to take their money and wealth wherever they could lay hands upon it, and depart from Egypt. So you must teach them to take all the money they can get from their masters, to enable them to make the strike without failure. (43)

Holland absolves his army of any culpability for taking the money that they need to free themselves from tyranny, telling his soldiers, "I'll show you when we leave for the North, what money will do for you, right here in Mississippi. Bear this in mind; it is your certain passport through the white gap, as I term it" (43).

So, Holland lays out the plan: first, secrecy, reliability, trustworthiness, and accountability of personnel are vital; and second, the revolution must be financed - he says with almost a sneeringly telltale tone that scoffs at the perpetrators' arrogant naivety - on the backs of the oppressor. Holland sets up a classic trickster "ruse" and it is clear that he is morally, ethically, and spiritually comfortable with his directives after which he becomes a "runaway" who scampers "off through the forest," an African-American empowered trickster spreading his religion of insurrection (44).

The initial fruits of Holland's liberationist labors result in the sudden disappearance of his son, Joe, just as Holland predicts might happen when he discusses his runaway plans with Judy. At that time, Holland sets up a coding system with Judy that will let her know if Holland has personally taken Joe away if Joe goes missing. Before he
goes into the field, Holland gives Judy his trust, shares his secret plans, asks her to care for his son, but, considerately, also issues the protective gift of plausible deniability, saying, "Then from this time hence, I become a runaway. Take care of my poor boy while he's with you. When I leave the swamps, or where I'll go, will never be known to you" (31). Since Franks ends up closely questioning Judy about Holland's runaway status, and she vehemently denies knowledge of Holland's whereabouts, her and Holland's prior conversation about his plans and also how to outwit interrogators takes on deeper significance.

Delany also does not back off from more fully fleshing out that serious barrier to successful insurrections: the Black Betrayal Trickster. During enslavement, white people certainly could and did betray trust which was bad enough; but when black people betrayed the people's trust, it was like a dagger to the heart and soul. Delany takes pains to caution against it and to include narrative illustrations of it. One instance of betrayal is when Holland is in Alexandria where "he [finds] the people patiently looking for a promised redemption" (73 - 74). But, before Holland can organize a "redemption" and bring the message of and plans for revolution, "...a pet female slave, Silva, espies him and [gives] the alarm that a strange black [is] lurking among the Negro quarters" which completely disrupts his attempt (74). Holland barely escapes with his life.

He is betrayed a second time when he is meeting with a group of revolutionaries in New Orleans, "...a party of fifteen, the representatives of the heads of that many plantations, who that night had gathered for the portentous purpose of a final decision on the hour to strike the first blow" of a revolt (102). However, before the plans could come to fruition, a slave named, Tib, enters the gathering, and, as Holland narrates, is
"evidently bent on mischief" (104). Tib insinuates himself into the meeting and, against all attempts of the others to maintain a low, cautionary profile by talking in hushed tones, Tibs begins to act like a loud buffoon, a dastardly trickster. He astounds and alarms the group by "shuffling, dancing, and singling at such a pitch as to attract attention from without" to the meeting location (106). Of course, Tibs is a puppet of the masters and his behavior is an alarm to notify a waiting posse that they should assault the black group, and they do. Holland describes Tib as "the betrayer," who has foiled "an extensive plot for rebellion of the slaves" (106). Delany narrates that there were dire consequences for betrayed fictional heroes, akin to the ones for rebellious real world slaves, for "the military [was] called into requisition, dragoons [were] flying in every direction, [and] cannon from the old fort sending forth hourly through the night...and the infantry on duty traversing the streets..." (107).

Holland encounters a third black betrayal trickster when he makes the journey to Charleston. Ironically, the traitor is a free "mulatto gentleman," a "mausta," whom Delany describes as a member of the "Brown Society," "an organization formed through the instrumentality of the whites to keep the blacks and mulattoes at variance" (111). In other words, and in the parlance of war, the whites of Charleston have devised a trickster scheme to divide and conquer. Delany is careful to explain that while "...many most excellent mulattos and quadroons condemn with execration this auxiliary of oppression," Holland had not run into one of them. Delany is bringing up a very pithy difficulty involving a part of African American history, which is the psychological damage enslavement caused. Yes, the nearly insurmountable external factors were the primary barriers to implementing small and large scale rebellions, but there was also the
inescapable fact Delany is discussing in storytelling that, as during wars in all times and places, some rebellions failed because of the active presence of internal tricksters, in this case known as traitors.

But, the good news and moral Delany wishes to deliver is that with courage, loyalty, and justifiable deception, ordinary members of the enslaved community can accomplish much and behave heroically. After Holland runs away in Blake, Franks corners Judy and demands that she divulge what she knows about Holland’s disappearance; but, unlike the disloyal slaves, Judy is clear on her responsibility to protect Holland’s secret. As a result of her cooperative silence, Holland is able to freely travel around to surrounding plantations and hold secret gatherings to encourage members of the enslaved community to run away. The implication is that Holland is able to convince two black women, Ailcey and Polly, to flee, and that he also spirits away his little son, Joe; and, it is likely not a coincidence that Ailcey works as the plantation’s children’s nurse maid. Delany continues on with the narrative of runaway politics, as many more enslaved people disappear from neighboring plantations and homes, and he adds commentary on general black insurrectionist activities.

Franks and the other slave owners in the region mount up and go searching for the missing runaway black people, but when the owners talk among themselves, they figure out that the issue is widespread, and they become afraid. One of them, says, "Oh, Heavens! We're no longer safe in our own houses. Why, sir, we're about being overwhelmed by an infamous class of persons who live in our midst, and eat at our tables!" (57). With this comment, Delany introduces one of the abolitionist arguments against slavery which is that engaging in it is dangerous for the enslavers. He is pointing
out that, contrary to the myth of the "happy slave" put forward in many slave-supporting corners, enslaved individuals are not content with their lot, plot and carry out escape plans, and, in some cases, are willing to commit acts of violence to secure their freedom. No, indeed, Delany implies, slave owners are not "safe." There are discontented Tricksters, like Holland, loosened on the field of battle. Delany has Holland join the legions of his literary African American trickster predecessors, oral and written, who have graced the homes and pages of previous stories, narratives, and fiction.

Henry Holland travels to plantations across the South, in Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana. Delany writes about his trickster hero that "[f]rom plantation to plantation did he go, sowing seeds of future devastation and ruin to the master and redemption to the slave..." (82). Holland even journeys to the "United Nation of Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians" and discovers that Native Americans are holding slaves. Delany approaches the delicate issue and creates a dialogue between Holland and a character named Mr. Culver, whom he describes as "the intelligent old Chief of the United Nation" (85). When Holland questions the Chief about his people holding slaves, Delany gives the Chief an explanatory speech:

Now you see, .... "the difference between a white man and Indian holding slaves. Indian work side by side with black man, eat with him, drink with him, rest with him and both lay down in the shade together; white man even won't let you talk! In our Nation Indian and black all marry together. Indian like black man very much, only he don't fight 'nough. Black man in Florida fight much, and Indian like 'im heap. (86)

Delany's narrative historically coincides with a time when "black [men] in Florida [fought] much" during the period involving the United States Army and the Seminole Nation's battles, known as the Seminole Wars, the last conflict occurring between 1855 - 1858. Natives Americans and African Americans, together, fought off U. S. Army
soldiers. Delany addresses the issue of how it came to be that many members of the Seminole Nation's ancestry included both ethnicities, having the "Old Chief" comment:

The squaws of the great men among the Indians in Florida were black women, and the squaws of the black men were Indian women. You see the vine that winds around and holds us together. Don't cut it, but let it grow till bimeby, it git so stout and strong, with many, very many little branches attached, that you can't separate them. (87)

The historical and cultural links between Native Americans and African Americans is only now beginning to be examined in a formal manner by academics, and even the more widely known and accepted Native American and European American or African American and European American blood ties have still not been sufficiently researched. As narrative dialogue, Delany does approach the difficult subject of the sexual interrelationship of blacks and whites during slavery. During what is a murderous outing of a white male "posse of patrols," men who have let loose a pack of "Negro-dogs" to hunt down, among other prey, "a little Negro girl ten years of age" (94), Holland overhears part of the white men's conversation about black and white interracial relationships:

...Colonel, we're to understand you to mean, that white men can't live without niggers," commented "Ralph Jordan," one of the members of the "patrol." "I'll be hanged, gentlemen, if it don't seem so, for wherever you find one you'll all'as find tother, they's so fully mixed up with us in all our relations!" replied "Colonel Sprout," another member of the groups and the owner of the dogs. (96)

The desire to show the vicious cruelty, lack of empathy, and stunning natal disregard on the part of white men who knew, or highly suspected, they were enslaving or keeping enslaved their sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, cousins, nephews, nieces, and in-laws is one of the common links between Brown, Jacobs, and Delany. They added this disturbing component to their writings to draw attention to the horror and bitter irony of
the incestuous nature of the abuse made all the more painful for the enslaved community who knew the pain and suffering was inflicted by blood family members. Delany provides historical commentary on the nature of cross-racial relationships of his time. The sexually intimate black and white relationship is more extensively addressed as an important theme in the Clotel and Incidents narratives, by informing or reminding the reading audience that many abused and oppressed enslaved people, ironically, were direct relatives or descendants of the oppressors.

Holland traverses the South as a trickster "[a] lone and friendless, without a home, a fugitive from slavery, a child of misfortune and outcast upon the world, floating on the cold surface of chance..." but determined to continue with "...his progress in the spread of secret organization among the slaves" (101). His "progress" with that goal eventually takes him to North Carolina's Dismal Swamp where he encounters a community of enslaved men and women Delany describes in heroic terms as "some bold, courageous, and fearless adventurers, denizens of the mystical, antiquated, and almost fabulous Dismal Swamp, where for many years they have defied the approach of their pursuers" (112). As we may recall, William Wells Brown has a character, Picquillo, in Clotel who is a “large, tall, full-blooded negro” who also lives in the swamp and is fomenting armed revolution (253). Harriet Jacobs in Incidents also hides in the swamp for a time to escape the abuse of Dr. Flint. The swamp is used as a complex metaphor in all three texts for a space of safety and for a place from which to foment revolution.

Delany's tone is near reverential with admiration for the people Holland meets. He references one of the most legendary slave revolts of his time, having Holland encounter "a number of old confederates of the noted Nat Turner" (113). And while
Delany is unabashedly admiring of a community of blacks "bold" enough to free themselves and craft an independent life in the swamp, he also takes a look at the place of spiritualism in the movement.

Gamby Gholar, the High Conjurer

Delany creates a character, old Gamby Gholar, "a noted high conjurer and compeer of Nat Turner," who has a story to tell about what has transpired during his "thirty years [having] been secluded in the Swamp..." (112). Of course, Delany implies, it is close to "mystical" how a group of blacks could maintain their freedom while still in the middle of the slave state of North Carolina. It is through the storytelling of Gamby Gholar that Delany comments upon a very important aspect of the folk life of the people of his time, their spirituality. While Judy typifies the community members who have embraced Christianity as their belief system, Delany presents another view with Gholar. Delany uses storytelling as a means of crafting his bifurcated objective with dealing with a form of African American "mystical" spiritualism of his time, conjuring. First, with Gamby Gholar, he admits its existence, explains it, and, from his activism point of view, gives the system context and place within the struggle. But, second, Delany also takes great pains to dismiss the spiritualist system of magic as a viable modality for direct, confrontational resistance. As we will see in chapter four, in The Conjure Woman, like Delany, Charles Chesnutt also uses conjure spiritualism as a fictional backdrop for mounting arguments for the presence of African American self-reliance, self-determination, and resistance activities towards injustice.

In service to presenting the many ways enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals cope with or resist enslavement, Delany weaves a tale about how Gholar had
"been seein' on [Holland]" years before Holland's arrival, and that Gholar, prophetically, had "tole 'em," meaning the swamp community of runaways, that Holland would come. Delany uses dialect for Gholar's speech and Standard English for Holland's words to distinguish between the two men, a system that he chooses for many of the characters Holland runs across. The choice is never to degrade or criticize the color, intelligence levels, or courage of the characters who speak dialect. Actually, it is the enslaved, darker-skinned people who are most often painted as being the most loyal, clever, brave, helpful, and self-sacrificial. In Gholar's case, he is all of these traits, and more. Gholar is a conjurer. According to Holland, Gholar works with "gourd[s]" and "articles of a mysterious character," among other things such as "bits of woollen yarn, onionskins, oystershells, finger and toenails, eggshells, and scales which he declared to be from very dangerous serpents" (112). However, Holland represents the rationally-minded, and practical skeptic who acknowledges the presence of spiritualism, but does not believe it in it, saying about Gholar's ritual items that upon inspection, they "closely resembled, and were believed to be those of innocent and harmless fish, with broken iron nails" (112). Delany's breath of incredulity about the spiritualism blows over the Gholar story, but he is also respectfully careful as he tells it. Gholar closely inspects the gourd's items "through a fragment of green bottle glass" which Gholar "claim[s]" is "a mysterious and precious 'blue stone' got at a peculiar and unknown spot in the Swamp", acquired by the guidance of a "special faith" (112-113). Holland continues to describe the ritual, stating that Gholar formed "a bottle" out of the gourd and its magical contents and then "rattled the 'goombah,' as [Gholar] termed it” (113).
This is Delany the commentator, the objective recorder of folklore and history. But he is revealing even more than pure fact when he writes that Gholar is doing these activities "as if endeavoring to frighten his guest" (113). Delany has had his hero traverse nearly the entire slave states and Holland has encountered innumerable hostile forces waged against him, from white and black origins. It is fine and dandy when enslaved soldiers are young, mobile, and armed to the teeth with money and weapons, as Delany advocates is the best profile for his fictional troops. But, what to do when you are elderly, unarmed, and hiding in the swamp like Gamby Gholar, the "old confederates of...Nat Turner" and "a soldier [old enough to have fought] in the Revolutionary War for American independence..."? (113).

Delany narrates that the group is either battle-hardened freedom-fighters of the ilk he admires, or they are men who admire the kind of frontal assault he advocates. They all sit around the proverbial African storytelling circle and "recount" stories of "the many exploits of whom they conceived to be the greatest men who ever lived" which circles right back around to admiring the actions of "Nat Turner, Denmark Vessie [Vesey], and General Gabriel [Prosser]" (113). Grudgingly, but to be thorough in his profile of the state of black affairs, Delany presents what I will call the Spiritualist Offense. That means that, although killing "Negro" bloodhounds and slaying "patrollers" is high on Holland's list of aggressive maneuvers, he is Delany's mouthpiece used to recognize that frightening an enemy with magic is a battle tactic some respected members of the community bring to bear upon the problem.

However, Delany relates, Gholar and the other men, are also willing soldiers of physical action, for they share "that the Swamp contain[s] them in sufficient number to
take the whole United States" (114). It is at this point that Delany offers his view of an explanation for why, with superior numbers, enslaved blacks did not, en masse, rise up as an army and throw off their yoke. Through Gholar, Delany explains that even though enslaved people had "sufficient number, he says that" the only difficulty in the way being that the slaves in the different states could not be convinced of their strength" (114). Gholar says "he," like Holland, "had gone out among [enslaved people] with sufficient charms to accomplish all they desired, but could not induce the slaves to a general uprising" (114). Although Delany's tone is, understandably, saddened and disappointed, he does unpack many of the difficulties surrounding such a complex action as violent rebellion. The main problems are in the tactical arena, one of the major ones being a lack of solid, believable intel versus the enslaved community's lack of intelligence, courage, or desire for freedom.

Delany's purpose for telling a story of a black man roaming the South serves to demonstrate the fact that enslaved communities were not one monolithic group; so therefore, they were unable to do most of the things necessary to raise, maintain, and deploy an army and assault the enemy in a cohesive manner. Enslaved people, in general, could not read newspapers or missives to assess enemy strengths or locations, converse with each other across state lines and vast distances, write to each other to issue or receive orders, or openly recruit, arm, and train thousands of soldiers without drawing the attention of whites.

Although it was "amusing enough," Holland "consents to satisfy the aged devotees of a time-honored superstition among [the Dismal Swamp gatherers]" by allowing them to "anoint him a priest of the order of High Conjurors" (114). He describes
the men involved in bestowing his rite as a "supreme executive body called the 'Head'
[which] consists of seven aged men, noted for their superior experience and wisdom"
(114). Holland may be amused, but in their "wisdom," the men of magic recognize that
Holland comes to them with a particular set of traits that they lack, such as youth,
mobility, money, and more modern warfare techniques than conjuring. It is obvious that
they are consummate battle tacticians, for they, logically and wisely, add conjuring to
Holland's already formidable arsenal. At first, Holland is less than fully impressed by the
gift of wielding magic, thinking "[t]he 'Head' seemed, by the unlimited power given to
him, to place greater reliance in the efforts of Henry for their deliverance, than in their
seven heads together" (115). But Holland does not allow his zeal for action to blind him
to the benefits of what is tantamount to an additional motivational tool for warfare.

After Holland moves on from Dismal Swamp, he eventually circles back around
to Natchez and Colonel Franks's plantation where he meets up again with his family
members and friends. One of them, Andy, asks Holland to tell him what Holland has
been doing since he left, but Holland, pressed for time, defers having an extensive
discussion. But, Holland does tell Andy about meeting Maudy Ghamus and Gamby
Gholar; the Head, the group of High Conjurors; and that he is now also a High Conjuror
"after their own order" (126). Delany has another black character in the discussion,
Charles, ask, "What good does it do, Henry, to be a conjuror?" (126). Holland replies, "It
makes the more ignorant slaves have greater confidence in, and more respect for, their
headmen and leaders" (126). In other words, the struggle for freedom is complicated. The
narrative makes it crystal clear that Delany is cognizant that there are complex factors,
including psychological ones, involved in dealing with the community of enslaved
individuals and there is the necessity of using a myriad of approaches to solve the
community's problems. Given Delany's extensive history as an activist, Holland’s voice
sounds an awful lot like Delany’s when Holland says to Charles, "I'll do anything
[including accept an appointment as a High Conjuror], not morally wrong, to gain our
freedom!" Obviously, Delany, as any good general would, observed the troops with
which he was working and it is not a stretch to conclude that Holland's astute observation
reflected one that Delany likely thought sound: "[W]e must take the slaves, not as we
wish them to be, but as we really find them to be" (126).

Even though he recognizes that it is wise and sound to meet and accommodate the
needs of as many segments of the black community as possible for the sake of uniting the
effort, Delany is ever the rational purist. He analyzes the spiritualist tendencies of the
"conjuring" community and accepts that they must be included in the plans for liberation,
but Delany wants no confusion concerning where his head is located, which is firmly in
the realm of the rational and materially practical. Delany winds up Holland's foraging
into the world of conjuration by having Holland dismiss "conjuration and such" as
"foolishness and stupidity" so far as it relates to a modality capable of "deliver[ing] them
[the enslaved community] from their confinement..." (137). Delany crafts his hero to
operate in the tangible world of troops, armaments, funding, and battle plans rather than
relying on magic practitioners he has Holland describe as "persons of nonsense..." and
who are engaging in the "silly nonsense of conjuration" (137).

Delany's steely-eyed observations that magic, or "conjuration," is neither an
adequate response nor offense against the organized system of American chattel slavery's
modern weapons of mass destruction is certainly understandable. If, Delany is likely
reasoning, in 250 years of struggling to find a permanent solution to enslavement, conjuring has not proven to be it, Holland's observation that the enslaved community's members were "sick at heart of [conjurers], and waiting willing and ready, for anything which may present for their aid" rings true as Delany's musings. But, what is irrefutably true is that Delany does grasp onto a different kind of ancient conjuring, the magic of storytelling.

*Blake* is a tour de force novel of the power of African and African American trickster storytelling used as a tool to grapple with oppression and change minds, both black and white. Delany uses an ancient literary structure to examine a 19th-century African American, but hardly unique, dilemma: How does a weaker force overcome an evil, oppressive, dominant one? Delany's answer crafts a wily African American trickster protagonist who, akin to African tricksters of old, adopts many physical disguises; undergoes name changes and personas depending on the need or location; exists in, hides out, or travels to multiple states or countries; strikes from the shadows; makes bargains he may or may not keep; and advocates for anarchy, often as a pathway for peace. *Blake's* hero, like typical tricksters, lies, cheats, steals, and kills in order to teach a lesson or further a noble cause. In African trickster literary mythology, this historic question has been answered with grace and wisdom, wit and humor, and, in Delany's case, the response is transformed and wielded with New World practicality in ways so stark that his points of argumentation are delivered like blunt force trauma to the brain. At the end of the twists and turns Carolus Henrico Blackus undertakes, as Henry Holland and Henry Blake, to free himself; advocate for liberty for his people across three countries; free his
child, family members and friends; find his wife and free her; and agitate for Cuban
sovereignty, he comments on the meaning and nobility of his fight with the reflection:

Freedom should ever be potent to repeal and annul the decrees of oppression, and
repel the oppressor. The instant a person is claimed as a slave, that moment he
should strike down the claimant. The natural rights of man are the faculties of
option, heaven bequeathed, and endowed by God, our common Father, as
essential to our being, which alone distinguish us from the brute. (273).

Brown, Jacobs, and Delany’s works preserve the African trickster literary
tradition as Trickster leaped shores from Africa to America to reside in their African
American texts. What makes these texts “African American” is that Brown, Jacobs, and
Delany introduce readers to heroes of African descent, real or imagined, who have their
African souls and memory intact enough to apply African American community soul
force to the problem of combatting nineteenth century America’s legal, political,
spiritual, and social oppression. All three authors make a decision to write texts that
demonstrate the commitment of their heroes to cooperative struggle, group survival, self-
sacrifice and freedom delayed for the time it also takes to ensure the liberation of others.
All the major African American characters in the three books are clever, strong, and
resourceful enough to figure out how they could leave everyone else behind and break for
freedom. After all, it was certainly much easier to escape as an individual than to have to
worry about the safety of people traveling in a group. But, lighting out for individual
freedom is not how Brown, Jacobs, or Delany crafted the heroic actions in their books.
Their heroes are intelligent, noble, brave, clever, and aggressive, classic African heroes
adapting to and operating in a new land. One of the defining aspects of their work is that
their characters, as Tricksters, are not comic figures. Oh, there are moments when the
characters’ actions likely engender smug, satisfied smiles from anti-slavery readers as the
characters thwart enslavers’ plans, escape, or mount frontal assaults in various ways.
However, no matter what the characters are doing, no matter how clever the ruses or brilliantly executed the plans, what they have to do to counter the painful flotsam and jetsam of enslavement that has washed over them is not “funny.” Much of the humor in the stories is deeply satirical, based in the satisfaction of revenge served cold, celebrations of representations of evil cut down or foiled, and seeing unjust and immoral villains craftily humiliated or circumvented. However, whenever Wells, Jacobs, or Delany frees a character from enslavement, it creates a literary moment of elation, like a crashing wave of pure joy washing over the mind and soul. It is as though the authors have called out to African Trickster and he and she, for Trickster is both male and female, appear to do combat duty in America on behalf of his and her African descendants. The notable issue with understanding the authors’ projects is that they wrote about how nineteenth-century African American heroes, who were the ordinary members of the African American community who lived to make America great, approached and solved their epic challenges. The answer? Their heroes did it in an African-inspired African American trickster way.
Chapter 4 Notes


2 My parents had several record albums of “Negro Spirituals.” As a child, I frequently played and sang the songs. Many “aggressive” spirituals were often sung before, during, or after political meetings I attended in the Civil Rights Era of the 60’s and 70’s.


4 The *Underground Railroad* is a term used to stand for the secret network of safe houses and other locations that runaway enslaved persons could access as they fled. Runaway people were often hidden by collaborating enslaved individuals on other plantations on the way, abolitionist leaning homeowners in slave states, escaped individuals who had made free colonies in swamps or other inaccessible regions, and Native American communities.


10 The original Uncle Remus collection was Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings: the Folklore of the Old Plantation* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881).


31 Robert Carr, Black Nationalism in the New World: Reading the African American and West Indian Experience (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 41, 45, 48.


CHAPTER 5
CHARLES CHESNUTT AND THE ORAL TRICKSTER TALE TRADITION
IN THE CONJURE WOMAN: GOOPERIN’ NINETEENTH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN OPPRESSION

The object of my writings would be not so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites,—for I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism—I consider this a barrier to the moral progress of American people; and I would be one of the first to head a determined, organized crusade against it. Charles Waddell Chesnutt, May 29, 1880

Chesnutt uses the African-inspired African American trickster folktale tradition and encapsulates it inside an entire short story collection, which connects *The Conjure Woman* to the Native American writings of Zitkala-Sa and Jane Schoolcraft, who use the Native American trickster tradition in similar ways, thus enabling a cross-cultural literary analysis. Chesnutt’s use of the trickster tradition also links his efforts to the African American trickster writing of William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Martin R. Delany—and to Paul Laurence Dunbar’s opening movement into combining the novel, enslavement narrative, and short story genres which will be discussed in this chapter.

Chesnutt’s literary endeavors rest on the shoulders of African American scholarship and writing that took place for many years before he put pen to paper. Although Chesnutt’s personal diary entries do not mention that he specifically read the major historical publications of African Americans, it is difficult to believe that he was not exposed to and familiar with the classic writings of African American authors. The reason is because Chesnutt had a family history of generational and personal involvement with African American education and letters. There is an interesting and significant
beginning to the official historical “sketch” of Fayetteville University, the Historically
Black College for the State of North Carolina. I have added italics for emphasis:

In 1867, seven Black men - Matthew N. Leary, Andrew J. Chesnutt, Robert
Simmons, George Grainger, Thomas Lomax, Nelson Carter, and David A. Bryant
- paid $136 for two lots on Gillespie Street and converted themselves into a self-
perpetuating Board of Trustees to maintain this property permanently as a site for
the education of Black children in Fayetteville. General O. O. Howard of the
Freedman's Bureau, one of the best-known friends of Black education, erected a
building on this site, and the institution became known as the Howard School. By
a legislative act in 1877, the North Carolina General Assembly provided for the
establishment of a Normal School for the education of Black teachers. The
Howard School was chosen as the most promising because of its successful record
during the previous ten years. It was designated a teacher training institution, and
its name was changed to the State Colored Normal School. Five Chief
Administrative Officers served for relatively short periods until 1899: Robert L.
Harris, Principal (1867-1880), Charles W. Chesnutt, Principal (1880-1883),
Ezekiel Ezra (E. E.) Smith, Principal (1883-1888), George Williams, Principal
(1888-1895), E. E. Smith, Principal (1895-1898), and the Rev. L. E. Fairley,
Principal (1898-1899). In 1899, Dr. Smith returned to the institution. Under his
presidency, the school grew from three rooms in a small frame structure to a
physical plant of ten buildings on a fifty-acre tract of land. (“Historical Sketch”)

Chesnutt’s father, Andrew Chesnutt, co-founded the Howard School when
Chesnutt was nine years old. During the time Chesnutt was a boy growing to manhood, it
is likely, due to his family’s active participation in African American and wider
American educational issues and politics, that he was privy to hearing and eventually
being able to read stories of African American enslavement, revolts and resistance, and
daringly successful, near magical escapes or attempts, and the horrific consequences of
failure or capture. He was also likely to have appreciated stories of the glorious rewards
and privileges of having liberty and being rejuvenated by descriptions of "Canaan"-like
locations of freedom to which enslaved people fled. Oral and written literature, by both
blacks and whites, of the Enslavement, Civil War, Emancipation, Reconstruction, and
Post-Reconstruction periods were historical literary markers generated in the public discourse during Chesnutt's youth and early manhood.  

Bold and audacious African Americans pulled every trick in the book to gain freedom and autonomy and their exploits were chronicled in most major publications of the day, printed on hand and posted leaflets, and told and retold as stories around American dinner tables in black and white homes. It is with this oral storytelling, listening, and print backdrop and Chesnutt's eventual movement to personal literacy and social activation that he wrote and published *The Conjure Woman* stories. As he grew to observant manhood under Jim Crow, he had to find and carve out his own "place" and space within the stratified social structure of racist America, an undertaking he determined included sensitivity and the need to address in writing the circumstances of all strata of the African American community.

While it is likely Chesnutt was exposed to African American literature, prior to writing *The Conjure Woman*, his diaries attest to his fascination with, love for, and appreciation of European classical texts. By 1874, when he was sixteen, Chesnutt writes in his journal that he had already obtained a “First Grade Teacher’s Certificate” and eventually, as the sequence shows, he became Principal of the State Colored Normal School in 1880 (Chesnutt, *Journals*, 39). As he obtains the education that allows him to become a principal, he writes of reading *A handbook for Home Improvement* and adopting many of its guidelines for personal hygiene. In 1874, he lists he is rereading *Volume I of Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Barne’s *U. S. History*, Page’s *Theory and Practice of Teaching*, and Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers*, calling it a “splendid book” (Chesnutt, *Journals*, 50). He also writes that he is in the process of reading Quickenbos’
Composition & Rhetoric. The next year, he says he is studying German and makes April 6, 26 and May 4, 1875 entries written entirely in German, exclaiming, “I like German very much” (Chesnutt, Journals, 57). Later the same year, he recounts an incident when, indicating his proficiency, he holds a dialogue in German (“Dutch”) with an educational administrator concerning a possible teaching position. By mid-year, he is reading George Gordon, Lord Byron’s “Don Juan” and William Cowper’s The Task. He moves back to Dickens with Barnaby Rudge and laments, “I wish I could write like Dickens, but alas! I can’t!” (Chesnutt, Journals, 80). He quotes Mayhew’s Means and Ends of Universal Education in support of his rational level-headedness when he is railing against “superstitious, hard-headed” neighbors (Journals 81).

In 1877, Chesnutt is an assistant teacher in the State Colored Normal School and writes about “reading History,” having history “books at [his] command,” reading “The Iliad in Pope’s translation,” Mary Ann Dwight’s Grecian and Roman Mythology, Reverend John Todd’s Student’s Manual, and Voltaires’ Histoire de Charles XII in the “original” French. On October 7, 1878, he writes several complete notations in French (Journals 86 – 87). Over the next several days, October 8 and 11, he reads 50 lines of Virgil’s Aeneid and writes out sections in Latin from the poem. He also includes more French lines from Voltaire. On October 12, he quotes from Longfellow’s “Hiawatha,” and exclaims, “I do not think I will ever forget my Latin.”

At this point, Chesnutt pauses to ruminate on a direct relationship between himself and Edmond Dantes in Alexander Dumas’ (pere) The Count of Monte Cristo. He exhibits the kind of mature, quiet, introspective reflection on life’s vagaries that becomes
evident in his characterization of Uncle Julius in *The Conjure Woman* and in his characters in the novels.

Chesnutt writes:

I above all things like to enjoy the…advantages of a good school, but must wait for a future opportunity.

- In some things I seem to be working in the dark. I have to feel my way along, but by perseverance I manage to make better headway than many who have the light; and besides, like Edmund Dantes in Dumas’ Monte Cristo, I have become accustomed to the darkness. As I have been thrown constantly on my own resources in my solitary studies, I have acquired some degree of *self-reliance*. As I have had no learned professor or obliging classmate to construe the hard passages and work the difficult problems, I have “persevered” till I solved them myself (*Journals*, Brodhead 92).

On April 23, 1879, Chesnutt’s reflections shift from contemplating his personal life and progress to commenting on the larger African American’s community’s affairs. He records a letter he wrote and sent to the editors of *The Christian Union*, a social Gospel journal. He expresses thanks to the editors for their “interest…through [their] invaluable paper, in the advancement of the colored people” which was prompted by the journal’s assumed positive copy on an appearance by the Fisk Jubilee Singers. The letter’s language is positive and forceful, very much unlike Chesnutt’s previous journal entries. Chesnutt does not mince words in his praise for the African American cause. His word choices and tone have a similar ring to the writings of Frederick Douglass, Martin R. Delany, and David Walker, unlike Chesnutt’s previous introspective scholarly musings. He writes:

The Colored People will advance. They have obstacles to encounter, but they will overcome them; they have a work to accomplish, and they will achieve it! I believe that the America People will recognize worth ability or talent, wherever it shows itself, and that as the colored people, as a class, show themselves worthy of respect and recognition, the old prejudice will vanish, or wear away, and the Colored Man [he double underlines the two words] in America will be considered, not as a separate race, not as a stranger and a pariah, but as a friend
and brother; that he may become a strong pillar in the Temple of American Liberty, and be “bone of one bone, flesh of one flesh” with the New American Nation! (Journals 108)  

The resemblance to Douglass may not be accidental. Douglass’s third autobiography, The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, appeared when Chesnutt was twenty-three years old. Chesnutt wrote a biography of Douglass, Frederick Douglass: A Biography (1899), admiringly calling him a “genius” and a man of “character” in the opening “Preface.”  

Douglass died in 1895, only three years before Chesnutt published The Conjure Woman.

Another literary influence that shaped The Conjure Woman was one of the most widely read retrospective reflections written on the enslavement period, Joel Chandler Harris’ 1880 African American trickster tales collection, Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings, the first of more to come. Harris declared he had “endeavored to give to the whole a genuine flavor of the old plantation” (Harris, His Songs, 39). The Uncle Remus character is depicted as a former enslaved man who tells African American trickster animal stories to audiences of post-war white children. Harris claimed to have gathered the stories directly from African Americans, transcribed the stories into a made-up Gullah-type dialect of his own, and ostensibly sought "to preserve the legends themselves in their original simplicity" (Harris 39). Harris, a man with decided Southern-leanlng sympathies, first published the Uncle Remus tales in The Atlanta Constitution as serial stories. The Uncle Remus figure, who is pictured lovingly holding a white boy on his lap, reinforced the stereotype (or fantasy) of the former “happy slave” that existed in millions of post-war white Americans’ psyches.
Uncle Remus tells stories of a black Brer Rabbit who “could only be assimilated into the culture of a post-slavery America through the mouth of a quasi-Negro whom white readers desperately need to defuse the stories’ revolutionary hostility” (Hemenway 29). 8 Chesnutt graciously describes Harris’s “plantation stories which dealt with animal lore” as “having [been] collected and put into pleasing and enduring form” (Chesnutt, *Study in the Short Fiction* 95). 9 Chesnutt even comments about his own work, *The Conjure Woman*, that “the name of the storyteller, ‘Uncle Julius,’ and the locale of the stories, as well as the cover design were suggestive of Mr. Harris’s Uncle Remus.” He essentially admitted to the Harris influence on his imagining of the tales. But, however well-intentioned Harris’s creation of a “quasi-Negro” Remus was and however polite Chesnutt decided to be, the Harris project was still that of what Hemenway terms “the oppressor” having “great sympathy with the race” and being “guilty of paternalism rather than physical violence” (30).

Chesnutt is of the opinion that as a black man, he is better suited to the undertaking of representing the black experience in writing. Chesnutt gives Harris grudging respect but states, his own “tales are entirely different” (Chesnutt, *Study in the Short Fiction* 103). Yes, they certainly are, as exemplified by the following illustration:

Uncle Julius, Chesnutt’s post-bellum character creation, is not a content and happy former slave, like Uncle Remus, who is regaling white children with tales of pleasantly "humorous" times in slavery. Julius sourly reflects on slavery and he represents the painfully difficult issues black people faced in the Antebellum, Civil War, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction Jim Crow South (Hemenway 39). Chesnutt writes in his journal that he is giving Julius a firmly militant mindset:
In every instance Julius has an axe to grind, for himself or his church, or some member of his family, or a white friend. The introductions to the stories, which were written in the best English I could command, developed the characters of Julius’ employers and his own, and the wind-up of each story reveals the old man’s ulterior purpose, which, as a general thing, is accomplished. (102)

Chesnutt crafts a very different set of behaviors for Julius that does not mirror the set Harris gave Remus. Remus is a passive hero created to assuage white fear; Julius is an aggressive hero created to show black self-determination and self-respect. The differences may seem subtle, but Uncle Remus panders; Uncle Julius demands.

Another writer who published novels before Chesnutt that examined the African American political condition in the South was Albion Winegar Tourgee (1838 – 1905), a white man who had an impressive and aggressive track record as a post-bellum champion for African American civil rights. He was born and raised in Ohio, and educated in Massachusetts and New York. However, after war wounds prompted him to move South to a warmer climate, he and his wife settled in North Carolina. Tourgee established himself in his new Southern location as a writer, lawyer, and judge who advocated for equal justice for all, even at the risk of personal assault. After later leaving the South, he litigated the 1896 Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson which unsuccessfully attempted to strike down the “separate but equal” laws that designated separate public facilities use by blacks and whites.

Chesnutt, Tourgee’s writing contemporary, was aware of Tourgee's political, legal, social and writing efforts on behalf of African American equality. In his March 16, 1880 journal entry, Chesnutt marveled at Tourgee's "astonishing degree of popularity" after A Fool's Errand was published in 1879 (Journals 124). Seven years before "The Goophered Grapevine" arrived in print, Chesnutt contemplated that:
If Judge Tourgee, with his necessarily limited intercourse with colored people, and with his limited stay in the South, can write such interesting descriptions, such vivid pictures of Southern life and character as to make himself rich and famous, why could not a colored man, who has lived among colored people all his life...write a far better book about the South than Judge Tourgee. (Chesnutt Journals 125)

Chesnutt continues his literary self-education by commenting on the activities and writing of Albion Tourgee. He comments on *A Fool’s Errand*, Tourgee popular 1879 novel. The story is about a northern white man, Comfort Servosse, who fights for the Union Army during the war. After the war, “the Fool [sells] his pretty home, pack[s] up his household idols, [takes] his wife and little daughter, and [goes] to seek health, happiness, and fortune in Dixie” (*Fool’s* 36). Servosse moves his family South, purchases a decayed planation, espouses liberal Yankee sentiments around and to his white neighbors (much to their annoyance), befriends and assists black people with improving their lives, and courts the ire of the Klan.

There are some literary indications that Tourgee’s white male character, Comfort Servosse, in *A Fool’s Errand* inspired a character profile for Chesnutt’s first story “The Goophered Grapevine” and then for subsequent tales in the *The Conjure Woman* collection. Chesnutt creates a white male character, John, who moves South with his wife, Annie, from the North and, like Servosse, John buys a plantation in bad disrepair. John then spends a lot of his time in dialogue with, listening to, and learning humanistic values about African Americans from a knowledgeable former enslaved man, Uncle Julius, who is living on the plantation when John and his wife arrive. This is where the projects diverge. Tourgee’s white man knows what the civil, just, and right thing to do is towards the African American community and he aggressively does it. Chesnutt’s
counterpart is present to learn about African American lives, concerns, and solutions and to be convinced that he has a responsibility to be civil, just, and concerned.

*A Fool's Errand* (1879) was a runaway best seller and its successor *Bricks Without Straw* (1880) was also a financial and artistic success for Tourgee. (*Bricks, Karcher 1*) However, Chesnutt proved up to the competitive task of being the culturally authentic voice on behalf of downtrodden southern African Americans, for in 1899 alone, *The Conjure Woman* received no less than sixty-nine strongly favorable newspaper reviews, mostly from papers in the North, but also from several in the South. *12*

In Carolyn Karcher's reintroduction of Albion Tourgee's 1880 novel, *Bricks Without Straw*, she indicates *Bricks* is the artistically and politically stronger of his two novels and offers a glimpse into the white social activist literary work being done alongside black voices in the late nineteenth century. Tourgee grapples with the South's dismal record of brutality and injustice and seeks "to awaken the northern public from its slumber and summon [it] back to the unfinished task of liberating African Americans from white domination" (Karcher 3).

Tourgee crafts a novel presenting strong, brilliant, brave, and resilient African American characters, such as Nimbus and his wife Lugena, a woman who audaciously kills a Klansman while defending her husband's life. Nimbus is situated and struggling in post-Civil War chaos where "the sting of defeat still rankled the heart[s]" of "Southern white men "such as the character, Hesden Le Moyne (Tourgee, *Bricks* 290). Nimbus's narrative moves him from an "inchoate, nondescript sort of existence: free without power or right; neither slave nor freeman; neither property nor citizen" to a "full-fledged citizen of the American Republic (Tourgee, *Bricks* 110, 115)." *13* However, this progress also
means Nimbus is the bane of insecure Southern white men's racist intentions for black men. Tourgee explains to his Northern readers the kind of prejudice a successful, late nineteenth-century southern black man could expect to encounter. Immediately after Nimbus’s swearing-in ceremony, the sheriff of the town declares, “[Nimbus] ain’t respectful” and “[t]alks as if he was a white man” openly resenting that Nimbus would begin to enjoy the kinds of freedom the sheriff had enjoyed all of his life.

Tourgee's depiction of the bitter racial resentment operating in the climate of the Reconstruction South sets the stage for better understanding of Chesnutt’s character, Julius’s, oblique approaches to manipulating the white characters, John and Annie. Obsequious behavior was demanded of black men locked in the grips of Jim Crow expectations. Like Nimbus, Julius is also a man of intelligence and honor but neither John nor the sheriff in Bricks sees nor appreciates those qualities. They are gripped by "the unjust spirit of caste which was so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole races and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism" (Chesnutt, Journals 139).

Unlike Nimbus, Julius is as careful around white people as a mouse is around a mousetrap, because he knows that at any time, his movements towards autonomy and security could land him in serious trouble. Tourgee's sheriff character lays out the kind of stakes Nimbus faces with his overt actions—stakes Julius would face if his covert approaches were unmasked for the aggression that they are. The sheriff further spews his racist venom as he puts forward in vivid detail the lethal risk inherent with the state of black success when he "sneeringly laughs" in response to the Northerner's assertion that "if there were more like [Nimbus] it would be better for everybody":
"The devil!" returned the sheriff, "If they were all like him, a white man couldn't life in the country." They'd [black men] be so damned sassy and important that we'd have to kill the last one of 'em to have any peace." (116)

Tourgee’s fiction offers a salient political commentary and protest-fiction writing model that Chesnutt saw as he was crafting his short stories.

Another model, or at least rival approach, was offered by Paul Laurence Dunbar, who published a book of short stories, *Folks from Dixie*, in 1898 by Dodd, Mead and Company, the year immediately before Chesnutt published *The Conjure Woman* collection. This fact makes Dunbar the first African American author to publish a book of short stories and puts Chesnutt in second place. However, Chesnutt is the first African American short story author to take the African American Trickster literary tradition from the oral storytelling culture and apply it to an entire collection of short stories, *The Conjure Woman*.

Dunbar primarily uses a standard narrative format for most of the stories to examine, relate, and critique the circumstances and experiences surrounding antebellum and post-bellum African American lives. Dunbar’s black characters speak in dialect and their intentions and actions are explained by an absent, omniscient narrator who speaks in Standard English. There is one story in the collection, “Aunt Mandy’s Investment,” where Dunbar employs the African-inspired African American storytelling tradition and includes the trickster element in an unexpected way.

“Aunt Mandy’s Investment” is a tale of, unexpectedly, an *African American* Trickster named Mr. Solomon Ruggles who sets up “The Colored American Investment Company” and smooth-talks the local black population into giving him their money to invest. Ruggles absconds with the community’s money except with one notable exception. He returns a profit on Aunt Mandy’s investment in a note he sends back to her
after he leaves, which causes the community to consider that perhaps Ruggles is not a crook: “The men looked at each other in surprise, and then they began to disperse. Someone said: ‘I recon he mus’ be alright, aftah all. Aunt Mandy got huh div’den.’ “I recon he’s comin back all right,’ said another” (Dunbar, Folks 167). However, Dunbar closes the story with a twist with the line: “But Mr. Ruggles did not come back.” That makes it obvious Mr. Solomon Ruggles is a Trickster.

Clearly, Dunbar was concerned about predatory and abusive behavior towards the African American community, no matter from what racial corner the abuse originated. The front piece to the book is a portrait of Ruggles, by E.W. Kemble. Ruggles is wearing the formal dress of a gentleman including a top hat. He looks like a black northern carpetbagger come to prey upon the African American poor of the post-bellum southern states.

African folklore educates and cautions the internal community concerning how members are supposed to comport themselves towards each other. This is the African American literary moral work of “Aunt Mandy’s Investment” brought whole and intact from Africa’s trickster tradition to reside on American soil. In Dunbar’s careful, but firm written conversation, he condemns white Americans for their hand in or complicity with the dire condition of black Americans during and after enslavement and he chastises black Americans for and cautions them against contributing to their own hardships. At the same time, even though the intent is painfully instructional, Dunbar glories in and praises African American culture and traditions.

The dialect Dunbar writes sings the praises of the beauty of the African American man and woman’s soulful struggle to make new lives in a hostile land using limited
educations and scarce resources. At the same time, Dunbar’s beautiful and eloquent Standard English prose flows like a tranquil balm over the disturbing memories and violent aftermath of enslavement’s troubled waters. Dunbar’s short story writing in *Folks from Dixie* was his approach to presenting and discussing a very complicated and difficult social and political reality Americans were struggling with in 1898 and are still struggling to find ways to discuss today – race relations.

Dunbar opened the African American short story racial conversation using caution, careful and balanced judgment during a time when for the prior five years from 1892 – 97, there were 727 African Americans lynched in America (“Lunching Statistics”). These African American lives were lost for supposed affronts to white sensibilities that were far less inflammatory than Dunbar publically bringing the pain and suffering of enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals to America’s attention (Lynching Statistics”). For reconsideration of any view that Dunbar wrote safely from the North in Ohio, Robert Golson in “The Negro Holocaust: Lynching and Race Riots in the United States, 1880 – 1950” points out that “every state in the continental United States with the exception of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Vermont has had lynching casualties.” During post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow, there were no safe spaces for raised African American voices, like Dunbar’s, that questioned or protested the conditions under which the black community tried to survive and thrive.

Paul Laurence Dunbar deserves his seat at the table of distinguished African American authors who used writing as a tool for political and social transformation. He set the stage for the arrival of Chesnutt’s politically and socially complex African-inspired African American trickster text *The Conjure Woman*, a collection of short stories
that critique the antebellum and post-bellum strained black and white American relationship.

The time frame in which Chesnutt wrote *The Conjure Woman* has several important characteristics which Chesnutt took into account while focusing on his writing. On the one hand, the Civil War, the official slavery system, and the Reconstruction period were officially over. But the legal system of the “separate but equal” Jim Crow laws that swiftly followed Reconstruction and were affirmed by the United States Supreme Court is “Plessy v. Ferguson” decision, were operational in many states prohibiting voting, interracial marriages, and legislating other severe limitations on African American freedom. The Ku Klux Klan and other non-governmental groups used violence, abuse, psychological coercion, and intimidation to reaffirm their sense of power and control over African American communities. There was definitely a heated discussion occurring on both sides of the color line in America concerning the role and “place” of African Americans in American culture. Chesnutt’s voice is bold, but he is also careful about how he initially approaches the written racial conversation. *The Conjure Woman*’s tales are subversive African American political treatises and morality tales chronicling rebellious behavior by African American characters who resist enslavement, express outrage over the condition of post-bellum abuse and limitations, and laud abolitionist and post-bellum protest voices, theories, and stances. However, Chesnutt is still operating from within a similar vein as Dunbar because the protest messages are also couched in fiction and trickster lore.
*The Conjure Woman* rests on the literary shoulders of centuries of men and women, black and white, who believed, acted on, spoke, and wrote about the belief in the equality of all persons and their right to equal justice under the law.

The Presence of the African American Trickster Tradition in Charles W. Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman*

*The Conjure Woman* short story collection features a running dialogue between Julius McAdoo and the white male narrator, John, which takes place in the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow South. Chesnutt ties the historical and cultural representations of the horrors of enslavement with the devastating residual legacy of the limitations of the newer Jim Crow oppression. 18 Julius McAdoo embodies Chesnutt’s situation in that Chesnutt was living under and grappling with the consequences of the Supreme Court's 1883 decision to allow racial discrimination by private individuals and in public accommodations. 19 The stories are the backdrop for Chesnutt to explain the political and social predicament of black men and women who struggled for freedom during enslavement and, importantly, to assert that they resisted the condition. This is an often repeated refrain for politicized African American authors of his time. The fact that this theorizing is so ubiquitous speaks to the issue that the general American population was ignorant or dismissive of the fact that African Americans engaged in resistance actions against enslavement.

The second component of Chesnutt’s stories detail methodologies for how enslaved African Americans resisted. The *that* and *how* refrain in Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman* work is an echo of Brown, Jacobs, and Delany’s previous efforts more carefully detailed in the previous chapter, to educate their audiences to the self-determining, heroic, and self-actualizing actions of the African American community. Chesnutt’s tales
are political allegories showing that racism did not die with slavery but continued to flourish after Emancipation and Reconstruction. The third component of *The Conjure Woman’s* message is that once emancipation was secured, post-bellum reconstruction was attempted, and African Americans and well-meaning whites began the work of rehabilitating a devastated South, there occurred a horrendous backlash against African American progress. Although, as the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law points out, “Jim Crow was not confined to the South,” the fact is that the South more forcefully and brutally enforced the codes. 20 The day-to-day living situation for blacks in the post-Reconstruction South was dire.

Chesnutt’s focus in *The Conjure Woman* mirrors his life’s mission to protest and “question” the racist assumptions then present in American culture. Chesnutt participated in protest as one of a body of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries’ Race Men and Women. This was a term describing the community of African American men and women determined to resist a post-Civil War era South that was in 1903, in the words of W. E. B. Du Bois, "simply an armed camp for intimidating black folk" (*Souls* 136). 21 This group who were members of the "black leadership elite," worked assiduously in support of furthering African American civil rights (Blackett xi). 22 Chesnutt's personal letters attest to his use of and facility with writing as a medium for social agitation and change. He corresponded with major champions for African American rights, men and women who "struggled against apparently insuperable odds" (Blackett xi). He wrote to people such as, among other prominent African Americans, Booker T. Washington, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Oscar Micheaux, A. Philip Randolph, and Georgia Douglas Johnson. 23
There is a threaded theme in Chesnutt's writings, from *The Conjure Woman* tales on through to his final works, of social awareness, political insight, and a call for transformative action that is a consistent reflection of Chesnutt’s commitment to the cause of justice and equality. Chesnutt's sentiments in defense and condemnation of how African American lives and experiences ought to and ought not to be depicted in print are reflected in the words he wrote in a November 7, 1909 letter to William Montgomery Brown as a rebuttal to Brown's book, *The Crucial Race Question*. Chesnutt takes offense at what he says are Brown's negative racial "views" that are revealed in his entry:

> For the book itself, I am quite sure I dissent radically from its views. I could not imagine myself approving a book which condemns to infamy and all kinds of hopeless inferiority so many of my fellow creatures, my fellow Christians, and my friends. The fact that race prejudice is prevalent, north, south or anywhere else, is no argument at all in my mind to establish its justice, its wisdom, or that it has the divine sanction. (Chesnutt, *An Exemplary Citizen*, Crisler 73)

Chesnutt's pages are replete with direct social anarchy and filled with overt and covert memories of the abuses of Americans having enslaved or tolerated enslaving black people and then whites continuing the abuses and discrimination of the post-bellum Jim Crow period. In Chesnutt's hands, slavery is not a cute and cuddly nostalgic memory of the enslavers’ “good old days” with Harris’s harmless Uncle Remus telling antebellum tales. Even free, Uncle Julius is angry and “has an axe to grind.” Once it has been sufficiently sharpened, Chesnutt has Julius bury it into the minds of the book’s white readers in order to attempt to “elevate” them. 24

John’s purpose in the series of tales is to listen to stories of life and death issues “remembered” by Julius. John's persona as white and narrating, and when, where and how he does it, is crucial to interpreting the text. John “hears” Julius’s slavery tales and retells them for the book’s post-slavery white reading audience. Therefore, John is the
white political and social voice and bears witness for Julius since Julius, according to the
codes of the Jim Crow South, does not have the legal right or credibility to bear witness
for the truth of black people’s condition or any other issue for that matter. John also
narrates the interactions between himself and Julius, again giving white testimony to
what happens between him and Julius and what it all means. The narrative “truth” from
within of the text is mediated by whiteness. But, the ultimate manipulation rests with the
text being written by an African American author who has black truth to tell through the
use of a white narrator, thus "tricking" readers into "hearing" black testimony.

Chesnutt creates a white narrator, a political and social interrogating tool who
embodies the role of the white “outsider” who has no clue about what it is like being
African American. Chesnutt functions as an “insider” translator who is presenting and
making sense of African American suffering, lost opportunities, and how, very
importantly, within such an environment, black people still forge some type of autonomy.
At the same time, to complicate white and black relationships in the stories, the white
narrator’s role of introducing and closing the stories is juxtaposed with that of Julius who
takes the lead to tell the “goophering” and "conjuhing" central sections of the tales.
Chesnutt, through Julius and the antebellum tales of enslavement, acts as a transplanted
African-inspired griot to promote African America interests.

Thomas Hale in *Griots and Griottes* explains that the origins of the griot tradition
stretch back in Africa at least 600 years and “most of the griot’s functions involve words”
(19). One of the insights into understanding the form and function of griots is: “If one
places the notions of history and literature into one category broadly defined as
interpretation of the past, the griot as historian emerges as a ‘time-bender,’ a person who
links past to present and serves as a witness to events in the present, which he or she may convey to persons living in the future” (23). This explanation certainly fits Chesnutt’s *Conjure Woman* project, for he “in [his] narratives” is a “griot [who] provides deep insights into the values of a people and their social structures” (Hale 23). Finally, Hale explains how that the term *griots*, the concept of them as “keepers of the oral tradition” and “wordsmiths”…“has entered the vocabulary of African Americans to such an extent that it would be impossible to try to suppress it” (Hale 18). In the stories in *The Conjure Woman* collection, Chesnutt combined the Old World African oral and trickster storytelling tradition with the New World written short story genre. Chesnutt, indeed, serves the African American community as the “human link between past and present” (Hale 20). As John W. Roberts points out in *From Trickster to Badman*, “Subversive behaviors became both a part of the everyday strategies of the enslaved and a primary focus of many personal experience stories told by former enslaved Africans” (32). Chesnutt serves up the voice of Uncle Julius as a “former enslaved African” who tells many “personal experience stories” to bear witness to African American truth. It is through Chesnutt’s writing in the collection that the African-inspired griot’s voice can be distinctly heard.

Throughout the tales, John channels Julius’s memories for the audience to hear. Through the interplay between the black and white males, written by an African-American author, researchers can get a glimpse of the functions and uses of trickster narration in the late 1800’s. *The Conjure Woman* is Chesnutt's initial answer to the often debated nineteenth-century's written black and white discussions concerning the
disposition of "the Negro," which were located in the type of literary journals in which Chesnutt published and which he likely read.  

The narrator has a wife, Annie, who avidly listens to Julius and more closely “hears” the lessons of humanity Julius is trying to impart. Unlike her husband, Annie is able to see into the adjusted, more equitable social paradigm Julius is offering her and her husband. She is able to translate metaphor into a deeper understanding of the uncomfortable reality which Julius, and by extension the former enslaved community in the South, is attempting to contend with and change. The circumstances for Julius and the black community are grim. The Civil Rights Act of 1875 did not have the federal will to protect blacks living in the post-war South from “white vigilantism,” and even by the time of the Rutherford B. Hayes administration, the government made the decision to “remove federal troops as an active force in the South” thus leaving blacks residing there at the mercy of States Rights and Jim Crow policies (Davis, *We Will Be Satisfied*, 137).  

The tales are set in a historical atmosphere in America which prohibited close African American and white interactions and Julius’s actions and those of the enslaved characters provide a sense of underlying power for African Americans in a situation where exercising power could be punishable by death. The stories have blacks deceiving and outsmarting whites; blacks and whites who are accessing black avenues of spiritual power; blacks resisting white dictums and directives; and free blacks wielding power over their own and even white spaces. 

In Julius McAdoo, Chesnutt crafts a Booker T. Washington “cast down your buckets where you are” African American male character who is fending for himself and trying to eke out a farm living in nearly impossible conditions.  

Through Julius's
trickster narratives, Chesnutt re-creates for the audience his version of the insanely “goophered” world of enslavement and the stifling conditions where Julius later resides and is trying to survive, a place marked by the reign of white supremacy. With the arrival of the white narrator to the McAdoo plantation in "Patesville, North Carolina," readers are introduced to Julius’s seemingly modest loss of a withered old vineyard and rotten honey tree.\(^{28}\)

Through this metaphor of ruin and decay, Chesnutt unmasks the tragedy of the South’s continued and relentless oppression of Blacks, for whom it blocks all advancement, and the moral, social, and psychological withering the institution causes its white participants. W. E. B. Du Bois commented that even as late as 1899 “the nation had not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman had not yet found in freedom his promised land” (\textit{Black Reconstruction} 48).\(^{29}\) In keeping with the near impossibility of overcoming the racist codifications of the South, which virtually assured non-autonomy and the economic depression of blacks, Julius is reduced from having free reign over the abandoned McAdoo farm to having to drive the coach for a new white owner from the north.\(^{30}\)

As Julius is trying to pry John and Annie out of his scuppernong domain, he has good reason to worry about having white people up close within his reconstructed world. According to tracking figures by the Tuskegee Institute, between 1882 and 1903, 3,337 people were lynched, the majority of them black.\(^{31}\) Julius’s obsequious behavior patterns towards John, although he is free at the time he is relating enslavement tales, makes sense when the \textit{Negro Year Book} lists “insults to white persons” as a white racist “cause” for lynching (Work 1).\(^{32}\) Julius risked becoming “strange fruit” as a result of being accused
of such trivial offenses. The Book continues with describing punishable behavior such as not calling a white man “mister; writing to a white woman; trying to act like a white man; attempting to vote; being prosperous; or not knowing his place.” Julius’s “freedom” had been invested in the ownership and nurturing of the deserted vineyard of the scuppernongs, but that freedom was snatched away the day John and Annie moved in.

Julius McAdoo, light-skinned enough that it causes suspicion as to why he bears the “McAdoo” name, thinks he should have clear ownership of the former plantation and be entitled to use the plantation’s land as he see fit. Julius’s expectations were not unfounded, for Eric Foner writes: “The Civil War destroyed the ‘model’ slave system [in parts of the South] and exposed undercurrents of discontent… When Joseph Davis fled his plantation in 1862, the slaves not only refused to accompany him, but broke into his mansion and appropriated clothing and furniture. By the time Union troops arrived, the blacks were running the plantation” (Reconstruction 59).

In keeping with the southern regionalist literature form, when he meets them, Julius tells John and Annie numerous stories of enslavement times' "discontent." Through moralizing and logical persuasion, Julius tries to solidify his tenuous hold on the land. The supernatural subject in the tales is used as part of Julius’s weapons to trick and spook away the usurping whites. Julius relates to John and Annie goose-bump-raising tales of supernatural and fantastic occurrences, not coincidentally, whenever John brings up his plans to modify or expand his grip on the plantation property. Chesnutt has Julius employ a particular view of and relationship with “magic” that Yvonne Chireau in Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition says formed part of the “complex generally recognized as ‘religion’ in black American experience” (Chireau 3). Chireau
defines “magic as a particular approach or attitude by which humans interact with unseen powers or spiritual forces. In contrast with religion, it is efficacious, with its spells, curses, incantations, and formulae. Magic is used for specific, personal ends. It operates mechanically—as opposed to prayer, which is communal, devotional, and non-coercive” (Chireau 3). Since Julius wants John and Annie to leave the plantation immediately and is using coercion as a strategy, magic is the best non-violent method Julius has available to accomplish the task.

Chesnutt was very astute to realize that the authenticity of his characterization of Julius required the introduction of the use of “magic, conjure, and root working” (Chireau3). His portrayal of Julius’s tales of goophering and conjuring underscores Chireau’s observations that “even as blacks in America embraced Christianity, they retained perspectives that harked back to older African ways. Remarkably, as late as the 1890’s, some black American conjurers were conducting African-based rituals…. Even the lexicon that came to be associated with conjuring in the United States included terms like toby, goopher, and mojo, which emanated from West and Central African linguistic antecedents” (Black Magic 55).

With the opening story, Julius and John are on a black and white cultural and political collision course where "one set of inhabitants meets the incursion of another group's way of owning and managing the world” (8). Chesnutt tweaks the social pressure to work through the codes of late nineteenth century racism, so he adheres to the traditional necessity of whites demanding white verification of black testimony. However, Chesnutt has the white narrator re-tell Julius's enslavement and antebellum through post-Reconstruction stories in a masterful stroke of turning the trick back onto
the abusers. Chesnutt succeeds in reaching several key socially instructive and constructive objectives when he paints a black storytelling face onto the white narrator. John takes note of Julius and his claims and concerns, so through the medium of storyteller and listener to black storytelling, he affirms that African American interests exist, are important, and must be considered. The narratives confirm that slavery is horrific, its depredations and constraints are unjust and hurtful, the institution does not ennoble its white participants, and enslaved people didn't passively accept nor tolerate the condition.

Chesnutt sets the system up so the tales are told to the wealthy white narrator by a poor black man and, with verification, the white man is relaying them to readers; he transcribes the stories just the way he hears them. And, to complicate the literary structure, since Chesnutt is African American, the white narrator doubly ends up speaking from a black point of view that the majority of his audience does not likely know about.

To many people, Chesnutt appeared white. Many of his writings delve into issues of blacks “passing” for white or being mistaken for white. However, Chesnutt was a staunch member of the African American community and a strong advocate for its civil rights.

Chesnutt cunningly "cunjuhs" up John and Annie and gives them a “place” to work in service to the black liberationist cause. He "gorophers" his readers into contemplating the evils of white Americans having enslaved the African American community and instituting the laws enforcing its unjustly challenging aftermath. The entire book is a trick, from the likelihood that many readers thought Chesnutt was white,
to the "authentic-sounding" black voice of Julius speaking through the white mouths of John and Annie, and onward through the radical positioning of Julius, not white people, as the authority on the condition of slavery and the black man's struggle for post-war autonomy. Of course, the ultimate insider's joke is that, for those people who knew Chesnutt was black - and some people did - they were aware that, through Julius, Chesnutt was really the man-in-charge, the artistic maestro, the African American genius painting the authentic picture of black life. And, for whoever knew he was black, depending on which side of the racial fence people resided, the literary joke he pulled was either comedy or tragedy.

In *The Conjure Woman*, the interactions of enslaved people with each other, of masters with enslaved people, and even of masters with masters involve the heavy presence of trickster behavior, often using the mystical and supernatural as weapons. The power of African and African American folk rituals, characters' use of magic, and the narrative presence of the supernatural permeates *The Conjure Woman*, and eight other short stories that have been republished in an edition by Richard H. Brodhead. Tying these three aspects of ritual, magic, and mysticism, Chesnutt uses the supernatural as a trickster metaphor for political resistance by enslaved people. He accomplishes this by supplying his African American characters with covert and overt trickster survival skills and methods for leveling the ground upon which whites and blacks struggled. Everyone with an agenda in *The Conjure Woman*—and it is clear that everyone in Chesnutt’s story world *has* an agenda—is “goophering” and “cunjuhing” everyone else, or getting goophered or conjured themselves.
While Chesnutt postulates that enslavement was an unacceptable situation, he does posit that it was also a condition that was next to impossible to counter. He is not naive enough to suggest that all enslaved people had to do was to story-tell themselves out of enslavement and Jim Crow He demonstrates the trickster possibilities clever and resourceful enslaved people used to shape and twist their situations for their own benefit as much as they realistically could.

Chesnutt presents an alternate view of everyone involved in enslavement, and, crucially, he examines the circumstances of the supposedly most powerless and weak gender in an enslaved community, its women. Aun' Peggy, the central conjure woman of the tales, has a thriving cottage industry providing mystical services to the enslaved and master-class communities, and Tenie in "Po' Sandy" is an enslaved woman with supernatural powers who wields magic to manipulate the circumstances in her personal domestic world. In "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," Aunt Nancy has to part with a "mess er peas" and her "bes' Sunday head-hankercher" to obtain Peggy's conjuring services when Nancy needs to rectify the separation of a mother and child (87, 89).

Aunt Peggy and Tenie retain their African memory of ritual and magic, and because Peggy is free, she is able to carve out a space of autonomy and sustenance above the ordinary for herself using her command of the supernatural as a tradable commodity. Peggy masters what Jeffrey Anderson describes as being a "conjurer" who realizes that "success rest[s] upon a potent blend of manipulation of the supernatural world and effective marketing" (90). In keeping with a conjurer's understanding that there is a constituent "market" for her services, Peggy is able to live independently and free. When Dugall McAdoo wants to prevent people from eating his grapes, he pays
Peggy "a basket er chick'n en poun'-cake, en a bottle er scuppernon' wine" as payment for her casting an evil spell on his vineyard (36). And, while McAdoo's participation in Voodoo might seem strange, there is a sound explanation concerning why McAdoo understands enough about how spells and "cunjun'" would scare off his white competition for the grapes. As Jeffrey E. Anderson points out in _Conjure in African American Society_, the fact of the matter is that many nineteenth-century white Americans subscribed to their own forms of magic:

Despite overt opposition to African religious systems, much in European beliefs helped preserve the very African convictions that whites sought to destroy. First and foremost, Europe had its own brands of magic workers. During the centuries preceding the settlement of the New World, belief in witchcraft was widespread in the countries that would later supply America with its white settlers. Despite whites' attempts to define blacks as superstitiously backward, whites were also strongly attached to supernaturalism. (52 – 53) 43

Chesnutt spits spiritual beer all over the pages of the _Conjure Tales_, congealing the maneuvering of the white and black characters within the swirling forces of magic. 44 In the context of the stories, African rites groan under the weight of slavery but are still powerfully wielded by conjurers with historic memory in order to maintain the norms of everyday life by countering the oppressive demands of the "peculiar institution." 45

Chesnutt crafts John to testify to the presence and continuity of the African mystical through the practices of conjuring, a skill most often associated with the practice of Spiritualism among enslaved people. Ron Bodin points out in _Voodoo Past and Present_ that although enslaved populations came from different countries, they "shared a similar worldview, holding in common a belief system rooted in the conviction that one's welfare depends on understanding the complexities of gods, spirits, and ancestors" (13). 46

Chesnutt's creation of John's narration is how we know how some enslaved and post-bellum people used a belief in the supernatural, by blacks and whites, as a weapon in
their struggle to maintain some modicum of control over their lives lived in a world gone rabidly mad. But, as with most religious traditions, there are some people who understand spiritual forces and practices better than other people do; and, this is true of African American spiritual practices. Bodin points out that there was "a shared tradition of African root doctors, also known as conjurers, or hoodoo men [who] had status in [the various transplanted African] cultures and the practitioners' knowledge of herbal remedies was integrated with the ritual skills of divination (reading the future) and magic (the casting of spells)" (13). So, Aunt Peggy, the primary conjurer in Chesnutt's tales, has "status" which even whites recognize and utilize. When things are going badly for a plantation owner's control over his slaves' behavior, he makes the trek to Peggy's house to pay her to fix the problem. Through Julius's testimony, Chesnutt explains Peggy's "status:

But bimeby ole Mars Dugal' fix' up a plan ter stop it [enslaved people eating his farm produce]. Dey was a conjuh 'oman livin' down 'mong's de free niggers on de Wim'l'ton Road, en all de darkies frim Rockfish ter Beaver Crick wus feared er her. She could wuk de mos' powerfulles' kin' er goopher,-could make people hab fits, er rheumatiz, er make 'em des dwinel away en die; en dey say she went out ridin' de [blacks] at night, fer she wuz a witch 'sides bein' a cunjuh 'oman. Mars Dugal' hearn 'bout Aun' Peggy's doin's, en begun ter 'flect whe'r no he could' git her ter he'p him keep de [blacks] off'n de grapevines. (36)

The stories are tales of combat and violence, the use of fear and intimidation, of survival, of occasional triumphs, and related methods of trickery. These techniques are employed by both the oppressor and oppressed, which Chesnutt metaphorically centers on the struggles between Julius and John over the McAdoo farm. John has reason operating on his side, the outsider's immunity of northern white cultural traditions wielded against the stereotype of southern superstitions.
John is incredulous and incensed when Julius relates a tale about a plantation owner, Mars Jeems, being magically turned into a black man by Aunt Peggy. The very idea that she has the ability to "cunj'in de w'ite folks," as the best way to teach Jeems a lesson "dat dem w'at is kin' en good ter po' people is sho' ter prosper en git 'long in de worl'" upsets John's "controlling rationality" (Chesnutt 68, Church 122). Chesnutt infuses John's response with considerable sarcasm and condescension as John responds to Julius's preposterous idea that Jeems was transformed into a black man. John says, "Yes, Julius, that was a powerful goopher. I am glad, too, that you told us the moral of the story; it might have escaped us otherwise. By the way, did you make that up all by yourself?" (Chesnutt, “Mars Jeems” 68-9).

Of course, Chesnutt is implying that one of the solutions to the racial dilemma is that white people must develop the ability to view black people's plight from an empathetic vantage point. Chesnutt’s suggestion, even delivered in couched narrative metaphor, that a white man become black was a radical, and under his circumstances, dangerous position to take. John's response, laced with incredulity, sarcasm, and condescension, were Chesnutt's best-effort to use against what was likely white readers' shock at this brand of racial shenanigans which Chesnutt splashed across the narrative pages.

Chesnutt's suggestion went far beyond "black face," which allowed a white person to don a skin-darkening product in order to mock and disparage black people on the stage and then revert back to white skin. This was a practice Chesnutt likely found offensive because "since antebellum days, minstrelsy demeaned blacks and effectively equated bourgeois morality--indeed, humanity--with whiteness" (Gaines 67). Chesnutt's horror-
for-white-people tale of Mars Jeems having "a monst'us bad dream,-fac', a reg'lar, nach'ul nightmare" of lost white privilege is designed to drive home the "monst'us" trick of nineteenth-century American culture - that too many of its white citizens were practicing racism and racial oppression (65). Chesnutt works to paint a true picture of the black experience, to put forward "the hard facts" and not rehash or record "stale negro minstrel jokes" (Journals 126). He uses trickster lore, which includes lulling white people to sleep with his slight-of-hand presentation of dialect-speaking "slaves" so he can then hit them over the head with the message of the "nach'ul nightmare" of African American enslavement and Jim Crow life.

While it is true that Chesnutt's publishers put pressure on him to produce conjure stories jam-packed with dialect and stereotypical characters, "controlling the terms of [Chesnutt's] appearance" in print, it is also important to realize that Chesnutt's acquiescence allows him to act with subterfuge (Brodhead, Conjure Woman 17). He is able to "respond to institutional pressures...by seeming to embrace assumptions demeaning to African Americans in the act of redefining their cultural significance" (Wonham 55).  

John disbelieves in the trickster history and power of the spirit of the South and thus Julius's tales don't inspire terror in John or the total capitulation Julius seeks; the northern white man can't easily be manipulated in this way. No matter what Julius says, John just won't leave the farm. And, the northern white male carpetbagger has the ultimate weapon of inequality in the relationship, the commodity that overcomes Julius's threats with the supernatural presence on the former plantation–yankee money. With money, spells or no spells, John is able to keep Julius out of the ownership and
controlling position on the McAdoo farm and relegate Julius to "his place" as a servant, the "still faithful retainer" left over from enslavement. Chesnutt infuses Julius with an unrelenting determination to try and secure dominion and autonomy over what he considers his piece of the southern land space (Brodhead 5). 54

John and his wife “Miss Annie,” in Chesnutt's obvious satirical allusion to the “Miss Ann” of historical African American white mistress referencing tradition, begin field maneuvers against Julius’s claim at the outset of the stories. 55 They approach Julius “at an angle and from the rear, and [get] close to him before [Julius] perceive[s] them (“Goophered” 34). 56 It is likely that if Julius had been a white male sitting on the land, John and Annie would have made a head-on approach with no need for employing subterfuge. Of course, being “shrewd,” Julius notices the new white world coming, and decides upon a strategic retreat the nearer the couple comes into his domain (“Goophered” 34). But, John puts a stop to Julius’s retreat in order to take advantage of the post-war situation where "labor was cheap" and “land could be bought for a mere song.” 57 Arriving in the south to enrich himself, John realizes that Julius has in-depth knowledge of the land and the South’s cultural customs and determines that he can take advantage of having Julius around. John calls Julius to him and tells him he can “keep his seat ” (“Goophered 34). In a telling commentary on what Chesnutt thinks should be the re-arrangements of the New South, he has the narrator declare to Julius that “there’s plenty of room for us all" (“Goophered 34). True…there certainly is, but the part readers quickly find out is that John will fall in line with prevailing racist thinking and decide to respect the codes of the antebellum and Jim Crow South, so the “room” will not be fairly shared between Julius and him. 58
Because of the chaos enslavement produced in Southern culture, the enslaved people in Chesnutt’s tales run amok across the fields and in and out of cabins, laying curses and causing havoc to masters and to each other. \(^{59}\) Gone is Joel Chandler Harris’s cuddly, cosy black-faced Uncle Remus, nauseatingly “caressing and stroking” Miss Sally’s little boy” for an adoring white audience. Chesnutt replaces Uncle Remus with a “shrewd” Uncle Julius. That Julius doesn’t regain autonomy on the land isn’t Chesnutt’s only point. There is also the stereotype-busting reality that Julius has the nerve, shrewdness, and capabilities to try it. Julius wants autonomy, freedom to move about the McAdoo space, and he uses his wits as a weapon to attempt to get it. Chestnut peels back the minstrel stage paint off of Uncle Remus so readers of *The Conjure Tales* can see that Remus’s slave cabin was really haunted by confusion, sedition, violent passions, and bids for autonomy and freedom. \(^{60}\) Under Chesnutt’s pen, Uncle Remus transmogrifies into Uncle Julius, shifting from fawning white-petting slave remembering de good ole days through ambiguous tales into a new persona, that of a manipulating trickster actively trying to pry white flesh out of his personal living space and to tell the real tales of slavery’s horrors.

Chesnutt has Dugal McAdoo don blackface to bear white witness to the African mystical, except the minstrel’s joke is on the white man, for McAdoo must prostrate himself before the black altar of the supernatural if he wants to rule the plantation stage. When the traps McAdoo sets for a black male runaway go awry, he stupidly shoots himself in the leg with his own hidden trip-wired shotgun. Injured, he realizes that by behaving like the omnipotent white male, he cannot maintain total control over his slavery domain. McAdoo goes to the free black Conjure Woman for help with controlling
enslaved people, “hires her” for ten dollars to help him, bearing “chicken and poundcake.” Jeff Forret points out that “many slaves diligently worked their own garden plots, raised and sold their own crops, and tended horses and livestock. As records of the Southern Claims Commission make clear, some slaves amassed impressive amounts of property” (783). With this narrative of white submission to black resistance, Chesnutt argues that even in slavery, for the clever trickster resisting oppression, there were spaces of black power incursions into white landscapes of power. Kenneth Greenberg and Mary France Berry in Nat Turner trace that some of the more prominent incidences of violent or planned armed incursions into white spaces of hegemony were those of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner. Vesey planned a revolt in 1822 near Charleston, SC, but it was discovered and stopped before he could execute it. Nat Turner’s rebellion in August 1831 lasted 36 hours and resulted in the deaths of 58 whites living in Southampton, VA (Greenberg, xi and Berry 27). With his tales of the supernatural, Julius continuously seeks to destroy the sanctuary the northern invader thinks to build on McAdoo lands.

From early in the stories’ trajectory, Chesnutt establishes Julius’s storytelling as arising from within the African griot tradition. With the culturally historical “remembering” words, “I 'member well w'en he [Dugal McAdoo] sot out all dis yer part er de plantation in scuppernon's.” Julius stakes his culturally-originating African ancestral claim to the McAdoo heritage and lands (35). Julius’s oral remembrance of place, land, and implied family ancestral ties, and his relationship to it all, speaks to his intact historical cultural memory. Julius is “bearing witness” to the state of things and establishing his “credentials” to speak of the past and the social, political and economic “contracts” held within it (Hale 20).
In his historically transplanted physical American space, Julius’s African memory of who he is, where he belongs, and what he is owed, is denied. Julius’s witnessing would have had the weight of an “oral contract” were he residing on African soil, but because of slavery codes of paternity, his possible lineage is unacknowledged. The narrator arrives into Julius’s African ancestral oral space of remembrance with the shifted currency of American contractual power – *paper*: printed money (more of it than Julius) and printed oppressive laws (written in John’s favor). Julius remembers more than the narrator and can bear witness to the truth, but since they are in Jim Crow America and not Black Africa, Julius’s witnessing, his word testifying to the situation of things, is worthless.

As Henry Holland had to do in *Blake*, Julius must fight John for the land with the tools he knows and has at hand, and that won’t get him lynched for using (and not necessarily in that order). With this necessity in mind, he decides on speech and culture as weapons. Julius recounts “monstrous” activities, witchcraft, and powerful conjurers loosened on the antebellum land. He hopes his remembrances and telling of the horrors of slavery will deter the narrator and Annie from wanting to inhabit the McAdoo property, with its haunting ghosts of slavery's past. Julius enters combat, invoking intimidation and fear as his weapons of choice; for, soldiering also has a place and past within the storytelling tradition. As Hale points out, “evidence suggests that [African storytellers] held other roles such as general and combatant” (45). Therefore, combat it is, with Julius armed with the moral power of past wrongs, righteousness needing justice, and the African saber of oral tradition through transplanted storytelling, while John is outfitted with the social, military, and political support of immoral white supremacist laws, might-
makes-right states’ rights, and money, and is protected by his “somewhat interested” Enlightenment reasoning (Dundes, “Forward,” vii).

Put simply, John wants the land, and it is Julius’s function to pass on the history to make sure the northern gentleman is clear about what spiritual attachments to the former plantation he will be getting, along with the trees and the scuppernongs. Graham Furniss and Liz Gunner in *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature* argue that “[t]he concentration upon the broad notion of performance within folklore studies is linked to the movement within linguistics broadly defined to assess the utterance not as a manifestation of underlying linguistic competence but as a ‘speech act.’ The idea of speech act as social action is that of…illocutionary force in speech, and intentionality” (3). 64 Julius’s tales of slavery’s horrors engage in “speech acts and social action” in his bid to psychologically and spiritually unsettle John’s mind and soul. Wanting the northern white male to be clear about “the truth of the matter” of slavery, he launches into “The Goophered Grapevine,” making sure John is going to find out “all about the facts” of life “on the old plantation.” And what “facts” would they be?

The slave cabins in *The Conjure Tales* house black men and women who do not spend their precious hours after work cuddling the master’s white children and regaling them with stories. Their circumstances keep their down time embroiled in finding ways to circumvent malicious white dictums and actions that separate husbands from wives, subject both to floggings, and result in the loss of their children. Circumstances might even lead to them to conjure or be “cunjured” by their own people. Either the enslaved people in the tales outright possess the knowledge and power of conjuring and goophering through the use of herbs, ritual, and magic, or they know someone who does.
In *African American Folk Healing*, Stephanie Y. Mitchem observes that “hoodoo (or conjure) is a set of practices and beliefs that draw on nature and its perceived energies in order to shape preferred conditions” (15). Mitchem describes conjuring as a “supernatural” system, which many African Americans believe “is not automatically to be feared but to be respected” (15). The enslaved people in *Conjure Woman* use conjuring to “shape” their circumstances to reflect more advantageous “conditions.”

Once John invades Julius’s space, Julius activates and employs his “energies” to institute his “preferred conditions.” Chesnutt’s tales make it clear that the black characters’ “free” time is spent finding ways, temporal and spiritual, to eke out and maintain some modicum of autonomy in oppressive spaces. In *Folk-Lore and Ethnology Circular Letter*, even as early as the nineteenth century, Alice Mabel Bacon (1858 – 1918) recognizes the value of respecting and preserving African American folk arts. She writes to encourage 1893 “[g]raduates of the Hampton Normal School and others who may be interested” to preserve African American cultural traditions. She warns, “If within the next few years, care is not taken to collect and preserve all traditions and customs peculiar to the Negroes, there will be little to reward the search of the future historian who would trace the history of the African continent through the years of slavery to the position which they will hold a few generations hence” (179).

   Aunt Peggy pro-actively “sa'nter[s]” in Dugal McAdoo's face around the vineyard "'mongs' de vimes," fulfilling the terms of her free person’s wage-work, gathering leaves, grape hulls and seeds, twigs, and dirt for her spell (“Goophered” 36-7). As instructed and agreed upon in a contractual exchange with Dugal, she casts a spell on the space, against blacks, telling one of them that any black person "w'at eat dem grapes 'ud be sho
Early on in the tales, the specter of manipulation and violence, for profit and survival, rears its head upon the land.

Neither, justifiable acquisition of combatant spoils nor giving quarter to the innocent is respected, for there is no fairness or justice for blacks within slavery’s condition. An overworked and barely-paid coachman saw "de scuppernon's growin' so nice in sweet, slip 'roun' behine de smoke-house, en et all de scuppernon's he could hole" (37). And, a young child “got in” the grapes too. For “getting into” and caught up within the circle of slavery’s one-sided, unjust war of death and destruction, of course, both characters had to die. Slavery’s conditions, as reflected in history and, therefore, the narratives, did not reward the bold and brave nor protect the innocent or weak, which is why millions of African Americans resisted, revolted, ran away, and protested. For as Twain observed in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, “They [enslaved African Americans] have an unfair show in the battle of life, and they held it no sin to take military advantage of the enemy” (11).

Julius goes on to tell “de noo han’s’s” tale of enslavement. As runaway from the Brayboy plantation, The New Hand does not know about the vineyard’s curse and also eats the bewitched scuppernongs. When he finds out about the curse, “he ‘uz dat terrified dat he turned pale.” And, in what is one of the more fascinating plot twists, it is the white overseer who takes The New Hand “ober to Aun’ Peggy, en see ef she wouldn’ take de gopher off’n him, seein’ ez he didn’ know nuffin erbout it tel he done et de grapes.” Chesnutt leaves it to readers to decide if the white overseer believes in the curse or if it is his job to take The New Hand to Aunt Peggy because The New Hand believes in the curse. But, either way, white and black behavior patterns converge and centralize on Aunt
Peggy’s cabin, are caught up, swirl around, and have “gotten into” African ritual magic and the supernatural. Around the metaphor of storytelling and the magical, Chesnutt’s white and black characters work through the complicated forces of oppression and struggle within the landscape of American slavery.

Chesnutt presents a riot of sly social protest movement from within the stories. In one instance, Henry eats the goophered grapes and is partially cured by Aunt Peggy, still suffering the effects in springtime. One of the outcomes of Aunt Peggy’s cure is that Henry “gets spry and lively…and so biggity dat Mars Jackson, de oberseah, ha’ter th’eaten ter whip ‘im, ef he didn’ stop cuttin’ up his didos and behave hise’f.” Henry becomes a “spry and lively” trickster, subverting slavery’s rules and codes of subservience and obedience. John Roberts in *From Trickster to Badman*, provides a useful commentary on Henry's resistant behavior, explaining that:

“The African American trickster tale tradition is an expressive embodiment of the ambiguous situation of blacks brought about by conditions which forced them to accept an identity as inferior and dependent beings in the slave system. [The trickster in slavery tales] is able to show a superiority over those larger and more important than himself through his tricks. The trickster’s actions revealed black feelings of rebelliousness against the values of the system which denied opportunities for self-definition” (21). 71

But, while it is apparent that Henry is Chesnutt’s trickster, a rebellious “biggety” force against the dictums of slavery, it is also clear that the oppression of the institution is more powerful than Henry’s resistance. As the cursed grapevines in the vineyard, the tentacles of slavery’s poisonous oppression, grow and flourish under the slave master’s studied nurturing, Henry is bound tightly in slavery’s grip. It is not until, symbolically, a northern white male, a “Yankee come down ter Norf C’lina fer ter l’arn de w’ite folks how to raise grapes en make wine,” visits the plantation that Henry is set free from his
bondage to the seasonal cycling spell of enslavement. When the Yankee “bus’ de watermillyum” by ruining the productivity of the accursed grapes “burn’ de life out’n dem vines” and causing them to “a-with’in en a-swivelin’” Henry is set free. But, of course, Henry’s freedom comes in the most frequent form of release for the enslaved community in the American south – physical death. As the grape vines of slavery’s entrapment are burned to death by the arriving northern white male, “Henry dies too – des went out.”

From long years of abuse and oppression, like the correlative abuse the grapevines suffer, Henry’s “strenk des dwinel’ away, ‘tel he did’ hab ernuff lef’ ter draw his bref.” With the death of the spirit and body of Henry, Chesnutt’s Uncle Julius lets us know that McAdoo was a “mont’us brash man” whose anguish is for “losin’ his vimes” first. So, for all of Henry’s spry, lively and biggety trickster behaviors, within the narrative, he does not triumph over the constraints of enslavement. As Roberts explains, “Trickster tales, though psychologically fulfilling as compensatory devices, could neither serve enslaved Africans [in America] as a symbol of group identity nor offer them a normative model of adaptive behavior (From Trickster 21).”

The violence inherent within the grapevines of slavery prevents Henry’s trickster-level subversions from resulting in a state of liberation. Orlando Patterson makes it clear that enslaved people like Henry, although adamantly “biggety” could not penetrate the “iron curtain of the master, his community, his laws, his policemen or patrollers” (Slavery 5). He reinforces the untenable position of enslaved people, pointing out that “laws in place against blacks such as the 1829 decision by North Carolina judge, Thomas Ruffin, which stated that the intentional wounding of a hired slave by his hirer did not constitute
a crime, articulated better than any other commentator before or after, the view that the master-slave relationship originated in and was maintained by brute force” (Patterson 3). However, the triumph of Chestnutt’s subversive trickster characterization of Henry is that in spite of the overwhelming likelihood of failing to triumph over the violent vigilance of the master class, through the narratives of resistance, readers are clear that, as the song implies, "many thousands" of enslaved people tried in order for there to be "many thousands gone."

"The Goophered Grapevine" begins The Conjure Woman's narrative journey where there is a collective “trying” of black resistance. Throughout the tales, Julius is trying to resist the incursion of the white male, but has to settle for the more historically and socially real shift from the autonomy of “deriving a respectable revenue from the product of the neglected grapevines” to “accepting the [miniscule] wages [John] pays him for his services as coachman (43).” Julius must settle for the Jim Crow reflection of his “place” as John's servant, rather than the position of master of the manor. He does not reside in a perfect color-blind American world where the farm would have officially come to him upon the death of Dugal McAdoo.

There is a big problem. John is not susceptible to the spell of Julius’s tales, and chooses to reject the burden of carrying the conscience of the deeds of slavery. He flatly states, “I bought the vineyard,” with the unspoken, implied parts being: "I bought it in spite of the curse of oppression on the vines, the deaths of the innocent and the weak permeating the soil, and bloodshed between white and black males and northern and southern white males over the very same land." The victorious white northerner in the Conjure tales does not care about the historical suffering that occurred for blacks in the
South and the region’s long history of slavery; he only cares that he can make a profit. He has turned former McAdoo lands into what he says “the local press calls a striking illustration of the opportunities open to Northern capital in the development of Southern industries” (43). He admits to discovering “that Uncle Julius had occupied a cabin” on the farm and derives income from the property (43). And, in what is another one of Chesnutt’s insightful narrative views into the racial and social injustices or misunderstandings of white males in relationship to black men, the white narrator realizes that Julius is trying to manipulate him off the property, and comes up with what he thinks is the perfect solution for Julius’s ambitions:

[Julius’s cabin and income from the grapes], doubtless, accounted for his advice to me not to buy the vineyard, though whether it inspired the gopher story I am unable to state. I believe, however, that the wages I paid him for his services as coachman, for I gave him employment in that capacity, were more than an equivalent of anything he lost by the sale of the vineyard (43). It is important to see Julius’s point of view about how to handle the resources, rather than John's. What does Julius lose by the sale of the vineyard? Julius “loses” what is probably his rightful land inheritance, autonomy of movement, an independent home and income, the dignity of tilling the land for a profit of his own, and the absence of a white male telling him what to do, and when and where to do it. John's view is that Julius’s position driving his wife and him around is a better option than Julius having the cabin, the run of the land, and keeping and living on the vineyard profits he has earned for himself.

It is interesting that Chesnutt lets readers know that the white male is single-focused on having the former plantation all to himself, without Julius as a rival threat for the land space. Also, by his studied disbelief in the tales, John is determined to remain free of the specter of the ghosts of slavery. And, while John is from the North, Chesnutt
informs readers that John is still nurturing racist perspectives and behaviors. Of all of the possible non-servant jobs John could have offered Julius to perform on his new farm, he views “coachman” as the most appropriate. Of course, it is…if the decision subscribes to the white supremacy perspectives of the South and what their creators and enforcers believe is Julius’s place within its system. John doesn’t believe Julius’s supernatural tales of the old slave South, but he does believe in the viciously oppressive social practices of the post-bellum South and its belief in what type of appropriate “places” he and Julius belong.

Part and parcel of the decisions John makes in relationship to the space he invades is to “tear down the old schoolhouse,” extract its lumber, and appropriate the wood for his and Annie’s private use as a “kitchen in the back yard” (“Po’ Sandy” 45). John’s decision to transform the local edifice designed and built for educating black youth, the school house - a community structure that is the ultimate symbol of education, an important form of freedom from enslavement - disturbs Julius. John’s intent to limit Julius’s community access to acquiring an education reminds us that the activity was forbidden by enslavement practices and made very difficult under later “separate but equal” laws under which Julius is chaffing.

The quest for literacy on the part of enslaved and recently freed African Americans is one of the most notable reoccurring themes within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African American literature. Examples of writings concerning the thirst for knowledge and acquisition or use of reading and writing as a means for liberation are themes found in, but certainly not limited to, the poetry and letters of Phillis

African Americans’ historic pursuit of English literacy and their protest against its denial or curtailment by white hegemony is a strong theme that runs through pre-1900 African American literature. However, as we saw in Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical writings, “white” schooling is a culturally life-threatening, not liberating experience with the advent of the Indian boarding school system.

Julius knows it is vital to preserve the school house from destruction at the hands of the insensitive white northerner, so he goes into pro-action again by telling John and Annie a supernatural trickster story called "Po’ Sandy." However, the issue of educating John and Annie to the complex intricacies of oppression requires a multi-layered approach.

The overt issue is most certainly an opportunity for whites and blacks to have a conversation about the school house lumber and its being a metaphor for opening and maintaining access to educational opportunities. But, Chesnutt nestles into “Po’ Sandy” a wider discussion of the loss of or strain upon vital natal ties during enslavement. It is a discussion that is prominent in Incidents and Blake. Chesnutt is stressing the importance of nurturing and maintaining a healthy African American family structure. This concept is not an idea or practice that has been functional in the South for four hundred years, so Chesnutt knows it bears airing in his work. He paves the way for his readers to gain an understanding of the internal social challenges the African American community faces as its members and white Americans jointly come to grips with what Du Bois “illuminated”
as “America’s struggle in the 1890’s to contend with the memory of slavery, racism, and the Civil War” (Blight. “W. E. B. Du Bois” 49).  

Po’ Sandy is an enslaved man who, when the McSwayne plantation family’s “chilluns growed up en married off, dey all un ‘em wanted dey daddy fer ter gin ’em Sandy fer a weddin’ present” (46).  

When McSwayne realized that he’d alienate someone by “giving” Sandy to just one child, he comes up with the plan to rotate Sandy monthly between all his children which gives them ample and equal opportunity to oppress Po’ Sandy. In between the abuse of being “‘lowed” to be passed around among his children, McSwayne heaps further oppressive actions upon Sandy by len[ing]” Sandy out to his other relatives to the point where Sandy is totally psychologically confused and physically abused (46).  

Julius informs John that one day, when Sandy was “lent out ez yusual,” McSwayne, claiming economic hardship, commits one of the cruelest of the many torturous acts of masters (46). When “a spekilater come erlong, Mars Marrabo swap’ Sandy’s wife off fer a noo ‘woman” (46).  

Julius is also careful to let his witness to the cruelties of slavery know that Sandy is a thinking, feeling, and moral human being who “tuk on some ‘bout losin’ his wife…” ((46). Sandy’s distress at losing his wife is a mirror image of the grief Henry Holland shows in Martin Delany’s novel, Blake. In Blake, when Holland is told his wife has been sold away from him, “he wiped away the emblems of grief which stole down his face, and with a deep-toned voice up-gushing from the recesses of a more than iron-pierced soul, he enquired [of Mrs. Franks, the master’s wife]. ‘Madam, what can you do! Where is my wife?’ (Delany, Blake 21). The reconciliation Sandy had to make to being under the violent yoke of slavery included
accepting the loss of his wife and re-marrying, having to [take] up wid de noo ‘oman,’”
Tenie (46).

Predictably, Sandy and Tenie are not destined for marital bliss either within the
churning, unsettled enslavement relationships in the stories. Even after they are married,
McSwayne continues to subject Sandy to the disruptive nomadic lifestyle of traveling
from plantation to plantation. Tennie feels deeply empathetic about her husband’s plight
and she also wishes to enjoy a stable home. Tenie brings up the option of employing
magic to ease their plight. She asks Sandy, “Is I eber te’ you I wuz a conjuh ‘oman?” as a
preface to revealing that she has the conjuring skills to make changes in their
circumstances(47). It is culturally revealing that Sandy is not frightened, nor appalled at
Tenie’s admission that she practices the conjuring arts. Actually, Sandy has “a great
‘miration w’en he hear w’at Tenie say” (47). So, although Tenie tells Sandy she doesn’t
practice conjuring anymore because she “got religion,” in her compassion, she offers to
work her magic to relieve Sandy’s distress (47).

With Tenie and Sandy’s application of magic to try and alter their circumstances,
it is further confirmation that within Chesnutt’s slave community's activities, magic is a
metaphor for a tool used for promoting internal unity and an external weapon they can
use for liberation. As Anderson points out, "In the nineteenth-century African American
world, hoodoo doctors held a major stake in both the 'natural' world of politics and
economics and the shadowy world of the supernatural” (Conjure 76).76

As Sandy bemoans having to “be sent roun’ fum pillar ter po’,” Tenie declares
that she “kin fix things so Sandy won’t haf ter. If [he’l]l des say de word, [she] kin turn
and Sandy are caught between the rock of chattel slavery and the hard place of trying to find some domestic stability within it. They turn to African ritual magic, hoping to find a connection to a power source that will recognize their right to pursue peacefully the fundamental social construct of society – the family unit.

The use of magic to aid with escape from oppressive, trying, or dangerous circumstances in a quest for domestic peace is a theme that can be found in the Ghanian tale “The Parting of the Waters,” in *Long Memory: The Black Experience in America*:

A Nama woman seeks escape from her much larger, stronger and more powerful abusive elephant husband. She runs away from him, but has nowhere effective to hide. She sees a rock, the “stone of her ancestors” and seeks the power, strength and stability it represents. The woman commands the rock to “divide itself for her” and let her pass through, to hide her in its core. Obeying her magical commands, the rock lets her through, hiding her from sight. Eventually, her husband, who had pursued her, finds out she is inside the rock. As her husband, he commands the rock to open and let him pass, demanding his rights over her. The rock complies and lets him through, but as he reaches out to grab his wife, and before he can come all the way through, the rock closes on him, squashing him to death (Berry, 27).

As with the African woman seeking domestic stability in Ghana’s story, Sandy and Tenie turn to the natural world to find answers to the question of how Sandy can avoid the domestic turmoil of enslavement and be a stable husband and family man. “He’s willin’ fer to do anythin’ fer ter stay close to Tenie” including resorting to magic and the supernatural, which Tenie points out is against “religion,” meaning the tenets of a good Christian (48, 47). Chesnutt presents Sandy as shockingly willing to do “anything”
to have a stable domestic home, a characterization countering the popular black male literary figure perpetually resigned to make the best of living his life separated from domesticity. Chesnutt resists an "Uncle Tom" writing of the passive black male satisfied and happy with slave life. However, he concedes, through the narrative of Sandy’s horrible death, that a black male slave’s actual chances, through no fault of his own, of achieving domestic stability and long-term wedded bliss in enslavement were slim to non-existent.

Sandy and Tenie’s relationship was destined for failure because for the institution of American chattel slavery to perpetuate itself, natal alienation had to be enforced as a code of the construct. “Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson” (Patterson 5). Instead of enjoying the prospect of a vibrant, thriving long-term marriage and relationship, Sandy and Tenie enter into a supernatural pact to try and avoid the “social death” Patterson describes as the built-in legacy of being a slave. So the tale moves along, and Chesnutt know the deadly social code of enslavement will only allow Sandy and Tenie a brief narrative time. They must enter into a supernatural struggle for them to be socially free because no natural social setting offers them the opportunity for the pursuit of happiness.

Tenie’s solution to the constraints slavery places on her married life is to use a magic trick to turn her husband into a tree to hide him and then change him back into a man so they can sneak and have a private relationship. And “w’en Sandy had be’n gone long ernuff fer folks to ter think he done got clean away, Tenie useter go down ter de woods at night en turn ‘im back, en den dey’d slip up ter de cabin en set by de fire in talk” (49). It is a clever ploy and a poignant moment in the narrative designed to make
readers think about the fact that Tenie must use subterfuge to have a small semblance of a personal relationship. The struggle to forge or maintain natal ties or marriage bonds is a painful topic William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, and Martin Delany explore in their books. Wells writes of the tragic doomed relationship between the enslaved youths Ellen and Volney that ends on both their deaths. Jacobs relates how her master, Flint, sabotages her engagement with the black man of her choice. Delany’s central character, Henry Holland is nearly inconsolable upon learning his wife, Maggie, has been sold South and expends a considerable amount of time and effort getting her back.

As with the tragic deaths of the coachman and the child due to the greed and treachery of McAdoo in “The Goophered Grapevine,” Chesnutt again uses a white narrator as a witness to slavery’s oppressive social conditions. By repeating Julius’s testimony to the black couple’s struggle to avoid the agony of constant separation and eventual natal alienation, John bears witness to black family pain in slavery. Chesnutt makes John and Annie listen to Julius explain the injustice, oppression and agonies of day-to-day enslavement.

By manipulating the characters in “Po’ Sandy,” Chesnutt creates a listening white audience both within the text and subsequently outside of it. He relates the tortures of slavery through a more acceptable, for the audience of his time, white narrating filter. Once Sandy becomes the tree, and sinks his roots into the soil of domesticity, all manner of tortures happen to him. Chesnutt needs the audience to “hear” how Marrabo orders turpentine boxes cut out of Sandy the Tree, which carve up Sandy’s body is a metaphor for lynching, and the enslaved African American community’s dashed hopes and dreams of a normal domestic life. By locating Julius in post-bellum time while he is relating the
story, Chesnutt makes the connection between the socially devastating natal stress of enslavement and the subsequent socially distressing situation John and Annie are observing. Chesnutt’s later nineteenth-century readers are forced to examine the social chaos, pain, and disruption enslavement has recently caused - after all, it has only been 35 years after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. If the readers are southerners, they know or run into former slaves like “Uncle Julius.” Chesnutt is demanding that readers give some thought to the sociological state of the black family in the post-bellum South and consider just how it got that way.

When a woodpecker menaces Sandy, Tenie “sot a sparer-hawk for ter watch de tree” and conjures a predatory bird to action to kill the ‘pecker, demonstrating the traits of a lovingly caring and protective wife (49). But the sincerity of the black characters’ quest for domesticity and the application of methodologies of resistance to slavery’s codes of social death is all to no avail. The relentless physical, social and psychological undermining of productive black life by slavery’s laws, codes, and violent reinforcements are too much for Chesnutt’s characters to survive, let alone thrive. The story is Chesnutt’s narrative telling of a lynching, in the guise of a supernatural story, where Sandy the Tree/Man horribly perishes, with all the added descriptions necessary for readers to imagine Sandy’s gruesomely violent death:

W’en [Tenie] got back ter her cabin, de fus’ thing she done wuz ter run down ter de woods en see how Sandy wuz gittin’ on. W’en she seed de stump standin’ dere, wid de sap runnin’ out’n it, en de limbs layin’ scattered roun’, she nigh ‘bout went out’n her min’. She run ter her cabin, en got her goopher mixtry, en den follered de track er de timber waggin ter de sawmill. She knowed Sandy couldn’ lib mo’d’n a minute er so ef she turnt him back, fer he wuz all chop’ up so he’d ‘a’ be’n bleedst ter die. But she wanted ter turn ‘im back long ernuff fer ter ‘splain ter ‘im dat she hadn’ went off a-purpose, en lef’ ‘im ter be cop’ down en sawed up. (51)
Once Julius’s recounting of Sandy's gruesome lynching by being cut up into boards is complete, Chesnutt has established that the narrative's purpose, to show "slavery as a machine that uses up the lives of slaves," is complicated (Goldner, "Other(ed) Ghosts” 62). 81 It is much more about getting white folks to acknowledge enslavement conditions, severed natal ties, and the violence of lynching than it is about Julius trying to trick John into relinquishing white spaces for black use. As with “The Goophered Grapevine’s” ending, “Po’ Sandy” closes transitioning back into the continuing power struggle between Julius and John, who is still narrating, because Julius "like the conjure woman working her roots or distributing her goopher mixture...casts his own kind of spell... (Brodhead, “Introduction,” 10)." 82

At the final scene in the tale, John’s voice clearly emerges again. His myopic and self-centered world view only allows him to reflect upon his immediate material wants and needs at the expense of Julius’s. John seems to realize that Julius is being manipulative, but does not understand or really care why, or put forth any effort to delve past the racial surface. He just simply refuses, unlike his wife, “to be influenced by Julius’s absurdly impossible yarn[s]” (53). This short-sightedness and convenient space of denial is, of course, supposed to give white readers pause to realize they identify with John and then to contemplate their unaware, unsympathetic, or indifferent relationship to the plight of African Americans. Chesnutt writes to move those whites occupying a place where they are cultural spectators who only "'appreciate others" but "do not cease to occupy their own different social positions" (Brodhead, “Introduction” 20). He writes to "stir up public opinion in behalf of the slave, by appealing in trumpet tones to those
principles of justice and humanity which were only lying dormant in the northern heart” (Chesnutt, *Journals*, 140). 83

At the end of each tale, Annie’s voice of testimony breaks the spell of the African American narrations, and firmly places things back on Jim Crow ground. In “The Goophered Grapevine,” she “seriously” asked, “Is that story true?” of course, referring to the “truth” of the horrors of enslavement that Chesnutt seeks to confirm for a non-black audience (43). But later, in "Po' Sandy," Annie grasps the black purpose and significance of Julius's stories with her comment, “What a system it was under which such things were possible!” (53). Since Annie’s soul has been moved by the abolitionist spirit of the tales to critique slavery’s condition, the narrative supernatural doorway to understanding has worked. At least, Annie has been conjured. Annie hears a tale about how Sandy had been magically turned into a tree by his wife, captured, and then tortured by being sawed into lumber which was used by a previous owner to build a kitchen that was haunted by Sandy's ghost. John had plans to tear down the school in order to use the lumber to build Annie a new kitchen, but she eschews using the wood to build it. She claims she "was not so silly as to believe it," but in the end, Annie's sleep is disturbed by Julius's "gruesome narrative" of enslavement (53).

Annie is more susceptible in part to the humanistic values Julius is transmitting through the stories because she is from the North. In short, Annie was never a “Mistress” in the slave-owning South. She is not steeped in or fully invested in the vast array of psychologically and socially complex southern beliefs concerning the inherent inferiority of Julius and his perspectives. Annie is Mrs. Carpetbagger from the North; however, more importantly for Julius’s purposes, Annie is not a proud member of the National
Association of the Daughters of the Confederacy. At least, Annie is open-minded enough to “listen” to Julius with the more sympathetic viewpoint of an outsider with fewer limiting notions about the way black and white relations ought to be. Chesnutt writes John as the more difficult of the two white characters to persuade. John represents white male patriarchy under which, although to a lesser extent than Julius, Annie must also bow. Annie is better able than John to comprehend the veiled meanings in Julius’s tales because she is in a subordinate position to John and grapples daily with white male patriarchy.

Working roots on John, helping him to “see” slavery’s horrors and its destructive post-bellum aftermath, is a much more difficult undertaking for Julius. Because the recollections of slavery are couched in supernatural metaphors, John is too “rational” to believe the truth in them. He dismisses Julius's stories of the pain and suffering of slavery as fantasy, "absurdly impossible yarn[s]" (53). Julius’s trickster actions to thwart Jim Crow, find autonomy, and convince John to behave with equity and justice towards blacks are the same rebellious efforts as the riotous activities of the enslaved people in the tale. Using trickster tales as his medium, Chesnutt painstakingly sets up a complex system of arguments for racial fairness and equity. John proves very difficult to convince, but Chesnutt's Julius is relentless.

One of Chesnutt's most powerful messages is that interracial interaction and dialogue are crucial for breaking down racism and bigotry. And, since Julius is the one doing most of the interactive heavy-lifting, the message he was sending to blacks is that they have the Black Man's Burden of reaching out in fellowship too. He is indicating that the path to racial intercourse is filled with nasty memories of the "ha'nts, ghosts, monst'us
bad dreams, sperrits," torture, and violent deaths of enslavement. The tales set up interactive situations between Julius, John, and Annie that could not have easily happened, if at all, in Chesnutt's historical South, but it's plain to see that Chesnutt thinks the endeavor to foster equity and justice for all citizens lies in the “tryin.”

Through Julius’s slave yarns of possibility, Chesnutt allows us to hear stories of resistance (if we care to listen). These are tales of enslaved people trying to craft a better life for themselves under inhospitable and life-threatening conditions and of enslaved people harking back to African ancestral lines of spiritual/mystical power when America’s lines of access fail them. And poignantly, there is the brief and tender blossoming of family. The tales bear witness to enslaved community members coming together with plans of action and reaction, forming extended kinship lines of offense and defense. And finally, we recognize that the spirit of freedom ran amok among the cabins of enslavement and still does within the heart of Julius.

“Mars Jeems Nightmare”

The intellectual prowess, educability, civility, proper political and social “place,” and employment capability of African Americans were a major topic of conversation by blacks and whites, North and South, before and after the Civil War. Before the war, pro-slavery ideology got a strong intellectual foothold with the vociferous writings of such men and writings as William Harper’s 1837 “Memoir on Slavery,” Thomas Roderick Dew’s 1853 “Digest of the Laws, Customs, Manners, and Institution of Ancient and Modern Nations,” and James Henry Hammood’s co-authored treatise, “The Pro-Slavery Argument” along with his 1858 “Mudsill Speech” when he argued that the upper class must have a lower class upon which to rest and slavery would prevent a dangerous
impoverished and landless class. In 1883, Sir Francis Galton, a wealthy British aristocrat and cousin of Charles Darwin, was in Britain dreaming up the concept of Eugenics and trying to figure out how to “improve” or “impair” the racial qualities of future generations of human beings. Galton’s theories were tailor made for the Jim Crow, segregationist and racist line of thinking Julius was contending with upon John’s arrival. The post-bellum factions who were looking for justifications for segregation found a perfect irrational basis in Eugenics’s position that physical, mental, or moral traits marked a person as superior or inferior. This “scientific” conclusion led these late nineteenth-century racist thinkers to arrive at a neat application for their theory – by inherent, inherited, and immutable traits, white people were superior and black people were inferior – and to protect the white race from “contamination,” the two races must be kept apart. Enslavement was over, but racists used the argument to support the strict, violent legal enforcement of the laws for separation of the races.

Frederick Douglass publicly approached the counter issue to pro-slavery propaganda with abolitionist theories. He promoted African American humanism and equality in his books, articles, journalism, and many speeches. He delivered a speech in 1863 titled, “What Shall Be Done with the Negro?” 85 Douglass’s position was that the Negro “must not only be given freedom, but must be admitted to all the privileges of a citizen of the United States.” Of course, Julius believes in Douglass’ position and in the uplift-the-race efforts by the rest of the pro-active middle class members of the African American community. However, Julius’s challenge, his “problem,” is that he knows John does not think that he is his equal. And, the truth of the matter is that Julius has grounds for his concerns about John’s locus of racial reasoning.
John’s origin in the North does not necessarily ensure that he has arrived in the South with a fully formed opinion and appreciation for Julius being his equal. The Northern white community was not inured from directly hearing and indirectly reading the racist perspectives of the Southern slaving or white supremacy supporting community members. The intellectual poison of pro-slavery or Jim Crow thinking was not confined to the southern regions. For example, on May 27, 1853, Reverend Fred Augustus Ross, D.D., Pastor of the Huntsville, Alabama Presbyterian Church delivered the sermon “Slavery Ordained of God” at a local white Presbyterian church in Buffalo, New York. Ross used a bible passage, “Powers that be are ordained by God,” Romans xiii.1 as the basis for his position that the “subjugation to authority, even slavery, may in given conditions, be for a time better than freedom to the slave of any complexion. Let him learn that slavery, like all evils, has its corresponding and greater good; that the Southern slave, though degraded compared with his master, is elevated and enobled (sic) compared with his brethren in Africa.” In order to “maintain harmony among Christians,…” let [slavery]” continue “until another and better destiny may be unfolded.” In 1857, Ross published a book Slavery Ordained of God: To North and South Who Honor the Word of God and Love Their Country. 86 Ross puts forth 192 pages of justifications designed to convince a wealthy and middle-class northern white audience to support the continuance of enslaving African Americans. He uses a particularly telling comment when he writes about the hypocrisy of the political and financial northern complicity in the slave trade:

Sir, why do your Northern church-members and philanthropists buy Southern products at all? You know you are purchasing cotton, rice, sugar, sprinkled with blood! Why do you buy? What's the difference between my filching this bloodstained cotton from the outraged [N]egro, and your standing by, taking it from me? [Y]ou daily stain your hands in this horrid traffic. You hate the traitor, but you love the treason. (18)
As an emancipated former enslaved man, Julius is contemplating and assessing John’s northern state of mind concerning the recent antebellum positions he held about African Americans before he arrived to the McAdoo farm. John’s northern pedigree does not mean that Julius can trust John to take Julius’s personal, family, or community’s welfare to heart as John goes about the task of building a new life for himself. Chesnutt is aware, even if it is not clear exactly how much Julius knows about the possible sources of John’s wealth, that northern wealth could sometimes have originated from the actions of individuals who had “daily stain[ed] [their] hands in [slavery’s] horrific traffic.”

In Chesnutt’s post-bellum world, there are men and women for whom Ross’s observations apply concerning the source of their wealth. Ross asks readers to consider who among them count themselves among “[t]he number of Northern church-members who are the descendants of the men who kidnapp[ed] [N]egroes in Africa and brought them to Virginia and New England in former years.” He pushes the inquiry to also ask them to calculate “[t]he aggregate and individual wealth of members thus descended, and what action is best to compel them to disgorge this blood-stained gold…” (Ross 14). Of course, this line of pastoral reasoning is designed to use greed and guilt as motivators to help counter the objections of Christian abolitionists. Chesnutt knows that John requires a period of astute observation and “handling” because there is no telling which liturgies he observes, which clerics he follows, or what actions John believes his conscience dictates.

Larry Tise in Proslavery explains Julius’s problem of trust very well:

In the nineteenth century from the resurgence of religion during the Second Great Awakening until the Civil War, one could find among the ranks of the ministry some of the most superbly educated, socially aware, and powerfully stationed (both symbolically and actually) leaders America could boast. As educators, writers, reformers, orators, and spiritual leaders, clergymen constituted the largest,
most vocal, and most readily accessible national elite in American society. One measure of their significance is the fact that ministers wrote almost half of all defenses of slavery published in America (Tise, *Proslavery*, xvii). 87

Chesnutt does not *directly* cloak John in a blood-soaked mantle of northern Yankees who participated in the trafficking in or profiting from the sale of slaves before the war. But, tellingly, Chesnutt also does not divulge the source of the wealth John has brought south, either. Julius is wise to be cautious around John and to assume John, who is likely a highly educated, well-read, and socially-active and connected individual, is familiar with antebellum and Jim Crow southern modes of thinking and manners and plans to get along or learn to get along with his southern white neighbors. These political and psychological circumstances are the reason Julius, as Chesnutt is crafting him, knows he has major political, social, and spiritual transformative work cut out for him with John. From Julius’s perspective, John’s soul is in serious need of conjuring and goophering; it requires blackening in a very different way than John could ever imagine. Chesnutt continues John’s and readers’ racial awakening at the hands of Julius with “Mars Jeems’s Nightmare.”

"Mars Jeems's Nightmare" opens with Chesnutt cataloguing Julius's impressive resume of accomplishments that make him fit to own and manage a large former plantation, the McAdoo farm:

He had a thorough knowledge of the neighborhood, was familiar with the roads and the watercourses, knew the qualities of the various soils and what they would produce, and where the best hunting and fishing were to be had. He was a marvelous hand in the management of horses and dogs, with whose mental processes he manifested a greater familiarity than mere use would seem to account for..." (55).

Chesnutt writes that John chalked up Julius's superior "mental processes" and "familiarity" with the intricacies of farm management, past the level of beast of burden,
as being "doubtless due to the simplicity of a life that had kept him close to nature” (55). Unable or unwilling to attribute intelligence and competence to a slave, the Northern white narrator reflected the myopic racist viewpoint Chesnutt wants readers to appreciate permeated the North as well as the South. In John's mind, Julius was behaving strangely proprietarily about the plantation and simply "unable to break off entirely the mental habits of a lifetime," because as a slave Julius was conscientiously and industriously engaged with McAdoo land affairs (55).

John and Annie are still missing the ability to “see” Julius’s full potential and talents. They merely find Julius "useful" and because he is, they "[take] quite a fancy" to Julius,” Chesnutt writes with a sour tone (56). However, when useful Julius introduces John to Julius’s seventeen year old grandson, "Tom," and talks John into hiring him, the narrator's response is not as favorable towards the youth. Since Tom was not raised as a slave to be integral to white labor's needs, therefore, John determines Tom is not suited to the "outdoor work of the household." The youth is a metaphor for the post-war Reconstruction black male, released from slavery, or never born into it, who is without property, farming skills, or money.

Tom, representing black men in a parallel situation in the South, is maliciously and erroneously stereotyped as "trifling, lazy, careless," and lacking in "responsibility." There was considerable discussion in the black community during the late nineteenth and early turn of the twentieth centuries concerning the fate and disposition of African Americans in the post-bellum south. Frederick Douglass writes about and makes commentary on several of the prevailing options under discussion in 1863 by abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates about “What Shall Be Done With the Negro?”: 1) Reduce all
black men to slavery. This includes black people in the North and South. [Douglass states this option creates the problem of a slave-owning “aristocracy” that locks poor whites out.] 2) Colonize them. Send them all back to Africa. [He states that it is too expensive an option.] 3) Advocate a race war and exterminate all blacks. [He disgustedly and dismissively states, “There were men base enough to advocate this.”] 4) Admit the [N]egro to full equality in political and civil rights [Douglass’s suggestion]. These positions and variations on the themes are all still under serious review in Jim Crow America as John and Julius continuously wrangle about position, status, monetary divisions, and access to resources.

Booker T. Washington’s influential *Up from Slavery* (1901) is one of the major works to address this issue that was published only two years after *The Conjure Woman*. However, prior to the book, Washington published his views in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1886. In “The Awakening of the Negro,” Washington argues for one of the methods he thinks will uplift the race: the “Tuskegee system of training to the South.” He advocates for young black men and women, like Julius’s nephew, to receive “academic and industrial training” at Tuskegee, to acquire skills that they can use to better themselves and assist the poverty-stricken post-bellum black community.

John, like many southern and arriving northern white land owners, "hardened his heart" against the youth and "dismissed" him, a fate that would separate Tom from Julius, the family progenitor and protector, and likely cause Tom's swift economic demise (56). With a very powerful and telling reference, John reflects that he has given Tom "more than a fair trial" before the judgment of the white man found the lad lacking (56). As "trials" in the South were not "fair" for blacks in the time frames about which Chesnutt
writes, John's comment is an indictment of the injustice blacks faced in America's court system.

Out for a drive with his wife, John encounters another lacking soul, but this time, he is faced with the southern white male version that doesn't measure up to his northern cultural standards. Comparing one of his white neighbors to the man's horse, an animal John deems to be of "good temper and good breeding," the neighbor misses the "good breeding" mark. Chesnutt explains through John that although human slavery is now outlawed, white behaviors, inclinations, and temperaments towards brutality and abuse by some people remain (57). The encountered Southerner was "beating [his horse] furiously with a buggy-whip" causing the horse to "rear and plunge" under the abuse, and dash away "panting and snorting with fear" (57). Even though slavery was over, the ugly specter of cruelty and oppression still remained unleashed on the land.

Chesnutt's setting is filled with dreams -- the clawing insecurity of dreams deferred or delayed and the ever-present shadow of violence or its imminence, partnered with overt and covert acts of cruelty. Chesnutt's narrator observes that the neighbor "look[s] as though he [is] ashamed of himself;" but Annie isn't so sure about it, commenting with a more tempered, "I'm sure he ought to be" (57). There is a major difference between the clarity of repentance with the intent to do no more harm and unrelenting, red-faced exertions to mercilessly whip a creature held at someone's mercy. Chesnutt conjectures that the Jim Crow South "ought to be ashamed" and cease its cruel treatment of black people trapped in the yoke of poverty and homelessness, but that wasn't the reality the people faced. As Julius sagely observes, "A man w'at "buses his
hoss is gwine ter be ha'd on de folks w'at wuks fer 'im," a direct reference to conditions for many blacks in the period (57).

Of course, in the world of the tales, there is a price to pay for bad white behavior and Julius presents the form black retribution will take - Mars Jeems suffering a vindictive dream attack. The codes of enslavement prevented the outright slaughter of enslaved people, so the enslaved community often employed countermeasures that circumvented unjust laws. One of those actions was psychological warfare against a man who "ha[s] no feelin' fer nobody" (57). Jeems is cruel to the point of preventing people from getting married, even employing the dreaded "selling one er de yuther un 'em, er sen' em way down in Robeson County ter his yuther plantation, whar dey couldn' nebber see one er nudder" if two enslaved people formed an attachment to one another (58). Jeems, himself, is a natural born nightmare, with sociopathic tendencies, displaying them "eber since he growed up" and behaving "monst'us stric" to the point of delivering "fo'ty" lashes if enslaved people so much as "eber complained" about mistreatment. (57-58).

Chesnutt characterizes Jeems in the coded language of the horrors of chattel slavery that "didn' make no 'lowance fer nachul bawn laz'ness, ner sickness, ner trouble in de min, ner nuffin" (58). The key element about "nuffin" is that it encompases the "nachul" right and desire to live free, the deprivation of which is Mars Jeems's unforgiveable sin, requiring retribution.

The form the adjustment took on was in the person of "Aun' Peggy de free-nigger cunjuh 'oman" whose contribution to the enslaved community's plight with Jeems was to "wuk her roots" (59). In the social case of Solomon versus Mars Jeems, it was a situation in which Solomon was seeking relief from Mars Jeems's unjust edict that
Solomon did not have the freedom to engage in "co'tin," a right Mars Jeems held for himself (59). Solomon was also seeking a method to overturn the banishment of sale of his "junesey" to another plantation (59). Aunt Peggy represented an opportunity for Solomon to take action against Mars Jeems and commit an act of pretest against his untenable and unbearable situation.

There was considerable risk involved with engaging Aunt Peggy's conjuring services against Mars Jeems. Chesnutt clarifies that a weapon deployed against slave masters was poisoning or, at best, the judicious use of "yarbs" as part of a belief system that employed food stuffs as mood-altering or mind-bending agents (60). If caught adding drugs to Mars Jeems's food, Solomon and Aunt Peggy would most certainly have been severely punished, even killed. Since Aunt Peggy knows there is the significant possibility of dire consequences attached to her actions if detected, she comments that she "has ter be kinder keerful 'bout cunj'un w'ite folks" (60). Notice, Peggy didn't say she was careful not to conjure white folks. The interesting thing about her situation is that, although she enjoys the status of being a free black person, she is still willing to assist enslaved blacks in their quest for freedom. She just has to be "keerful 'bout cun'jin w’ite folks" (60). Chesnutt is making a statement concerning one of the most pervasive fallacies of the enslavement period which is that enslaved people didn't or couldn't fight back. Here, Solomon teams with Aunt Peggy, enslaved and free persons, to subvert the system, undertaking "monst'us" dangerous actions (60).

The community of enslaved trickster participants widens with the cooperation and collusion of "de cook" because Solomon "tuk de goopher mixtry up ter de big house en gun it ter de cook, en tol' her fer ter put it in Mars Jeems's soup...", which she did (60).
Chesnutt's position is that Solomon's negative issues with slavery are not a solitary aberration, but a whole-hearted group aversion, and that resistance vigorously comes from free and enslaved blacks. Judging by the thousands of nineteenth-century newspaper advertisements for runaway enslaved individuals and numerous testimonies in former slave narratives, Chesnutt's assessment of constant resistance and agitation is right on the mark.

David Waldstreicher’s position that for many enslaved individuals, “masters did not hold all the cards” makes perfect sense when viewed in the light of his numerous examples of runaways who were multi-lingual, multi-skilled, clever, freedom-seeking, resourceful, and incredibly daring, traits not usually ascribed to the enslaved African American community (Waldstreicher 11). The reality is that masters desperately wanted back brilliant, talented, and highly-skilled enslaved people, but, due to the codes of slavery, prejudice, insecurity and discrimination, masters had to portray them in public notices as "knaves, confidence men, criminals and deadbeats" which, if the circumstances weren't so dire, would come off as comically ironic(Waldstreicher 14). It is truly astonishing to figure out from the ads the lengths to which the white male masters had to go to try and disguise the superior qualities of black people who chose to “run.”

Chesnutt's characters are tricksters, intent on subverting the system, and they put to rest the stereotype of the docile or unjustifiably rebellious, unintelligent, one-dimensional, dumb beast-of-burden-like enslaved people who happily lived in the big house, contentedly toiled in the fields, or told stories solely for the profit, entertainment, and benefit of “Massa, Miss Ann,” and their children.
Chesnutt includes the rebellious actions of the southern white woman, Miss Libbie, who refuses to marry Jeems. When Libbie hears about Jeems's cruelty towards his slave, "she des 'lowed she couldn' trust herse'f wid no sech a man..." making a direct comparison of his treatment of slaves to his likely treatment of his wife (58). She surmises that "he mought git so useter 'busin' his [slaves] dat he'd 'mence ter 'buse his wife atter he got useter habbin' her roun' de house" (58). So, Libbie rebels and "'clare[s] she wuzn' gwine ter hab nuffin mo' ter do wid young Mars Jeems" (58). Chesnutt's Libbie is a commentary on the fact that while American chattel slavery could not have existed without the participation, cooperation, and collusion of millions of white participants, there were members of the white community for whom the vicissitudes of slavery presented a site of disapproval, moral dilemma, or challenge. The other white woman in the tales, Annie serves as an outsider and witness, a figure of conscience to question the status quo. She asks the questions about the limitations under which the African American community must live that she is realizing are coming from the long shadow of the abuses of enslavement and the South’s determined refusal to change.

"Mars Jeems" is a complicated blend of African American magic, stubborn white adherence to slavery, black active resistance behavior, and passive/aggressive subversive acts designed to signal displeasure and non-cooperation. Aunt Peggy "goophers" Jeems, but since it is only the enslaved people who know it, the act operates for black empowerment and self-determining liberation. Julius's tales are "like the conjure woman working her roots or distributing her goopher mixture, creating a zone of reality under his imaginative control, the space of a fictional reality."91
Within the reality of "Mars Jeems," Solomon stumbles upon Jeems in the woods, after Jeems has become magically transformed from a white man into a black one, 

“[Peggy's goophered] sweet'n'tater 'fo' de nigger's nose, en he des nach'ly retch' up wid his han', en tuk de 'tater in eat it in his sleep, widout knowin' it." Chesnutt's characterization of Jeems transforming into a black man hits upon one of the core tenets of the African American liberation and justice movement, which is that white people needed to change their minds, hearts, and souls in order to behave justly and equitably towards black people. Chesnutt's twisting narrative manipulations of Jeems posit that under slavery and Jim Crow's conditioning, this free and equal positioning was difficult, but not impossible for white people to undertake and master. And, as with Jeems needing to be "goophered" by magic, Chesnutt uses veiled narrative as his psychological "trick" to open up white minds to the issues and problems of their participation in slavery and discrimination. Just as Jeems is tricked into being humane by being magically transformed into a black man, Chesnutt uses the narrative of self-determination, justice, and mercy to try and transform or enlighten the minds of his readers. *The Conjure Woman* was, with "The Goophered Grapevine" leading the way, his opening trickster salvo across the bow of American racism. With the publication of the tales, he succeeded at his goal of "being one of the first to head a determined, organized crusade against it (Journals 140)."

The greatest wish of enslaved people is to be free. And, for some members of the enslaved community, famously kept alive in America's history and popular imagination, enslavement was transformed into freedom. 92 But the millions of people trapped on plantations, and guarded by heavily armed overseers had little or no hope of escape or
respite from the pain of the situation. A more realistic and immediate reality for them was engaging in acts to transform their living conditions to more closely approximate a state of life, liberty, and the ability to pursue happiness. This was done in the face of overwhelming odds against their enjoying what white Americans crowed about securing, savoring, and treasuring for themselves. The struggle in Mars Jeems is about declaring that black people valued autonomy, family, happiness, and personal safety and satisfaction and would employ drastic measures, take "monst'us" risks, to obtain them.

Jeems needs to be turned black to exhibit humanistic qualities, but Chesnutt makes it clear that the black community was always "white" in its equal desire to enjoy the "inalienable rights" under which white people thought it was necessary to live.

In a testament to the unsavory linkage of white collusion in the institution of slavery and its effects of moral degeneration, Chesnutt scripts the moral and physical rehabilitation of Jeems as he improves Solomon's condition. Chesnutt assists his white character, a proponent of inequality, cruelty, and unjust actions, through the desired "elevation" process by conducting him through a moral awakening experience. Jeems is converted to the point where the slave characters all "t'ank de lawd" that he reached some modicum of understanding that he needed to treat everyone like human beings, especially them. With *The Conjure Woman*, Chesnutt seeks to foster nothing less than a "moral revolution" using "the province of literature to open the way for [black men] to get...social recognition and equality" (Chesnutt, *Journals* 140).

John, operating from within the codes of Jim Crow, snidely sums the ending up as the enslaved people "living happily ever after" in the unlikely fairytale of blissful enslavement, reaching a simplistically racist viewpoint without understanding the
political and moral nuances (68). John is incapable or undesirous of probing the complex plantation circumstances that lead enslaved individuals to make daily, moment-to-moment, often split-second decisions about whether to leave or stay enslaved. He is clueless that the McLean plantation's enslaved people are neither joyous nor happy about being enslaved; they are just determined to be joyous and happy *in spite of* being enslaved, not because of it. The distinction is crucial.

Chesnutt gives testimony to the power and force of the African American humanistic spirit to overcome slavery's vile cruelty, degradation, psychological warfare, and attempted dehumanization of all things honorable and good. While John didn't "get" the message imbedded in Julius's text, like Libbie, Annie more readily absorbed the humanistic lesson woven into tales of bad dreams, white men turning into black men, plantation marriages and celebrations, banished overseers, and sweethearts reunited and united. While John "drove to town the next morning on some business, and did not return until noon...," Annie colluded with Julius behind John's back to bring Tom onto the farm as a hand telling her husband, "... I'm sure you'll not regret taking him back (69)."

John's response to his wife's altruism clarifies Chesnutt’s position that the North is not blameless for limiting black access to enjoying the same rights whites cherished for themselves. John is royally annoyed with having Julius's family member on the farm after he has "discharged the rascal for good and all (69)." He reflects negatively on his wife's actions:

I [am] seriously enough annoyed to let my cigar go out. I [do] not share my wife's rose-colored hopes in regard to Tom; but I [do] not wish the servants to think there [is] any conflict of authority in the household. I let the boy stay. (69)
Chestnutt reveals that the "stay" part does not spring from the goodness of the Northerner's heart, but from a desire to project his dominant position in his household. John's hardened heart, limited humanistic insights, and tendency towards questionably moral actions still requires storytelling as a means for moral adjustment; therefore, the trickster tales continue onward. John needs further fixin'.

“Sis Becky’s Pickaninny”

In "Sis Becky's Pickaninny," Chesnutt addresses the issue of the plight of enslaved black women. In the title character's "Sis' Becky's" case, Chesnutt gives her the rare dignity in slavery of "having a husban' once" and making it clear that her baby, Mose, was the child of a black man, presumably her husband, when he describes Mose as "de cutes' blackes', shinyeyed's little [child] you eber laid eyes on....” (84). Due to the sexual realities of female life on the plantation, there is no absolute certainty, and even Chesnutt does not offer it, that the black father of Becky's child is her husband. Her husband may have had to put up with sexual interference in his married life because slavery's laws permitted masters access to females at will in spite of any marriage to a black man. The constant sexual access of white men to enslaved women, and the women's breeder status in relationship to black men for reproductive services was a never-ending source of pain during slavery. In 1837, Sarah Moore Grimke observed that "our southern cities are whelmed beneath a tide of pollution; the virtue of female slaves is wholly at the mercy of irresponsible tyrants, and women are bought and sold in our slave markets, to gratify the brutal lust of those who bear the name of Christians” (Heath 2013)." 94
Notably, Chesnutt goes to great pains with the "blackest child" comment to clarify that Mose is most likely the result of Becky's marriage, or at the very least of a relationship with one of the black male members of the community. So, by default, Becky's "blackes" child is not the mulatto result of the exercise of "brutally lustful" rape by Colonel Pendleton or an overseer. Chesnutt affords Becky the status of having a marriage and husband, and of bearing a child probably by her husband, all of which represent the pinnacle of dignity concerning definitions of upper and middle class Southern womanhood in the nineteenth century. Grimke provides further testimony to the expectations of genteel, wealthy white women by stating that:

During the early part of my life, my lot was cast among the butterflies of the fashionable world; and of this class of women, I am constrained to say, both from experience and observation, that their education is miserably deficient; that they are taught to regard marriage as the one thing needful, the only avenue to distinction; hence to attract the notice and win the attention of men, by their external charms, is the chief business of fashionable girls" (Heath 2013). 95

Deborah Gray White argues in Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South that "black males and females did not experience slavery in the same way," which is the point of Chesnutt's focus on the maternal nature of Becky's pain (62). 96 Black male slavery activity primarily centered on the work black men did for whites. Black female slavery encompassed physical labor with the added mandate to accept sexual exploitation, bear children without benefit of marriage, nourish them, and endure the distinct reality of losing them to the financial demands of the slave system. The likelihood of frequent forced separation of mothers and children as being one of the sources of the pain of female enslavement is borne out by the fact that "for each year [between 1750 - 1850], more than one fifth of black women in the 15-44 age cohort bore a child" (White 69).
Since one of the primary uses of enslaved black women was sexual, many forms of abuse were standard operating procedure. As with Becky, whenever it became expedient, children were routinely sold away from their mothers, or mothers sold away from their children. "Female slavery had much to do with work, but much of it was concerned with bearing, nourishing, and rearing children whom slave holders needed for the continual replenishing of their labor force” (White 69). Becky is one of the black female archetypes of slavery's unique situation for women, which was to be impregnated and bear children in bondage and, subsequently, have no ultimate control over their location and wellbeing.

Chesnutt, like Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is not just interested in exposing the evils of slavery; he, like Stowe, is interested in unmasking its inhumanity and placing blame for slavery. It is instrumental to their goals that they differentiate between the genteel class of white people who monetarily profit and hedonistically benefit from slavery and the socially coarser lower class whites who primarily psychologically benefit. Chesnutt and Stowe are not totally even-handed in dispensing culpability for their characters’ descent into moral turpitude. Pendleton digs his own financial hole while Stowe’s Shelby is portrayed as being a victim of financial circumstances beyond his control, certainly two circumstances that any adult can comprehend. It is the inhuman responses the men make that Chesnutt and Stowe bring into question.

Chesnutt and Stowe indict and judge both men based upon their responses to their situations, using characterization as a referendum on the moral corruption of American slavery viewing human beings as financial commodities. In keeping with this plot line of
thinking, it is unthinkable that Pendleton would give up his ostentatious lifestyle built on
the fruits of slavery; and, of course, Shelby decides to sell Uncle Tom and the baby, 
Harry, for money to stave off his financial ruin. Chesnutt's financially distressed
plantation owner, "Kunnel Pen'leton," eventually arrives in the same morally bankrupt
location as Arthur Shelby, so he makes the horrendous move to sell Becky away from her
baby, Mose. Chesnutt and Stowe, unlikely allies in this instance, through Pendleton and
Shelby, examine one of the horrific aspects of enslavement - the prevention or separation
of family bonds, especially those between mother and child.

Although in "Sis' Becky," Chesnutt does not directly address the topic of forced
sexual relations between masters and enslaved females, other African American writers
did, as in Clotel and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. It is likely that since he makes
repeated narrative mention of the near impossibility of maintaining family bonds in
slavery, it would result in his readers also mulling this aspect over. Orlando Patterson
explains the purposely inflicted torture of lost familial ties in slavery, calling it "natal
alienation":

[T]he term "natal alienation"...goes directly to the heart of what is critical in the
slave's forced alienation, the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending
generations. It also has the important nuance of a loss of native status, of
deracination. It was with this alienation of the slave from all formal, legally
enforceable ties of 'blood,' and from any attachment groups or localities other than
those chosen for him by the master, that gave the relation of slavery its peculiar
value to the master. (Patterson 7) 97

Saidiya Hartman’s Scenes of Subjection masterfully reconfigures the often-used
“bonds of affection’s” non-rape theory as a description for black American enslaved
female and white master forced sexual arrangements, into its rightful positioning as being
sexual “violence in the garb of sentiment.” 98 Hartman’s argument is that the “ethic of
submission” within the slave system “indiscriminately includes absolute power,” and an example of it is Pendelton's power to sell Mose from Becky (90). Pendleton also takes advantage of masters’ “absolute rights of property” over Becky's reproductive and maternal rights and the disposition of her children (90). Pendleton inflicts further violence as he keeps Becky in the condition of the public and private sphere of “social death” (Patterson). Pendleton breaks up Becky's happy marriage and then traumatizes Becky's baby with maternal withdrawal to the point of near death. Chesnutt's examination in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny" is of the gender-specific pain of female enslavement. It is important to note that due to the courage and intervention of strong black women Becky's situation is fixed.

Ole Aun' Nancy is the plantation's "nuss" and was assigned the task of caring for Mose while Becky worked in the cotton fields; so after Becky is sold away and Mose left behind, raising Mose falls to Aun' Nancy. When Mose becomes sick, it is Nancy who goes into action to save Mose's life and comes up with the plan to expand the sister circle and turns to Peggy. Aun' Peggy goes to work and "cunjus" away the problems surrounding Becky's and Mose's dire domestic situation of separation. Nancy is a stalwart pillar of strength, self-sacrificing, knowledgeable, honorable, and willing to confront and thwart oppressive forces even at great personal risk.

One of Chesnutt's crucial issues with his female characterizations is to point out the fact that lower-class black women, even when enslaved, were part of the rank and file backbone of African American culture. *The Conjure Woman* and its lens on the actions of powerful black women demonstrates Chesnutt's near precognitive awareness of the historical necessity of the "inclusion of less famous [nineteenth-century black] women
and of materials not readily available [to show] that insight is not limited to the famous, nor is sensitivity to experience invariably wedded to distinguished achievement."

After *The Conjure Woman*, Chesnutt continued to explore the African American experience; but, he did it through turning to writing significantly about the upper class, educated, and heavily mixed-race, segment of the community, the social and racial group to which he belonged. However, he did not abandon his examination of the lower class African American condition because he included a continuous stream of literary references that make it clear that his work places a lens on many aspects of that experience. In *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), Chesnutt includes Mammy Jane, the black woman character struggling with survival, place, and condition in the post-Civil War South. In the “Wife of His Youth” (1898), he asks readers to be cognizant of and concerned with the plight and twist-of-fate reunion of the “black” ex-slave woman and her “light” husband who ran away from slavery to go north and eventually join the upper-class mulatto community. Chesnutt’s stories, novels, poems, play, and essays after *The Conjure Woman* are important works for gaining insights into the larger African American experience of the time. Chesnutt also wrote several manuscripts Chesnutt wrote that failed to get published in his lifetime: *The Business Career, Paul Marchand, F.M.C., Mandy Oxendine*, and *The Quarry*. They are now available.¹⁰¹

Through his literature and direct social action, Chesnutt "cunjured" up his own successful design and accommodation to being black in America. Through his trickster writings, he gave dignity, grace, power, and voice to the too often forgotten historical black community members who endured and did, in the gospel words of Charles Albert Tindley's song, "overcome."¹⁰² *The Conjure Woman* deserves to be catalogued with the
great civil rights literary pieces that affirm the Enslavement, Antebellum, and latter
nineteenth-century African American community's struggle to survive and thrive about
which Tindley's lyrics to “I’ll Overcome Someday” aptly describe:

This world is one great battlefield,

with forces all arrayed;

if in my heart I do not yield,

I'll overcome someday.
CONCLUSION

Research in the fields of Native American and African American Literary Studies and Folklore that examines the inter-textual and intercultural relationship between Native American and African American trickster literatures is rare. The bulk of the research that indicates that this type of comparative literary analysis makes sense currently exists primarily in the fields of history, sociology, and archaeology and the research in these areas is still developing. I also did research in the fields of performance studies, political science, law, music, art, and geography.

Once I had identified the salient literary points in the Native American and African American trickster traditions, I contemplated their differences and similarities. I conclude that the Native American Oral and Written Trickster Tradition serves to provide a source for internal moral and social guidance to Native Americans as they go about the daily business of living their lives in community with each other, assist Native Americans with understanding, coping with, challenging, or resisting the arrival of foreigners to their sovereign lands, the loss of the land, and the genocide and oppression that resulted from European conquest, analyze oppression and offer practical, impractical, real or imagined, violent or non-violent solutions to the oppression so as to maintain tribal sovereignty and, last but not least, entertain. It allows Native people to laugh at the vagaries of life and find humor in the triumphs or challenges that are a part of living as America’s First People, preserve culture. The tales contain “Native Truth” about what it means to be America’s First People and to have the responsibility to live in balance with all things and to protect the land.

I conclude that the African American Oral and Written Trickster Tradition serves to 1) provide a source for internal moral and social guidance to early Africans when they
arrived in America either enslaved or free. The tales provided the same service to African Americans as they adjusted and still adjust to life in America, assist African Americans with understanding, coping with, challenging, or resisting the particular oppression African Americans face living in America: kidnapped, Middle Passage, enslaved, and later oppressed when freed, analyze oppression and offer practical, impractical, real or imagined, violent or non-violent solutions to the oppression, entertain. The tales allow people to laugh at the vagaries of life and find humor in the triumphs or challenges that are part of living as African Americans in America, provide cultural memory and continuity of African and African American life principles of the pursuit of freedom, uplift the race, agitate for equality, and be the moral and ethical voice for “Justice for All” by any means necessary.

In the late Nineteenth Century, there were several Native American and African American authors who made their writing projects platforms for cultural, social, and political commentary along with crafting works of cultural preservation. Native American authors Jane Schoolcraft and Zitkala-Sa, and African American authors William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Martin R. Delany, and Charles Chesnutt wrote works using the short story, enslavement narrative, or novel forms and combined these forms with trickster storytelling tropes to address the challenges Native Americans and African Americans were experiencing.

Through the aggressive addition of trickster rhetoric, the authors question and often bitingly critique the oppressive political and social status quo. It is the trickster storytelling form and language that gives the political punch to their language and emphasizes subversion and anarchy. Their works, including Schoolcraft’s cultural
preservationist trickster tale “Mishosha,” promote alternate views of what language and conversations are important to hear and have in American space. These authors trickster rhetoric contributed to the concepts of what free and autonomous “places” Native American and African Americans deserved to occupy. They raised their voices in protest against the nineteenth century’s rush to imprison, keep enslaved, limit, categorize, or commit genocide against Native Americans and African Americans. In their hands, Native American and African American Tricksters answered the call to literary arms.

African Americans and Native Americans in Community: The Historical and Sociological Case for Trans-cultural and Inter-textual Discourse

As I pointed out in the Introduction, I have traced the trail of the Native American and African American Literary Trickster Tradition by following the lead of several key historians. The first text I read about the historical and cultural connections between African Americans and Native Americans was William Katz’s now classic, Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage.103 I began to carry and display a copy of the book whenever I did performances at schools and universities, and in the early 1990’s many people were surprised to see a text that linked the two cultures.

In the mid-90’s, I was invited to speak and perform Native American singing, drumming, and storytelling at a tribute for Ivan Van Sertima that was held in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. Prior to the event, I had stumbled upon and had read They Came Before Columbus when I began searching for more information about African American history and culture.104 At the tribute, I presented first, so I had time to sit and listen to Van Sertima’s research and positions. After reading Black Indians, They Came, and listening to Van Sertima, I began to consider that a significant African and African American presence in the Americas translated to cross-cultural contact. Katz and
Van Sertima were arguing that the intercultural situation between the two cultures was more extensive than what I previously thought was limited to a few isolated African American families who had Native American ancestry. In his subsequent book *African Presence in Early America*, Van Sertima edited an anthology of writing by scholars who gathered a multitude of evidence supporting the presence of Africans in the Americas pre-dating the arrival of Columbus.\footnote{105} Using evidence from numerous academic disciplines, the researchers amassed evidence that Africans and Native American peoples have a long history of interaction that stretches from at least as far back as 1,000 B.C.

Daniel F. Littlefield’s *Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War* traces the circumstances leading to the meeting of Africans and the indigenous Native American population during the Colonial Period.\footnote{106} He outlines how the European Carolina planters first enslaved the Native Americans they found living on the land. Littlefield writes, "During the early years of the Carolina Colony, Carolinians had used large numbers of Indian slaves" (9). Creek contact with Africans occurred on the plantations, through African slave escapes to Creek villages and because Creeks "encouraged Blacks to run away with them" whenever they could (Littlefield 9). I discovered in *Africans and Creeks* that the social phenomenon was not isolated to small locations. Littlefield attested to the social interaction occurring in the Seminole Nation as well. He writes that as early as the end of the Revolutionary War, "the Seminoles, like the Creeks, began to acquire people of African descent as slaves" (Littlefield, *Africans and Creeks* 39). Other Black families also began to live among the Seminoles as free Blacks as a result of escape from plantations.
These facts made me wonder: if “large numbers” of Native Americans were enslaved first, then what happened between Native Americans and African Americans when Europeans imported Africans to work on plantations in community with Native Americans?

Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. in 500 Nations writes that “[a]fter 1730 the tempo of the [enslaved Indian] trade decreased rapidly” due to the depletion of Indians accessible for capture” (226). He explains that many Native American from the Creek Nation fled into northern Florida and into hard-to-access terrain to escape from European slavers. Josephy is careful to note that even though enslaved African people rapidly began to be imported into South Carolina “the slave labor structure of the American South had by [1730] been built on the backs of the Indian people” (226). The significant reality that led to the early American meeting and social interaction of Native American and Africans is that “[i]n 1730, one quarter of all the slaves in South Carolina were still Indian” (Josephy 226). The more “hidden” history I read, the more I was struck by how historians were arriving at the same conclusions—that Native Americans and African Americans had a long history of interaction that was, to use Katz’s phrase, a “hidden history.”

In Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society: 1540 – 1866, Theda Purdue points out that "the Cherokees encountered Africans at least as early as they did Europeans and may have seen Blacks even before the conquistadors visited their towns" (36). If it was not for "strident efforts" on the part of European slavers to create animosity and mistrust among Blacks and Indians, the two groups “would probably have recognized certain cultural affinities between themselves” (42).
Whether or not Cherokees and Africans would have eventually recognized their cultural affinities” had the Europeans not taken steps to cause animosity between them may never be fully known. What is known is that the Cherokee Nation at the end of the Civil War had so many former slaves within it that when the newly formed Southern Cherokee Nation signed a treaty with the United States on August 11, 1866, United States government officials included a treaty provision for the recently emancipated slaves (Purdue 142).

In the preface to The Chickasaw Freedmen, Littlefield explains that the United States government representatives for the treaty agreed to “remove” the former slaves from Chickasaw territory if the Chickasaw Nation did not want to “adopt” the now freedmen (Littlefield xi). In 1866, after being forced to move to Indian Territory from Mississippi, the Chickasaw Nation had people of African descent living among them as a result of intermarriage and its slave-holding practices. After the Civil War, the same Treaty of 1866 with Indian Nations led to the equal membership of African freedmen in the Cherokee Nation and resulted in a different situation than for the freedmen in the Chickasaw Nation (Littlefield). The Chickasaws decided not to adopt their former enslaved African Americans. But, the United States did not keep the part of the treaty agreement to move the Freedmen from Chickasaw land. The Freedmen continued to live among the Chickasaw in Oklahoma Indian Territory but without benefit of official membership in the Chickasaw Nation. Not all Freedmen were satisfied with their non-citizenship status in Indian Territory. Littlefield comments that “at times [,] some factions of the Chickasaw freedmen had advocated removal from the Nation” (Littlefield 77).
However, nothing ever came of the sentiments because “most” [Freedmen] had emotional and cultural ties to the Chickasaw lands, and many had blood ties to the Chickasaw Nation” (Littlefield 77).

Literary Conversations about the Inter-textual Intersections of Native American and African American Literatures

I discovered several contemporary texts that address or theorize a possible case for the cross-literary examination of Native American and African American Literatures. These texts helped me to conceptualize a continued future for this type of comparative literature.

In the spirit of extending realities of historic past intercultural discourse between Native American and African American literary traditions to the present, in “Storytelling Women: Paula Gunn Allen and Toni Morrison” Kathleen M. Donovan does a cross-cultural analysis of Gunn Allen’s (Laguna Pueblo) *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* and Morrison’s (African American) *Sula*. Donovan explains such a juxtaposition by saying that “a close examination of the novels reveals multiple parallels in the representation of the ways in which, for women, the crucial search for individual and cultural identity and voice is shaped by the Native American and African American oral traditions, and by the relationship of landscape to human action, thus providing at least a jumping off point for women of all races to consider what they have in common as well as what divides them” (124). She thinks “[s]uch conjunctions in the thought of two writers of color from vastly different cultures and landscapes suggest that cultural specificity need not exclude some very real cultural commonalities” (13). Donovan’s rationale for a comparative literature text examining the “cultural commonalities” between Native American and African American writers makes sense.
In “Red, Black, and Southern,” chapter two of Reconstructing the Native South: American Indian Literature and the Lost Cause, Melanie Benson Taylor writes that though “the practice of enslaving Natives was gradually disbanded (though never legally abolished in some locales), the presence of mixed African-Native slave communities had quickly become so widespread throughout the plantation South that it ensured a permanent bond, both biological and cultural, between the two groups” (78). She observes that “[r]acial intermixing became increasingly common, and soon these dark others shared bloodlines along with their analogous histories of marginalization and exploitation” (78). Taylor concludes that “[t]ogether, blacks and Indians resisted the earliest European colonial incursions, and in the nineteenth century, they fought side by side…” (78).


Miles and Sharon P. Holland observe in Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country that:

[T]he idea of and desire for connectivity with Indians and Indian spaces has found expression in a variety of African American cultural forms, including song, story, and visual art. In particular, the oral and written tradition in African America includes a predominant narrative of black and Native interrelations: that during slavery and the unpredictable climate of Reconstruction, blacks found safe haven, enlivened hope, and spiritual renewal by resettling in Indian territories and, whenever possible, becoming members of Indian families” (11).
The more I read expert testimony from academic sources, such as the ones above, about the literary, historical, political, and cultural ties of Native Americans and African Americans, the more I realize that pre-nineteenth-century Native Americans and African Americans interacted at levels the academic community has not documented at the same research and writing levels it has done concerning white and Native relationships. The information about these ties is one of the most current and emerging fields.

The Value of Zora Neal Hurston’s “Spy-glass”

Now that I have traveled along the dissertation journey to its completion, I can relate to what Zora Neal Hurston said in *Mules and Men* about how she felt when Franz Boas sent her out to “collect Negro folklore” (1). She observes that her assignment, while it would be charting out new anthropological territory for Boas, was “not to be a new experience for [her]” (1). 111 Hurston continues, in the dry, humorous writing voice she uses, to explain that the work of encountering and collecting African American folklore is not new for her because “[w]hen [she] pitched headforemost into the world [she] landed in the crib of negroism” (1). After deftly pointing out her insider status with African American traditions, she brings up the issue of how her assignment requires that she become a researcher, an outsider, who “ha[s] to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at [her culture]” (1). She is writing about how uncomfortable it is using a cultural “spy-glass,” that requires her to engage in a cultural shift if she wishes to “advance within the system.” She laments that the academic community demands that culturally-grounded individuals, among whom she places herself, “poke and prod at ourselves and very often at our traditions” (1). John Edgar Wideman also addresses the issue in the “Foreword” to Hurston’s *Every Tongue Got to Confess* and gives direction to
schiors seeking entry into African American oral narratives. He advises researchers to “[a]lways keep in mind what you’re consuming is vastly distanced from the original. Translation destroys and displaces as much as it restores and renders available” (xvi). He informs us that the narratives instruct us to keep in mind as we analyze them that “talk functions in African American communities as …celebrating the power language bestows” (xx).

Hurston’s expression of cultural discomfort with the “spy-glass” of academic pursuits mirrors how I felt at the beginning of the dissertation project. Initially, it was uncomfortable dissecting Native American and African American trickster stories instead of evaluating them as a cultural participant or storyteller. It felt authentic to read them for cultural enrichment, entertainment, or evaluating them for performance work. Putting what I felt were my cultural stories under the microscope of academic analysis felt spiritually wrong. I assumed that my cultural experiences as a member of the Native American and African American communities and reading some “expert” books (if there were any new ones on the topic) should be all I would need to know and do to be able to explain the meanings inside of trickster texts. I was wrong.

The more I subjected trickster texts to what the academic community often calls the gaze, Hurston’s “spy-glass,” the more I realized that Native American and African American writers had cleverly buried hidden cultural, social, and political messages inside of their writings. Before I used the “spy-glass,” I had missed a significant amount of the literary buried treasure. I also came to the conclusion that the messages in the trickster stories and writings were not solely “mine.”
The academic research and analysis tools I have learned have been useful to discern the nuances of the social and political agendas of the Oral Native American and African American Trickster storytelling traditions and of the writers who later used them. I no longer feel that this type of “gazing” is intrusive because I now see that it expands my understanding and appreciation of Native American and African American trickster literature. The next time I tell or explain a trickster story, verbally or in writing, ancient or modern, I will have much more to say about what the story means.

The Future of the Study of Native American and African American Trickster Folklore

There is the future potential for finding documentation in folklore collections, historical archives, archeological evidence, census, plantation, and Bureau of Indian Affairs records, treaty documents, private letters, and photos, which prove the interrelationship of Africans and Native Americans. Researchers in all fields will be able to build a clearer picture of the extent to which early Africans-to-America, African Americans, and Native Americans interacted. If nothing else, the current historical and sociological analysis proves that Native American and African American people met and at least talked to each other. This means there is the certainty Native Americans and African Americans shared their lives and their folklore. This is the reality upon which this field of research can move forward.
Chapter 5 and Conclusion Notes


3 Chesnutt was born in 1858, was two when the war broke out and seven when it ended, was old enough at seven to be aware of the celebratory aspect of the Union victory, Emancipation Proclamation, and their impact on the African American community. He came of age between eight and nineteen years old during the Reconstruction and early Jim Crow eras, for from 1878 – 1899, Chesnutt was twenty to forty-one years old.

4 Richard Brodhead notes in Journals that Chesnutt writes that he is “glad” the letter was not published.


6 Joel Chandler Harris published multiple volumes of folklore with an African American theme. See: Nights with Uncle Remus: Myths and Legends of the Old Plantation (1883); Daddy Jake, the Runaway, and Short Stories Told After Dark (1889); Little Mr. Thimblefinger and His Queer Country (1894); The Chronicles of Aunt Minervy Ann (1899) and Uncle Remus’s Magazine (1906 – 1908).


8 Antebellum (1843 - 1860), Civil War (1861 - 1865), Reconstruction (1866 - 1877), Post-Reconstruction through Jim Crow Era (1878 - 1900) This period can also be considered part of the Gilded Age (1878 - 1889) and Populist/Progressive (1890 - 1913).


14 Charles Chesnutt, Journals of Charles Chesnutt 139.


18 “The first expression of the term ‘Jim Crow’ came after it was used as early as 1832 to describe a Cincinnati black face song and dance team in the New York state. But the first racial use of Jim Crow, however, appeared during 1841 in Massachusetts when it became a colloquial term applied to a separate Negro railway car. ‘Jim Crow’ now has widespread use as the popular term meaning for discrimination and segregation of Negroes.” Jesse Walter Dees and James Styles Hadley, Jim Crow (Westport, CN: Negro Universities P, a Division of Greenwood P, 1970).

19 The Civil Rights Act of 1875 originally guaranteed African Americans equal access to public accommodations, service as jurors, and public transportation. The Supreme Court ruled these provisions to be unconstitutional.


23 Oscar Micheaux wrote, produced, and directed a silent, black and white film adaptation of Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman in 1926, starring Evelyn Preer and Lawrence Chenault, but no print of the film is currently available. It is presumed lost. For examinations of nineteenth century African American figures. See: R.J. M. Blackett, Beating Against the Barriers; Leon Litwack and August Meier, Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988). William Montgomery Brown (1855 - 1937) was the Episcopal Bishop of Arkansas (1900 - 1911). His book was "a vigorous restatement of the white supremacist perspective on the inferiority of the Negro, the franchise, miscegenation, and the need to maintain the segregated status quo." Charles Chesnutt, An Exemplary Citizen: Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt, 1906 - 1932. Jesse S. Crisler, et al, Eds., 73-4.

24 It has not helped the general reader to have had “Uncle Remus” tales later made into American films, adding additional stereotyping to Harris’s original writings.


27 At the Atlanta Exposition of 1895, Washington delivered an address that included the lines: “To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land, or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: Cast down your bucket where you are; cast it down in making friends, in every manly way, of the people of
all races by whom we are surrounded. Cast down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called upon to bear, when it comes to business pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man’s chance in the commercial world…” Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1995).

28 There is no record of a city called "Patesville" in North Carolina. There was a "Gatesville" in his time.


30 In terms of Julius’s employment status, and irrespective of Julius’s numerous management skills, John bought into the convenience and limitations of the Black Codes and indulged his own racist stereotypical thinking.

31 “Founded in a one room shanty, near Butler Chapel AME Zion Church, thirty adults represented the first class - Dr. Booker T. Washington the first teacher. The founding date was July 4, 1881, authorized by United States House Bill 165.” "History of Tuskegee University," Tuskegee University “About Us,” tuskegee.edu. 2012, Web, 18 July 2012.


33 “Strange Fruit” is a song recorded in 1939 by Billy Holiday about lynching in America. The black lynched body is “strange fruit” hanging from a southern tree. The lyrics were written by Abel Meeropol, a New York public school teacher and first printed in 1937 as the poem “Bitter Fruit” in *The New York Teacher.* Stanza 1: “Southern trees bear a strange fruit./ Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,/ Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,/ Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.” See: Claiborne Carson, *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and First-hand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Penguin, 1991).

34 Monroe N. Wok, ed., *Negro Yearbook*.


37 For more period literature or speeches in protest of late 19th C. and turn of the century African American “Jim Crow” oppression and struggle, read the voices who bear “witness:” Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Turrell,, Mary McLeod Bethune, W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Walter White, the Harlem Renaissance and NAACP *Crisis* writers and many others.


When slaves came to the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, they brought West African music, folktales, proverbs, dress, dance, medicine, language, food, architecture, art, and religion with them. In the last decades of the twentieth century the African memory of Afro-Americans permeated American folklore, speech, music, literature, cooking, and religion. Africa and the slave experience remain central to an understanding of American history.” Mary Frances Berry and John Blassingame, Long Memory: The Black Experience in America (London and New York: Oxford UP, 1982) xvii.


Jeffrey E. Anderson, Conjure in African American Society, 53.

When I attended several religious Haitian Voodoo ceremonies in the late 80’s, the presiding Mambo conducting the ceremonies, while possessed by the loas (spirits), spit mouthfuls of beer on the attendees as a blessing. Some anthropologists estimate that Voodoo practices, originating in Western Africa, date back at least 6,000 years. Numbers approaching 60 million people worldwide currently practice the religion of Voodoo.

The word “peculiar” derives from the Latin “peculium,” translated as “private property.” The term “peculiar institution” was euphemism used by Southerners to denote the institution of slavery. Paul Finkelman writes in Defending Slavery: Pro-slavery Thought in the Old South (New York: Bedford P, 2003) 55: John C. Calhoun begins his 1837 pro-slavery speech to the United States with “The peculiar institution of the South—that on the maintenance of which the very existence of the slave-holding states depends, is pronounced to be sinful and odious, in the sight of God and man; and this with a systemic design of rendering us hateful in the eyes of the world—with a view to a general crusade against us and our institutions.”


By 1850, black face minstrel shows were hugely popular in America. Originating around 1830, they persisted for nearly 100 years as a foundational part of international theater performances. There were hundreds of performers. Thomas Dartmouth Rice (1808 - 1860), Joel Sweeney (1810 - 1860), Lew Docstander (1856 - 1924), and Al Jolson (1886 - 1950) were only a few of the white main acts.


Charles Chesnutt, Journals, 126.


"Carpetbaggers" was a pejorative term Reconstruction Southerners gave to northerners who streamed down to the post war-ravaged South to take advantage of economic and political opportunities for personal enrichment, such as buying up large plantations at rock-bottom, depressed prices. The term referenced the "carpet-like" material commonly employed to make the hand-held suitcases Northerners used when they traveled south.
The Confederate States of America dollar was strong and had high purchasing power when it was first issued in April 1861 and during the early Civil War years. But as the tide of the Civil War turned sour for the Confederacy, its dollar’s value deflated to zero by the end of the war. United States Notes were issued by the United States Treasury in 1862, tender popularly known as "greenbacks." John would have likely purchased the McAdoo farm with US Notes.

Richard Brodhead, "Introduction," The Conjure Woman, 5

"Miss Ann" is a term having origins in the Slave South. Miss Ann refers to the white mistress of the plantation or any other white woman with authority during slavery times. It's currently used to derogatorily refer to a white woman who behaves in an overbearing fashion, or to an employer who oversees African American domestic services in a bossy, abusive, or racist fashion. Example: "I can't believe that 'Miss Ann' forced me to work late even though I told her my children would be home alone if I did."


Charles Chesnutt, "The Goophered Grapevine," 31. “In 1863, William J. Minor, a Natchez resident who owned three Louisiana sugar plantations, complained of "troubles and difficulties" without number. No sooner would he overcome one problem, he said, "than a new one arises & I do not feel competent to contend successfully against them all." By January, 1863, his slaves were "completely demoralized ... going, coming & working when they please & as they please." He saw "the handwriting on the wall." If the war continued for twelve more months, he said, "all negro men of any value will be taken, the women & children will be left for their masters to maintain, which they cannot do." The landowners "will make nothing, the lands will be sold for taxes, & bot. [bought] by northern men & the original owners will be made beggars." James Roark, Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction (New York: W.W. Norton Publishers, 1977) 113.

The Supreme Court confronted four main issues involving race and the Constitution in the period 1895-1910—the Plessy era, as I shall call it. The first issue was the constitutionality of state-imposed racial segregation. The second issue was the disfranchising of blacks by southern states, which produced numerous high-court challenges. The third issue was the exclusion of blacks from juries, which was raised in numerous cases where southern blacks sought to overturn their criminal convictions on this ground. The fourth issue had to do with the education of blacks. Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education (1899) rejected a Fourteenth Amendment challenge to separate-and-unequal education because the justices deemed inequality reasonable under the circumstances.” Source: Michael Klarmon, Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality (New York and London: Oxford UP, 2004) 9.


The images most white Americans had of blacks were stereotypical; blacks were a demonized group which had to be controlled by terror or an idealized group of self-sacrificing Uncle Toms and Mammys; they were seen as embodying a sexual potency and promiscuity secretly envied by whites, or they were represented as primitive, laughable clowns. All these stereotypes were given form and (for many Northerners) largely brought into being by the century-old tradition of minstrelsy, in which white comics blackened their faces with burnt cork and performed an imitation of black life for a (usually delighted) white audience. It is this tradition and its effects that DuBois seeks to subvert in The Souls of Black Folk; he removes what Houston Baker calls the "minstrel mask" from his entire race, taking back from the black-
face theater the characteristic art form of his race, its music, which the minstrels had appropriated for their own purposes.” Source: Scott Herring, “DuBois and the Minstrels,” *Melus* 22.2 (Summer 1997): 3 - 18.


67 There is a wide selection of African and African American folktale books. However, B.A. Botkin’s *A Treasury of Southern Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions, and Folkways of the People of the South* is a large collection of black and white tales and makes fascinating reading, particularly because it was published in 1949, before Jim Crow laws were officially abolished.


69 Charles Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine,” 37

70 Samuel Langhorne Clemens (Mark Twain), *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, 11.


74 There are histories of slaves who fled rather than endure forced separation from their families. Harriet Tubman is an example: “A married woman-her husband was John Tubman, a black free man -she fled her past of field and house labor when her future within slavery threatened the limited security that she knew. She was almost thirty, but childless, when her young master died in 1849. Deaths, like weddings, imperiled the stability of estates; the rumor spread that she and her fellow slaves were to be sold to distant buyers. Vainly she tried to persuade her brothers to escape along with her. Only years later, on two of her furtive missions, did she bring her brothers and her aged parents out to freedom in the North. In a decade of personal daring, she made twenty trips into the slave states.
The hundreds of human chattels she rescued had a large commercial value; in consequence there
was a sizable price on Harriet Tubman’s head.” Burt James Lowenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., Black
Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words Their Thoughts Their Feelings (University

75 “It is the alienation of the slave from any attachment to groups or localities other than those chosen for
him by the master that gave the relation of slavery its peculiar value to the master. The slave was the
ultimate human tool, as imprintable and as disposable as the master wished.” Orlando Patterson. Slavery
and Social Death, 7.

76 Jeffrey Anderson, Conjure in African American Society, 76.

77 Mary Frances Berry and John Blassingame, Long Memory: The Black Experience in America (New

78 Uncle Tom, the principle male character in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, was separated from his wife and
family, and resigned to being repeatedly sold. He dies separated from his wife and children, and never

79 Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death, 5.

80 Charles Chesnutt, The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales, Richard Brodhead, ed., (Durham:

81 Ellen Goldner, "Other(ed) Ghosts: Gothicism and the Bonds of Reason in Melville, Chesnutt, and

82 John is the White Narrator. However, there are clear relational shifts between Julius and John. When
Julius is “talking,” it is the White Narrator telling us what Julius told him. During this phase, the persona of
John disappears. John actualizes, or “possesses” Julius…in keeping with many African rituals.

83 Charles Chesnutt, Journals, 140.

84 The National Association of the Daughters of the Confederacy was founded in 1894 by Caroline
Meriwether Goodlett and Anna Davenport Raines. In 1895, the organization changed its name to the United
Daughters of the Confederacy. Membership is open to women at least 16 years old who are direct
descendants of veterans who fought honorably for the Confederate States of America during the Civil War.

85 Frederick Douglass, “What Shall Be Done with the Negro?: A Lecture by Frederick Douglass,” New
2013.

86 Frederick Ross, “Slavery Ordained of God” (New York: J.P Lippincott, 1857), University of


88 sweetheart

89 David Waldstreicher, Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution


Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Denmark Vessey, Olaudah Equiano, and Harriet Jacobs, to name a few.

"overseers"


Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 7.


Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.


Charles Albert Tindley (1851 - 1933), "I'll Overcome Someday." *New Songs of the Gospel*. Songster, 1900. It is generally accepted that Tindley's lyrics are the basis of the 1960's civil rights song, "We Shall Overcome." The opening and closing melody is from the early African American spiritual "No More Auction Block for Me," author unknown.


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Harris, Joel Chandler, retells. “Mr. Fox Goes A-Hunting but Mr. Rabbit Bags the Game” and “Miss Cow Falls a Victim to Mr. Rabbit.” *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*. D. Appleton, 1880, New York: Penguin Classics, 1982. Print.


White Hat, Sr., Albert. Sinte Gleska University, Rosebud Indian Reservation, South Dakota. June 2009. Interview.


APPENDIX A
NO MORE AUCTION BLOCK

Enslaved African Americans developed many songs with lyrics that were subversive trickster texts. The lyrics to the song “No More Auction Block” are printed in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay’s collection in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*:

No more auction block for me,
No more, no more,
No more auction block for me,
Many thousands gone.

No more peck of corn for me,
No more, no more,
Mo more peck of corn for me,
Many thousands gone.

No more pint of salt for me,
No more, no more,
No more pint of salt for me,
Many thousands gone.

No more driver’s lash for me,
No more, no more,
No more driver’s lash for me,
Many thousands gone. (12)
APPENDIX B

GO DOWN MOSES

This is a song enslaved African Americans sang as a spiritual, expression of social and political protest, and signal to escaping individuals alerting them that it was time to flee. The lyrics to the song “Go Down Moses” are from Richard A. Long and Eugenia W. Collier’s collection *Afro-American Writing: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry*:

Go down, Moses
‘Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole—Pharaoh,
To let my people go.

Go down, Moses
‘Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole—Pharaoh,
To let my people go.

When Israel was in Egypt land:
Let my people go,
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go.

Go down, Moses
‘Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole—Pharaoh,
To let my people go.

When spoke the Lord, bold Moses said:
Let my people go
If not I’ll smite your first born dead,
Let my people go.

Go down, Moses
‘Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole—Pharaoh,
To let my people go. (110)
These lyrics are from the recorded version I listened to Paul Robeson sing when I was a child. My parents owned “Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho,” *Spirituals*, Columbia Masterworks, 1949. Vinyl, LP, Album.

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
The walls come a tumblin' down, Hallelujah

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

You may talk about your king of Gideon
You may talk about your men of Saul
But there're none like good old Joshua
At the battle of Jericho

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down
Up to the walls of Jericho
He marched with spear in hand
Go blow them ram horns, cried Joshua
‘Cause the battle am in my hands

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Then the lamb ram sheep horns begin to blow
The trumpets begin to sound
Old Joshua commanded the chil’ren to begin to shout
And the walls came a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
Jericho, Jericho
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls come a tumblin' down
APPENDIX D

THE GOSPEL TRAIN

The song was published by the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1852. There are several versions of the lyrics. This version is the one I learned as a child from listening to a gospel songs record album.

The Gospel train's a-comin'
I hear it just at hand.
I hear the car wheels moving,
And rumbling thro’ the land.

Git on board lil’ children,
Git on board lil’ children,
Git on board lil’ children,
They’s room for many a more.

I hear the train a-comin'
She's comin' round the bend,
She's loos-ed all her steam and brakes,
And strainin' ev'ry nerve.

Git on board lil’ chil’ren,
Git on board lil’ chil’ren,
Git on board lil’ chil’ren,
They’s room for many a more.

The fare is cheap and all can go,
The rich and poor is there.
No second class aboard dis train,
No diff”nce in de fare.

Git on board lil’ chil’ren,
Git on board lil’ chil’ren,
Git on board lil’ chil’ren,
They’s room for many a more.
APPENDIX E

MASTER KEEPS HIS WORD

I heard this “Master” folktale in the early 1970’s in the Temple University *Black Student League* office. In this version, “John” was named “Lester.” This is also an example of a *John and Master Tale* I do not tell or teach in classrooms or to mixed race audiences.

“Master Keeps His Word”

Master decided one day it was about time for his only child and daughter, Ann, to marry. But, he was mighty particular about who his son-in-law would be because that man would not only be Ann’s husband, but he would also inherit the plantation and all of Master’s worldly goods. So, Master gave it a lot of thought and hit upon a plan for how to choose the best man.

The following week, Master called John into his office and said, “I have decided to throw a big party in honor of Ann’s eighteenth birthday that’s coming up in two weeks. It is going to also be the evening I announce that Ann is eligible to get married.” Lester kept quiet, waiting for Master to continue. Master said, “Lester, I want you to gather about a dozen of the boys and go out to the back 40. I’ll meet you there in an hour.” Lester said, “Yes, Master.” Well, Lester quickly gathered some of the best field hands and met Master as arranged.

Master said, “Ok, Lester. Now I want the boys to dig a big hole right here about 40 x 20 x 10 feet. Supervise the process, Lester, and call me when the hole is finished.” Lester eyed Master out of the corner of his eye, but didn’t say anything but, “Yes, Master.” When the hole was finished, Lester got Master. Master said, “Now, dig a trench
from the river to the hole and fill the hole with water. Call me when the job is finished.”

Lester gave a quick look at the other men, but all he said was, “Yes, Master.” It took all day, but finally, the trench got dug and the hole got filled with water. Lester called Master. Master said, “Ok, now go to the river and pull about ten big alligators out and throw them over into the pool you just made. When they are in there, seal off the trench so they can’t get back to the river.” “Gators, Master?” Lester cocked his head to the side and quietly asked. “Yes, Lester, that’s what I said. Call me when the job is finished.”

It took the men until sunset to get those big gators out of the river and into the pool. But, when the job was finished, Lester called Master over to see the results. Master was pleased as punch and stood there watching those gators swimming around in the pool. Then he gave Lester instructions to get the plantation house and grounds ready for Ann’s big birthday party.

Finally, the day of the party came around. The plantation was decorated within an inch of its life and the tables were groaning with food for the guests. Ann looked like a princess in her new ball gown and slippers. Her milky white skin was dewy soft. Her beautiful blonde hair was done up in ringlets that fell to her waist and her big blue eyes were the color of a cloudless sky.

Every planation family for miles around was present. Master had sent a special invitation telling every white man in the county between the ages of 18 – 30 to attend Ann’s party, so the richest plantation owner’s sons were there. Everyone partied until late in the day.

When the sun was just about to set, Master raised his hands and called everyone to attention. Master said, “Thank you for coming to celebrate Ann’s birthday. Now, I
have a surprise.” Master called Lester over and whispered to him, “Get the boys and have them all line up along the sides of the pool and stand there. Leave one side open and I want you there, too, to keep an eye on things.” Lester quickly followed Master’s instructions. When everything was ready, Master turned to his guests and told them all to follow him out back to the sides of the pool the boys had made.

Master said, “I have decided that it is time for Ann to marry. Her husband will have my beautiful daughter, inherit my plantation, and all my worldly goods.” Well, that announcement caused a buzz. Every single male at the party wanted to be the man to marry Ann. Then Master said, “There’s just one thing the lucky man will have to do. See that pool with the alligators in it?” They sure did. There wasn’t a guest who could take their eyes off the strange and frightening sight. Master continued, “Gentlemen, if you want to marry Ann, I’ll tell you what you’ll have to do. On my signal, you will have to dive into that pool of alligators. The first man to swim it to the other side of the pool where I am standing will be my new son-in-law.” SPLASH!

Before the echo of Master’s words was out of his mouth, everyone saw someone swimming like lightening across the pool! It had gotten too dark to see who it was so everyone had to wait until the swimmer reached the other side and hopped out. What the heck! It was Lester! Master, Ann, and the entire assembly of guests stood there gaping open-mouthed at Lester dripping wet and standing in front of Master. When Master recovered enough to speak, he stared at Lester for a long time and then said, “Lester, there is nothing that could have prepared me for something like this. But, I am a man of my word. I said I would give Ann, the plantation, and all my worldly goods to the first
man to make it across that pool. You have served me faithfully and are a man of high intelligence and integrity. I present you with Ann.”

Lester was barely paying attention to what Master was saying. He was busy looking all around the grounds at the guests, spitting out water, and frowning. Master said, “Lester! Did you hear what I just said? I said I am giving you Ann to marry!”

Lester said, “What?! F&%$ Ann! All I want to know is who pushed me in the pool?!”