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American Mythology: How Storytelling Shapes Modern Cultural Perceptions

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AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY: HOW STORYTELLING SHAPES MODERN CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS

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APPROVAL OF THESIS

We, the faculty supervising the work of Kristin Maynard, affirm that the thesis, *American Mythology: How Storytelling Shapes Modern Cultural Perceptions*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Masters In English and the College of Liberal Arts. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine the American storytelling tradition, paying particular attention to American folktales and legends that arose as the nation expanded westward, such as the stories of Paul Bunyan, John Henry, Billy the Kid, etc. This text will utilize a lens of European narrative tradition (especially those which lent themselves to the written records of oral fairy tales and folktales) and trace the cultural significance and social purpose of these formative American stories. I will discuss the reasons why we so readily recognize the echoes of outside narrative traditions in American storytelling and the ethical implications of these narratives that, according to Hanna Meretoja's critical examination of the ethics of storytelling "can promote exclusion that amounts to annihilation" (Meretoja 2017). Because stories are not *just* stories – they are the method by which social norms are communicated and internalized by the members of a given culture.

The sections of this manuscript will focus on various topics that perform this purpose of communicating norms and values – why and how do these get communicated through narratives? What does the shift from oral traditions to written literature have to say about the persistence of these stories? How do these stories shape the modern perception of history? What can be gleaned from the division of narrative tropes between the tragic female narrative and the heroic male narrative? And, most of all, how were these stories used not only to polish the edges away from a less than ideal past but also to look towards the future with rose-tinted lenses?

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

For many children in the American classroom, the words "I cannot tell a lie," resonate with a cultural significance they aren't quite aware of yet. These words, apocryphally spoken by a young, George Washington create an attachment to national history they didn't have before. Here is a founding father, young as you are now; see how morally upright he is in facing his faults – this is an image of what American children are meant to aspire to. But this narrative carries beyond childhood, ingrained in the morality of the adults to whom this legend was taught. If not this narrative, then another – Johnny Appleseed, John Henry, Calamity Jane, Paul Bunyan, Davy Crockett, Christopher Columbus. These are the figureheads of American nursery rhymes and "tall tales," yet they shape our understanding of what history is, establishing a simplified version of narrative truth.

Narrative, even in this "tall" form, is an inescapable aspect of collective humanity. All people communicate and apprehend understanding through narrative, though narrative can operate as a more subtle element of human interaction (both with the world and with each other). How then do individual and collective narratives operate in their contexts? How are narratives used to establish their cultural contexts, allowing us to express our individual and collective understanding as well as allowing us to create that understanding? And in what way does the establishment of these narratives with children create a new knowing of history?

Specifically, I am arguing that American storytelling, through repetition/retelling and the romanticization of certain qualities and events, has laid a nearly unshakable foundation both for the modern understanding of history and for modern mores and values. This is especially true considering the relative youth, size, and population of the country, which contribute to the variety and rate of narrative creation. Narrative serves as the framework for the realizing of the

national identity when the national identity, by those relativities, is naturally divided. Narrative is the foundation of American nationality – our knowledge of our country comes from narrative history, with children learning the past through storytelling, which in turn shapes their perceptions of the past in adulthood. Narrative allows for the conceptualization and actualization of diverse nationalistic identities – with storytellers (and therefore their audiences) narrating their experiences of being an individual member of a collective culture, such as Gloria Anzaldua who write from their literary borderlands, intersections, and liminal spaces.

This is what H. Porter Abbott refers to as "narrative time" (history) and "narrative perception" (identity and understanding) in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Abbott). In its universality, what narrative does for us (both as the creators and audience) is helping our species "organize its understanding of time" (Abbott 3). This is to say, when informing an audience about or giving context for events, we speak in narrative. Abbott discusses the delineation of notable events through narrative. The effect that this application of narrative has is that it allows "events themselves to create the order of time" (Abbott 4). This means that readers comprehend time in relation to particular moments (single days, individual wars, certain tragedies or losses – narrowing down from there, individual people, battles, conversations), rather than in the expected chronological progression. History stretched out through the past and future, is therefore expanded and condensed in light of specific, if technically brief episodes in history. What this expansion, in turn, allows for in the American narrative canon is a concrete focus on certain formative events and circumstances – the European discovery of the Americas, the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, the "end" of slavery, the writing of the Constitution, the first Thanksgiving, etc. Readers can collapse other events into themselves as less important, or at least more shameful – the Fugitive Slave Act, the Trail of Tears, the regionality that led to the

Southern secession, smallpox blankets, the lack of rights for people of color and women, etc. This episodic view of history, once accepted by the masses, becomes Truth, both in and out of context; accepted narrative history allows for little correction.

In the context of my thesis, in which I am discussing history as a narrative, it makes sense to divide those events up into narrative eras – Early America, which is what I am calling the span of American history leading up to just after the American Revolution; the period between the end of the war to the beginning of the Civil War, which could fondly be called "The Era of Strife," for its marked surge in civil movements and general unrest; and the Civil War and Reconstruction, rich in narrative discourse, albeit a shorter moment in national history than the other two. Stemming from this is Abbott's idea of "narrative perception" which allows narrative consumers to persist in a distorted understanding of their cultural environment - enabling both the overwriting of other narratives and for multiple adaptations of (often opposing) narratives to exist concurrently. Abbot uses images to explain this concept of how it is possible for viewers of the same image to have different narrative tellings of the content of that image (Abbott 10). In his illustration of this point, two people observing the same abstract or surrealist painting may have separate interpretations of the same image (though the image never changes) that form out of their understanding of the circumstances surrounding the creation of the work, its place in and out of context, and the person who created it. For the purposes of my research, the same assertions can be made about the visual American past, which often accompanies the narratives I discuss, such as in Thrace Talmon's retelling of the Molly Pitcher story. In relation to the narrative telling of American history, modern "viewers" have no choice but to see the past as a series of images, being the way people recall information; both the brevity of memory and the

repetition of stories account for the foundations of narrative history, as narratives become distorted from fact as they get passed down through multiple generations.

This distortion through retelling a story is different than the distortion that comes from romanticizing an event. The romanticization of narrative informs cultural values, displaying the narratives and traditions which are favored by the people of a certain nation or region and through those favored stories, the principles of social behavior that are often passed down through generations. Through narrative romanticization, consumers, viewers, and readers absorb information regarding gender roles, family dynamics, political structures, community, and religion. The retelling of narratives, while not distinct from romanticization, permits consumers to have a distinctive and adaptable understanding of cultural mores (the characteristics and customs) and norms (the patterns of group behavior). This means that we can better understand the more nuanced and complex traditions of a society as it changes between generations, as opposed to the reinforcement of contemporary standards established through romanticization.

The retelling of stories allows for minute shifts in the culture. This can be seen, for example in the way that a white storyteller now might differ in their narration of a person of color than a white storyteller from the turn of the 19th Century (though it is shameful to have to qualify that statement with the word “might”). The adaptation of narrative through romanticization and retelling has allowed for the persistence of certain foundational tenets of American culture, such as regional/national identity, religious moralism, democracy, even as society itself shifted. It is retelling that informs continuous notions of gender roles, family dynamics, religious morality, relations between the government and the people, relations between different people, and most essentially, the relationships between narrative “insiders,” who rule the direction of the creation and development of narrative and narrative “outsiders,”

who are most often othered in both their narrative representations and in their attempts at creating their narratives.

In this thesis I will address the questions of the impact and context of narrative as they relate to the romanticization and retelling of narratives; narrative perception and narrative time as they affect the stories that recur throughout national history as educational tools and propaganda. Stories or narratives, in the context of this work, refer to certain tall tales and legends from American history in both their original, often oral forms, as well as in their written adaptations (which are more widely accessible for research applications and open discussion for the existence of written versions of these oral narratives). These stories are parts of the American historical narrative – a body of compiled work of historical fiction and nonfiction which, regardless of veracity, is often presented as historical fact.

In Chapter 1: A New Promised Land, complicating the relationship between white settlers and their religious roots is the existence of people who exist outside their value system. These Others, the Native Americans were portrayed as naïve and in need of salvation – a lower class in need of subjugation. I discuss their explicit and implicit assimilation into white culture through the Cherokee creation myth "Earth Making," which is rife with imagery that narrowed the gap between the Indigenous people and their colonizers. Regardless of attempts to both work with white settlers and forceable attempts to assimilate Native Americans into white communities, Indigenous people were still seen and portrayed as Other. In the persistence of their othering, they were also presented as dangerous deviations from the standard laid down by the colonizers. I write about this narrative reseparation, or perhaps incomplete assimilation of both the Jicarilla Apache creation myth "The Jicarilla Genesis" and the legend of Godasiyo, the original, uniting chief of the Iroquois. The former narrative illustrates a creation myth that

remains separate from the ideologies expressed in the Christian book of Genesis, and the latter expresses the effectuality of a female leader, contrary to the societies formed by white settlers, despite intersections of gender roles.

The Promised Land, which is fundamentally unobtainable by reason of the flawed logic this image is built on (the colonizers were not the Hebrew children, there was no divine ordinance declaring the nation theirs, white settlers were in no way morally superior to the Indigenous people they saw as a threat), is also complicated by women, existing, and moreover, fighting in the American Revolution – and the legend of Molly Pitcher illustrates the form of the acknowledgment of these women, compiled into a single woman (who would have never had to fight if her circumstances hadn't been dire), and cast off to make their own ways in a society that lauded their deviations from the standards placed on their gender, but forced them to seek the only recourse they had after their part in the war was over – marriage. At the heart of the narrative of Molly Pitcher is the adoption of Indigenous narrative traditions, namely the hero narrative (a genre to which the previous legend of Godasiyo belongs). This tall tale coming out of the American Revolution marks both the ideals of American femininity and the intersections of the Indigenous [female] hero narrative with the newly engendered American female legend. The othering of American women is depicted in the narrative and the narrative gaps – they, like the Native Americans, were both enemy and subject. Unlike the Native Americans, their quality of being an enemy is directed outward towards national enemies in relation to the nation (as opposed to the Indigenous inward toward the nation) and their subjugation is directly to their husbands, rather than to the white race as a whole. I discuss these dynamics of hostility, subjugation, and assimilation through the lens of Morrison's *The Origin of Others* and William M. Clements' "This Voluminous Unwritten Book of Ours."

In Chapter 2: Darker Shadows Still, I examine America's era of rising tensions through the lens of Mason Locke Weems' *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits of General George Washington*. I propose that George Washington serves as the narrative pinnacle of the standard white, masculine, Christian American established in the previous chapter and therefore serves the triune role of aspirational ideal, romanticized figurehead, and foil to the culturally identified Others. Here is where the notion of a romanticized past is projected onto the American historical narrative. Weem's biography portrays specific cultural values – benevolence, industry, and patriotism are highlighted as the epitome of the white American male identity. What then, can be said of the identities of Indigenous people, African Americans, and women of all races, who were struggling to achieve the right to be socially, politically, and narratively recognized at the least, with equality being the ultimate goal.

Heightening the growing rift within the American narrative were national literacy rates, the quickening rate of transportation and communication brought on by the advent of railroads, and what June Howard refers to as "local color fiction" (Howard 121). These narratives, released in serial format in newspapers and magazines, while different media from Weems' apocrypha, lend credence to the rapidity of dissemination of the tall tales and legends discussed in the previous chapter and this chapter. The exciting narratives, accessible to many Americans throughout the early 19th Century through periodicals such as magazines and newspapers evoke the very notion of what it means for extraordinary narratives educating audiences on the American ideological system to be widely accessible. Here lie the complications of propaganda, when people begin to assimilate it into their narrative perceptions. This in turn opens the door to a concept that Thomas Peyser introduces in his essay "Planning Utopia," in which he discusses the division between "planned order" and "spontaneous order." These concepts introduce the

necessity of the human element when it comes to establishing a nationalistic structure. In the context of Peyser's essay, this structure is physical – the infrastructure of a nation, provided by those in power; in the context of this thesis, the structure is purely narrative – who tells the stories? How do they tell them? Who reads stories? What can stories do?

In Chapter 3: A Nation of Magnificent Distances, the sense of tension evoked by the previous chapter explodes into full-blown narrative conflict as the Civil War erupts across the country. This war, established on the basis of regionalist attitudes stemming from a growing collective nationalism, elicits an outpouring of narratives from both sides of the divide. To the South, narratives of unity evoke a sense of duty as ingrained as the region's collective self-righteousness or racism. I use the narrative of Mary Sharpe Jones and Mary Jones Mallard– women trapped by Sherman's March to the Sea–to express the South's willingness to die for their cause, and their antipathy for the North in general. While the othering of African Americans still occurred, in the face of an immediate threat to their way of life at the hands of other white people, the North became the primary other of the South during the war, with the othering of Black people being a retaliatory effort to maintain the status quo. In them was an insidious and powerful enemy that threatened their way of life. And in Southern narratives, unity would see the narrative war won through collective agreement on the self-righteousness of their cause, even as they lost the physical war.

To the North, narratives of disunity ran rampant. Louisa May Alcott's "My Contraband" and Edward Everett Hale's "The Man Without a Country" express the fissures within Northern society centered around the threat to the national identity. What did it mean to be an American– man, woman, black, white–when the Union was collapsing in on itself? What would be the outcome of the burgeoning civil rights movements? In the first, the complex portrayal of freed

African American slaves speaks to a bleak future marked by still more othering from the national white narrative. In the latter story, nationalistic propaganda evokes a similar sense of belonging as the earlier Molly Pitcher legend. Benedict Anderson speaks to both sides of the conflict in Imagined Communities when he discusses “the attachment that peoples feel for the inventions of their imaginations” (Anderson 141). This adherence to truth relative to the regions of the nations is what in return evokes the sense of narrative perception–multiple narrative histories existing on the same continuum, muddying the water.

CHAPTER 1: A NEW PROMISED LAND

Introduction

American storytelling tradition began long before America as a nation was thought of. Native Americans, living on the continents of North and South America for thousands of years before Europeans first stepped foot on the shores of their "New World," had ample time to develop their mythologies – creation and deities, heroes and monsters – sharing tropes across their own cultures and tribes. Similarly, the Europeans who would come to divide the Americas had their own cultural and narrative traditions. These traditions, carried with them as they began to explore and settle the continent, reflected their cultural values and superstitions. Ideas about the roles of men and women, the necessity of religion, the sovereignty of the Christian God, family dynamics, ideas about ownership and property, freedom and enslavement, systems of government are pervasive within European folklore. This isn't to say these concepts were absent from Native American oral storytelling tradition, only that the conflict that spawned from the differences in narrative and therefore culture would inevitably cause some shift in the American way of life before colonization. A new people had arrived and a new culture was beginning to form – a culture that favored the image of the white, masculine, Christian as the baseline for human existence; this was not only a cultural shift, but also a narrative shift as storytellers rushed to confirm this as fact, or, barring admittance to that demographic, to justify their continued existence within the American national canon.

William M. Clements writes about this shift in relation to Native storytelling in his 1996 essay "This Voluminous Unwritten Book of Ours: Early Native American Writers and the Oral Tradition." Clements discusses the way that Indigenous storytellers "wholeheartedly adopted Euroamerican, Christian values," even as they continued, or at least attempted, to uphold their

narrative traditions (Clements 123). How these Native American storytellers approached this delicate balance varied between tellers and between stories; while they examine shared cultural roots, variations on traditions, and oral histories, these storytellers (particularly the Cherokee in Eastern America) worked towards the creation of written and rewritten histories in the European traditions. This could have only been an attempt at survival. Colonizers – both explorers and settlers – were not hesitant to exploit the people as they exploited the land. Historical narratives portray a long-standing tradition of underhanded dealings, backstabbing, and general two-facedness, the most notable of which are smallpox blankets, various Native American massacres throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and every conflict surrounding the allotment of land to the European settlers marked by the tenuous Proclamation Line of 1763.

This narrative adoption can be attributed to two sources – the forcible adoption of Native Americans into white culture, as with Pocahontas, who was abducted and christened Rebecca by white settlers in Jamestown, or the voluntary adoption of white narratives to appease the colonizers proselytizing to and harassing the Native Americans. As white setters pressed inland, Native Americans continued to struggle with what Clements calls "the task of establishing themselves as members of the human race whose ideas were worth the attention" of Euroamerican settlers (Clements 124). This task could only be accomplished by attempting to level the narrative playing field between the white people and the Native Americans, which in turn was accomplished by shifting narratives to suggest an accommodation and overall acceptance of Christian morals and identifying traits, such as an understanding of creation, the tribes of Israel, and sin and salvation. Though all Indigenous people did not make this social and cultural shift, some tribes chose to work with white colonizers, quasi-assimilating into their traditions through the creation of written language, the adoption of the English language, the

disbanding of Native American religious traditions and ceremonies, and the adoption of race-based slavery. Simultaneously, the so-called "civilizing process" was enabled by white-run boarding schools and forced "adoptions."

On the other hand, while white narrative heavily influenced Indigenous storytelling, the latter possessed necessary traits for the formation of the American narrative. The creation of a newly conceptualized "Promised Land" could not only rely on stories of place. While Jamestown and Plymouth Rock certainly bear some characteristic significance, it was the formula of the Native American hero myths that allowed America to raise a new pantheon of deified figureheads to bear the banner of what it meant to be an American. While these narratives bear multiple similarities to European myths, the geographical distance and the rapidity of dissemination allow for multiple versions of the same narratives to occur near-simultaneously; these stories often (but not always) deal with more naturalistic and humanistic forces, rather than more supernatural ones. Stories of people like John Smith, George Washington (and the other founding fathers), Christopher Columbus establish some sense of American identity, the narrative canon can only be rounded off by composite narratives of notable female figureheads – thereby establishing Eurocentric gender roles for a new nation. These female narratives from early America present an interesting combination of subservience to God and human men and brazenness in the face of an enemy of the American ideal. The narrative of Molly Pitcher who participated counter-gender in the battle of Monmouth during the Revolution illustrates this.

What these narratives of race and gender reveal about the American storytelling canon is a concept which Ta-Nehisi Coates calls the "language of justification" in his foreword to Toni Morrison's *The Origin of Others*. His idea is that a group of people or an individual can somehow be simultaneously more than human, exemplars of "their kind," and less than human,

othered by the differences between them and what is culturally accepted as the baseline. In the establishment of the American canon as separate both from a European body of work and from Indigenous narratives, that standard by which all Americans (those who live in the nation, though not necessarily those who identify themselves as American) must be measured. If that standard is white, European, and Christian, then Native Americans are othered for their race and religions; if that standard is male, then women are othered by virtue of their gender. But ultimately these dynamics create a full understanding of American identity. Both othered groups fulfill that necessary role in the power vacuum left behind as war rapidly shifted society in the eighteenth century, a role of subservience. The common narrative perception of America as a new holy land forced racially and gender-diverse narratives to serve the necessary justification for the presence both of Native Americans and women within that American identity with stories of "look at what I am – I am one of you" through adaptation of traditional story elements and adoption of more Eurocentric storytelling characteristics.

A New [Native] Religious Narrative

As white settlers began to flock towards the pieces of land their governments had allotted them, they brought with them their narratives and traditions. Namely, the Pilgrims and the Puritans, who escaped religious persecution in Europe for this new "Promised Land" brought with them their religious narratives and their sense of Christian identity. The genre of the American Jeremiad stems from this sense of self; settlers, faced with a quality and quantity of suffering they had not previously experienced in Europe related to the struggles of Old Testament figureheads. "Crisis had become their source of strength," according to Scavan Bercovitch in his book, *The American Jeremiad* (Bercovitch 62). The overwriting of contemporary history with biblical allusions and vice versa was key to the commercial success of

these narratives. Simultaneous projection of these familiar historical and religious narratives with current events created another layer to the narrative perception of developing American society.

These settlers, interacting with the Native Americans, were face-to-face with a complex issue invoked by their sense of morality and religious identity. Reassuring them was their own "genetic salvation," which Bercovitch explains as the Puritan concept that the inheritance of God's chosen people had been passed to them, their children, and therefore the community in aeternum (Bercovitch 65). This salvation, though it could not be secured for certain for everyone, could at least be extended towards those who adhered to social customs, particularly baptism. Through the perpetuation of this narrative, settlers were able to maintain their self-image of being like the Israelites of the Old Testament, who had wandered in search of a divinely granted homeland. The Native tribes must in turn be associated with the Canaanites who stood in the way of their claim. These were people who had not been introduced to the religious traditions of the Puritans, or more aptly, refused to accept them; they did not observe the traditions that allowed the Puritans to resolve the anxiety between the promise God gave for a homeland in the Bible and the realization of that promise in the present day. Therefore, the idea that Indigenous peoples were the enemies that must be overcome through conversion or death became a common trope in Euroamerican narratives.

Though there are clear similarities in the myths of Indigenous people and the European settlers, it is difficult to parse out the true division of where one narrative tradition begins and where the other ends. This effect is due to the writing and rewriting of American myth. Narrative tradition moved away from oral storytelling and towards the written word as literacy rates skyrocketed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This favor for written versions of American myths and legends also rose in the years leading up to and directly after the Civil War

in response to the rift growing between the North and South; the recording of narratives that had previously only been spoken and the creation of written American myths separate from oral traditions worked to further establish the foundations of the American identity (which were shallow due to the comparative age of the nation), as a call to action to fight for the defense of the American ideal and to heal that rift through a unified canon of historical events. An example of this can be found in Thrace Talmon's Captain Molly: The Story of a Brave Woman, written and published in 1857. This prolonged version of the relatively straightforward Molly Pitcher myth created a background for the fictional character which recalled the domestic sphere during the American Revolution, over fifty years prior, with a single chapter dedicated to the myth itself. Though this story was told during and immediately after, Talmon recorded the narrative to serve the purpose of propaganda – informing readers of the roles and ideals of the American people, specifically white Americans, thereby reinforcing their ideals.

In turn, the Native American myths are equally difficult to make a distinction with, the myths I use here coming from tribes that had direct contact with European settlers – the Spanish in the west and the British and French in the east. The attempts (both voluntary and forceful) to assimilate Native Americans into white culture and society through language adoption and boarding schools, the cessation of Indigenous ceremonies and traditions (including storytelling), and the eventual resurgence in interest in Native American narratives in the twentieth century contributed to the possible alterations of Native American myths, including those included here, which were published as a part of a general collection of child-friendly narratives in 1984. As Walter C. Fleming claims in his brief article, "Myths and Stereotypes about Native Americans," "what people know is limited by their sources of information – and, unfortunately, much of the information about Indians is derived from popular culture" (Fleming 213). These stories then,

while coming out of Native American storytelling traditions and being adapted from true-to-form oral stories (which were told at the beginning of the twentieth century), still also come out of a place of response and reaction to a well-established white American society with a history of distaste for (at the least) and violence in response to (at the most) Indigenous peoples and their stories, and therefore could have been shaped by European narrative traditions.

Native Americans in turn began to shift – either to accommodate the beliefs and traditions of the white people who would kill or enslave them, or to lash out in violence against these settlers who weren't only beginning to encroach on their land, but also their stories. One Cherokee creation myth, "Earth Making" is notable by the presence of "Someone Powerful" along with references to the destructive nature of the white settlers. This myth mirrors the Christian book of Genesis beyond the shared concept of creation. "Earth is floating on the waters," (Erdoes and Ortiz 105). This opening line depicts a formless Earth floating in space. Darkness, the lack of life, and the presence of water at the beginning of all things reflect the lines from Genesis 1:2 "And the earth was without form and void: and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." While God doesn't make a direct appearance in the Cherokee version of creation, two key aspects suggest the presence of a divine entity higher than the first animals (represented by characters such as Grandfather Buzzard and the Water Beetle) which were often revered amongst Native tribes.

The first, as was previously mentioned is the presence of "Someone Powerful." This entity is responsible for "fastening" land to the ceiling of existence with cords, and though it is not explicitly mentioned, the similar image of the connection between dry land and the "sky ceiling" and the earth as a whole, which in the narrative is hung from the sky by ropes, it is implied that they were also responsible for hanging the earth. Someone Powerful also created

plants, animals, and humans in that order, once again reflecting the Christian version of creation. While not entirely uncommon for Native American myths, this divine presence and accreditation for creation, and the displacement of emphasis away from the Water Beetle and Grandfather Buzzard, who were also responsible for the creation of the earth, suggests a shift in narrative tradition in favor of Christian idealism. The idea that spirits can remain, but ultimately, everything must narratively be subservient to a single deity is typically associated with Euroamerican traditions.

Contributing towards the dual narrative perception of Indigenous peoples, in "Earth Making" the characterized Sun is masculine, as opposed to the typically female Sun (Erdoes and Ortiz 106). While this could also suggest the pervasive nature of more generalized Euroamerican superstition, which associated women with the moon and men with the sun, also suggests a connection between the descended "Sun" and the descended "Son." The association of Jesus Christ with light of all kinds is a key element to New Testament philosophy. The Sun in the myth is brought down in order to warm and bring light to the earth – another element which can be found in Genesis – but must The raising up of the Sun in the Cherokee narrative is comparable to the language used to describe the death of Jesus. In both instances, the Sun is raised for the salvation and preservation of the creation.

This kind of story (which is comparable to white European creation narratives, despite being distinct narratives unto themselves) stand in contrast to the narratives of tribes, such as the Jicarilla Apache tribes of the American Mid-Southwest, who had a different introduction to European culture and a considerably lower rate of interaction with the Anglo-Saxon settlers along the Atlantic coast, by virtue of exposure to Spanish settlers. In "The Jicarilla Genesis," while water remains narratively as the primordial element, all living things already exist and

cohabitate the "underworld" (Erdoes and Ortiz 86). This opposes the Euroamerican traditional model of creation which presents it as a process performed by God. The Jicarilla creation myth presents no higher power as far as the conceptualization of a deity. The focus then shifts away from the creation of humankind, which is often the pinnacle or center of Euroamerican creation myths, in favor of their escape from the underworld and the formation of the geography of their homeland. In this narrative, as opposed to recognizing the power of a sovereign entity, there is a focus on the unity of creation – humans and animals and nature, communicating on the same level, working towards a singular goal, as opposed to Euroamerican narrative, which from God to the least of the humans emphasizes the work of the individual.

Toni Morrison explains a similar racial/cultural delineation in her book *The Origin of Others*. This book, which focuses mainly on the experiences of African Americans can nevertheless be used to analyze the racial divide between white settlers and Native Americans as "our tendency to separate and judge those not in our clan as the enemy, as the vulnerable and the deficient needing control, has a long history not limited to the animal world or prehistoric man" (Morrison 4). And at this point in the development of the American narrative, Indigenous peoples simultaneously represented both dangerous enemies that could not be trusted (and therefore must be killed) and uneducated and spiritually deficit heathens in need of salvation (which could only be conveniently delivered by white people). That salvation offered an escape from both literal and cultural death for many Native Americans but also pushed them ever closer to their outcome as "'vanishing Americans,' doomed at best to assimilation" (Clements 127). The assimilation here, is both narrative and cultural, the narrative assimilation leading ultimately to the cultural one as Indigenous people were forced to give up their traditions and values to be seen as at least partially human by the white settlers. A lack of narrative integration implied a

sense of untrustworthiness for white settlers; if Native Americans could not be trusted with the narrative truth as portrayed by Euroamericans, then as opposed to being innocents needing to be led to understanding, they were insidious enemies biding their time to cause conflict.

Opposing the white narrative of war-like and war-torn tribes, are legends such as that of Godasiyo, the Woman Chief, a narrative passed down through multiple Iroquois groups such as the Seneca and the Tuscarora. One of the variations on this narrative by the same name presents the rule of a female chief as being an era of "peace and harmony" – this echoes some themes that also arise in Christianity, namely the story of Babel – as Godasiyo attempts to maintain this state, even as her tribe grows beyond sociable levels. She is representative of connections between people, as even her first action within the context of the narrative is to "order a bridge to be built to make transport between the north and south easier for everyone" (Oneida). Her character both accepts the integration of strangers into the tribe and acknowledges tribalism amongst socially and geographically distanced groups and works to keep the peace. However, she is portrayed as an effective leader throughout her life and influential even in death, as many versions of her narrative conclude with "drowned in the great river" and "her people's language changed" (Oneida).

What is remarkable (as in, different from Eurocentric tradition) about her ultimate portrayed ineffectiveness is that it is not portrayed as an internal deficiency inherent to her womanhood, but rather the "violent quarrel" of the two men transporting her down the river. Indeed, Native tribes, while impossible to truly combine into a single entity, were unique from the European settlers in a normalized respect for women –respect displayed through narrative (Hollrah 17). In this way, the narrative refrains from falling into a more Eurocentric portrayal of the downfall of woman; beginning with the story of Eve, women are responsible not only for

their downfalls but also for the downfall of those around them. Godasiyo, on the other hand, is killed not by her deficiencies or her inability to lead, a lack of wisdom, or some flaw only understood to narrative insiders – she is killed by the careless and prideful nature of others. Moreover, her death is only inevitable in variations on this version of the myth; in others, her departure is not caused by her death, but by her frustration with the infighting of her people, and she transforms herself into a fish and leaves when she hits the water. In either version, the division of language and peoples into individual tribes represents the infallibility of human nature to categorize oneself as culturally and narratologically separate from others (and Others).

The American Pantheon

On the opposite end of this era of American history, as the nation moved toward Revolution, the Euroamerican narrative found itself changed by the interaction with Indigenous folklore. A key feature of American mythology was the hero narrative and the Revolutionary War made heroes every day; a simple soldier, child, mother, the farmer could be vaulted into the annals of history as easily as if they had been the main characters in European epic narratives. One such woman, Molly Pitcher became one of these great American folk heroes for her role in the Battle of Monmouth. Rising up against the British when her husband, John, William, or occasionally Hollis, was himself away to fight in his battles, Molly finds herself manning the canons in a valiant effort that scatters the British forces, shatters the cannon, and lands her with the rank of Captain in the American Army.

White, Eurocentric female narratives consign women to stereotypically feminine roles – mother, sister, wife or lover, temptress. Female narratives typically end in some form of death (actual death, loss of moral high ground, death of spouses or children, destruction of their way-of-life, or rape) or transformation (marriage, motherhood, or spiritual and sexual awakening) to

restore her to the domestic sphere she "belongs" to or to debase her, thereby cementing the dangers associated with social deviance. Women ultimately are, for all their narratively portrayed courage and tenacity, subject to these rules, and Molly Pitcher is not an exception. However, the introduction of Indigenous female narratives alters the traditional narrative roles of women, even in white storytelling culture; white feminist readings cannot fully comprehend the complexities of the roles women played narratively in Native American storytelling, but these roles certainly influenced white storytelling. The traditional roles of women in various Native societies, as leaders, and also as a mother, sister, daughter, temptress, lover, etc. are not portrayed as socially or narratively weaker; white narratives wrestle with this idea of subversive weakness and strength that oppose traditional European narrative and social structures, causing the rapid fluctuation of Molly Pitcher's role in her own story as it overcompensates for her femininity by thrusting her into battle, then pulling her immediately back home.

However, masculine hero narratives are much less restrained in their portrayal of the prowess and abilities of their protagonists than feminine hero narratives, both in Eurocentric narrative tradition and Indigenous narrative tradition. Indeed, the former begins to take on aspects of the latter as American hero narratives are formed around real people – Christopher Columbus, John Chapman, Davy Crockett – and their exploits in early America. While female narratives tend to remain in a single place, these masculine narratives are specifically roving, and their expeditions are built into their stories as a recognizable key component. As opposed to females represented in hero narratives, who are often portrayed as somehow mortal, and fallible, despite their spirituality or divinity, represented men are often portrayed as infallible, legendary, despite their mortality.

The story of Captain Molly Pitcher varies widely both in its historical contexts and its variations on the same theme, but the earliest recorded version of the narrative comes from Talmon Thrace at the end of the Civil War; this narrative stems out of a need for women to have a determined place in the nation that must simultaneously portray the tenacity necessary to survive the danger and her ultimate subservience to man. Thrace's adaptation of her story gives a sense of this sociocultural position. At the beginning of Molly's war story, she is sad to see her husband leave for war; it is through her eyes that readers "plainly distinguish [the] motions" of the armies in the middle of their conflict (Talmon 291). Molly's observations of the battle as it draws closer to her home evoke a sense of national, masculine duty as she would "give those British tyrants free doses of death," if she were only a man (Talmon 291). Her determination elicits a cultural understanding of both the fact that she cannot or should not fight because she is a woman and the fact that men should fight because they are men.

This dynamic can only continue as long as her husband lives in the context of the narrative, however, as the traditional roles of men and women begin to dissolve in the face of death. At first, Molly Pitcher is determined to only provide water to her husband as he operates the canons on the front lines of battle. "Skipping away to the cold spring, a few yards distant, she filled her pitcher, and remembering Hollis' liking for spearmint, paused a moment to break off a few leaves of the rich bed, fringing the bank at her feet" (Talmon 293). Molly represents in this passage the fulfillment of the female role of the spiritual and emotional provider for her household. She skips, maintaining joy in the face of bullets "whizzing" about her and her husband; she remembers the preferences of her husband, pausing to flavor his water before meeting him amid danger. She is out of place in her "white muslin dress amid the bloody strife,"

her dress representing her purity, her implied delicacy, and the earliest stirrings of the notion of martyrdom, as she appears here as a saint prepared for her death.

On the other hand, when her husband is shot, her "breathless anxiety" shifts into "arousal" mirroring her earlier attraction to her husband in the middle of battle, while also tainting her purity – she is now capable of feelings beyond joy, yearning, and anxiety; to call her aroused as she enters battle suggests her level of desire and the idea of personal passions. So too, the color palette shifts; her husband, in death, taking on her paleness, while the language associated with Molly becomes red with blood and death – "hell," "fire," and the present arousal displace (though they do not remove) her femininity and make her dangerous. She is defiant of General Wayne, who orders the canon to be removed as she slaughters the British enemies before her in revenge both for her widowhood as well as the shift in her womanhood.

It is in the aftermath of the battle that she shifts to a more settled, domestic form of femaleness, and Washington, Wayne, and Lafayette mistakenly imply a connection with the famous martyr, Joan of Arc, who was known for her prowess in battle and her dedication to God. This image no longer aligns with Molly Pitcher who no longer wears a blood-stained white dress. Instead, she is dark and pale – black dress, pale face, dark eyes – sitting in silent darkness. But her home is undefiled by the battle, even as she mourns the loss of her husband, which implies a return to her place as the keeper of the home with the added tragedy of no one being at home for her to keep it for. Thus is American womanhood portrayed as delicate by nature, but dangerous by necessity.

In addition to promoting an idealized domestic and subservient image of American femininity, the Molly Pitcher narratives point toward the interchangeability and namelessness of women. Molly Pitcher is named for her pitcher, which she uses to declare her identity in relation

to her husband – not only in Thrace's late adaptation but in all versions of the story. The irony in this is that her water-bearing is not only associated with providing succor to her husband during battle. History, however, records the presence of women on the front lines doing labor that the men were unable or unwilling to do. Molly Pitcher, as a composite character, represents the women who maintained the responsibility of taking care of the canons, which had to be cleaned between uses, lest the ammunition ignite the remnants of the previous round, destroying the cannon and killing everyone using it. These women plumbed the inside of cannons and washed them out so that the army may continue to use them during battle, often fulfilling the duty of loading the rounds themselves.

Similarly, women on the front lines served as gofers for supplies and ammunition in the heat of battle, field nurses, prostitutes, and manual laborers. But for the most part, these women remain nameless or represented by composites like Molly Pitcher. These narratives about women involved in the war remove their individuality in a way never seen in the narratives of the founding fathers or even male foot soldiers. No reader has found that the narratives of George Washington represent a collection of stories based on the actions of other people. Men are their own, women are faceless, in spite (or because of their bravery). The three women compiled to create Molly Pitcher – Deborah Sampson, Margaret Corbin, and Mary Hays – did, in fact, play significant roles in the victories of their respective battles.

Sampson disguised herself as a man in order to fight in the Revolution, returning to the idea that Thrace introduces in his Molly Pitcher narrative of delivering "free doses of death" to the British as a man; she required no husband-death to inspire her to fight, suggesting that this element is a narrative addition to reinforce the distance between women and anger, violence, and ultimately battle and death (Talmon 292). Corbin and Hays present common narratives that also

see them wearing their uniforms to fight – significant for the declaration that they are not merely following the camp, but true soldiers fighting alongside their husbands. This is also portrayed differently in the original stories – Molly Pitcher is depicted wearing a full late-eighteenth-century dress, even in battle; and is shown in many illustrations to be looking towards the men for direction.

These historical narratives move somewhat counter to the American narrative tradition in their representation of women, while their deaths were not required for the story to be formed, their inevitable marriages cleared the way for the conceptualized transformation through a union with a husband. While none of the real women who inspired the Molly Pitcher narrative were ever relegated back to their domestic lives after the war – going on speaking tours, having stay-at-home husbands, being awarded their military pensions – the Molly Pitcher narrative notably forces their composite back into the home after her role was over, thereby containing the threat that Hayes, Sampson, Corbin, and other women like them posed. The story casts a negative light on these women who could and would not return to domesticity by portraying Pitcher's route of going home and forgetting all about it not only possible for someone who has seen active duty but proper.

Through Talmon's version of the Molly Pitcher story, and the legends that inspired it, readers understand what their roles are in white American society. Men are established as protectors of the nation and the status quo – their absence incites women, counter to social norms, to fill up the ranks of the military and alienate themselves from their proper roles as guardians of the domestic sphere and home. Women, while defenders in their own right, were not typically depicted on the front lines of an actual battle, being the more abstract, spiritual protectors for their families. The Molly Pitcher narrative comes out of circumstances

surrounding women in early America – the necessity of women doing more than care for the home, or rather do more to care for their home, in the face of the dangers of an undeveloped (in the European sense) new world. The hostile environment demanded women take action beside their husbands and in place of them, even as the status quo demanded that they be more closely aligned with traditionally feminine roles and traits. Molly Pitcher is the balance between the two – a woman who can fight to defend her home and nation when it is demanded of her, yet return to that home and her "place" as mother and wife after the fighting is over.

Conclusion

In the American narratives that portray them, white women have a different othering dynamic than Native Americans had. While the latter was notably both enemy and subservient, women were enemies to enemies of the state (thusly mirroring the positions of their husbands), and subservient to those men in power. Neither group, according to the standard – that while masculine, Christian American – could be entrusted with their identification. Both groups worked towards their justification within the American canon and a romanticized notion of the past through narrative – a process William Clements refers to as "reactualization" (Clements 127). This allowed narrators (the actual tellers of a narrative, as opposed to their characterized counterparts) the opportunity to reclaim their traditions and history, even as it seemed that assimilation into the white American national narrative was inevitable.

Clements, of course, describes this process in relation to Native Americans who faced destruction and assimilation through sheer lack of numbers, but the same concept can be used to frame a discussion of female narratives. White women were not entirely voiceless in early American storytelling, and indeed they are responsible in part for its evolution (as women wrote in forms other than religious sermons and politically geared pamphlets even as the writings of

men flooded the market). However, the narrative tradition of apologizing for one's voice can be seen throughout the stories of the American Others.

A sense of having to apologize for representing one's own experiences, while not explicit in the language of the oral stories discussed in this chapter is much more so in narratives that are purely written. In these narratives the apology is implicit. It is present in the acclimation of Indigenous narratives to Christian moralism and Euroamerican narrative cues – eventually culminating in the pseudoscientific debate on the relation between Natives and the alleged "Lost Tribes of Israel," justifying their presence in America with those people who believe they had been divinely granted the land they colonized. The narratives were altered in both character representation and in their suggestion of civilization as it was understood by European standards (cities, commerce, monotheism, rituals, and traditions, etc.).

In narratives of women at war, the apology can be found in the return to a previous way of life if somewhat reduced by their experiences. Molly Pitcher rejected the notion of her promotion to the rank of captain, desiring the return of her husband, and sitting later, amongst their nice things, like another object herself. In the narratives of American women, the development happens within the domestic sphere, or when that is removed, outside that sphere for the sake of returning when an adventure is over. For the women who inspired the narrative of Molly Pitcher, marriage was that return to the domestic. As each of them was discovered in their femininity and discharged, Sampson, Hayes, and Corbin struggled both with reduced physical ability due to wounds sustained during the war and lack of financial stability as they struggled to reintegrate into a society they hadn't truly been party to since before their military engagement. Military engagement was then given over into marital engagement and, at least for Hays and Sampson, the conception of a family unit.

Ultimately, for all their apologies, textually explicit and narratively implicit, the Otherness of women and Indigenous people, regardless of gender could not be cured. The American narrative demanded both an enemy to rage against and a deficient (morally, spiritually, mentally, socially) group to defend. With the ousting of European forces just around the corner of a new era, these groups were slotted into the category of the Other by virtue of their noticeable deviation from the norm – which can be said because light-skinned people of color and cross-dressing women have often, notably in the historical context surrounding these narratives, been able to pass for the baseline white male. As Coates says,

> To be an Other in this country matters – and the disheartening truth is that it will likely continue to matter. Human communities rarely cede privileges out of altruism, and thus the only world in which one can imagine subscribers of whiteness renouncing their religion is a world in which its privileges become a luxury they can ill afford.
>
> (Coates xvi)

This dynamic of privilege and othering is pervasive within the context of the American narrative as well, not only on the part of the white, masculine narrative but also on the part of Indigenous narratives and white women's narratives. Clements discusses this ceding of privilege in relation to the Native American understanding that assimilation into white culture is inescapable, but it can be seen historically in the exploitation of Natives by white colonizers and by each other in a bid to be on the winning side, so to speak. Colonization had socially, economically, geographically, and generationally devastated the Natives, heightening their reluctance to cede anything more, as well as that concept of inevitability.

For the narratives of white women, it is less than they have unwillingly or begrudgingly ceded privilege, so much as they were never granted it in the first place. The luxury of secure

identity within the realm of the American narrative canon will never be a privilege that white people feel they cannot afford, particularly white men. For them, America was exactly as they had been assured – a New Promised Land in which even the poorest man could formulate his own narrative identity; and the narratives, even as they shift to display cultural values as they form (a sense of duty, of nationalism, of the American Dream, of Manifest Destiny), much of those narratives is retained, pressed deeply into the foundations of the American identity.

Now, in the modern era, the discussion of othering – who is the Other, how are they othered – centers around privilege. And while we as a society have come to a significant distance from where we were at the birth of the nation, the recent pandemic has revealed long-term and institutionalize flaws in the structure of our society directly linked to the disavowal and othering of Indigenous people and Black people. At the same time, more recent advancements in technology have allowed and enabled a new generation of storytellers and a new form of oral storytelling – social media platforms, such as TikTok – that reveals these systematic injustices that have persisted throughout and despite multiple social justice movements. Current events paired with this enabling of stories that were, until recently, by virtue of their "otherness" silenced, have created a new emphasis on multiculturalism and intersectionality. In light of these new discussions, it becomes further necessary to examine the foundations of the national identity to its origins – its stories – to reevaluate and reformulate a more accurate modern understanding of what it means to be American.

CHAPTER 2: DEEPER SHADOWS TO COME

Introduction

The turn of the nineteenth century saw literacy rates across the nation increase along with the popularity of what June Howard refers to as "local color fiction" (Howard 121). These stories, circulated in newspapers and magazines made written narratives even more accessible than they already were in the United States in book-form. However, with increased exposure to sensationalized fiction, came a growing awareness of conflict from within the nation. Political rivalries between Federalists and Anti-Federalists, and between North and South, served as a backdrop to growing tensions between social groups. After the Revolutionary Era determined what America was, it was up to the people to determine what Americans could be in a new age. Free and enslaved Black people, women, and Native Americans were all taking a revived stance on their rights as American citizens in an attempt to shift the narrative which had been established as the standard – white, masculine, Protestant. The dissemination of stories, then, should have helped to spread those ideologies. To an extent, they did, however, the narrative power remained mostly in the hands of those "standard" Americans.

Through this narrative dynamic, yet another dichotomy is revealed within the era – that of order versus chaos. Thomas Peyser portrays this dynamic in an uncommon way in his essay "Planning Utopia" in which he discusses the threat that a "lack of rationality" plays when it comes to establishing a utopian society (Peyser 416). This lack is not, as might be expected, a true absence or rejection of rational thought, but rather a tolerance for thought and preferences that fall outside the immediate confines of the society at large. That is to say, not confined to the boundaries of the ideology of the society; this is separate from the concept of "mainstream"

cultural characteristics, as something can be mainstream, yet work against Peyser's presented idea of utopia; the narrative is often mainstream while it simultaneously works against the utopic ideal of a nation. In the context of the growing idea of America (and therefore its national narrative traditions) the stories being established by Indigenous activists, the earliest Women's movements, abolitionists, and current and former slaves often broke down the boundaries that had been established by earlier narratives. The idea of heathen Native Americans, women as lesser, and mentally deficient slaves could not withstand the "chaotic" (that is the more complex) identities of these demographics that existed in reality outside of narrative tradition.

With these collective burgeoning threats to the acceptable American identity, the national fascination with the now-aging founding fathers introduced the idea of a new narrative premise: the true histories. These sensationalized biographies and apocrypha featured the founding fathers – namely people like Jefferson, Franklin, and George Washington – were released throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and depicted scenes from childhood, young adulthood, and from their time at war in which they exhibited unique levels of mental acuity, moral fiber, religious devotion, and most of all, patriotism. These ideas further established the concept of what it meant to be an American and were built on the idea of divine placement in one's social standing and adherence to social norms and values. No Revolutionary figure was more popular than George Washington himself, following his death at the end of 1799, reached a level of deity in the American historical narrative. These narratives recemented these figures as representative of "true" American history and culture, thereby leaving all other narratives on the outside of canon as othered texts with no true way of breaking into the mainstream consciousness as commonplace. I argue that this form of American mythmaking is a reactionary response to those chaotic elements threatening the American utopia; that the establishment of Washington,

particularly, as a divine entity within the American canon was meant to combat the gender and racially diverse narratives that were beginning to take hold in this era.

Discussing the idolization of George Washington, in turn, evokes a modern reaction to his lesser-known imperfections, namely, Washington as a slave owner. While the idea of "treating slaves well" most likely comes out of the Lost Cause narrative that came out of the Civil War, it is still a modern justification for the injustices committed by the founding fathers, most of which, even if they didn't own or sell slaves themselves, participated in the oppression of people of color that we feel the repercussions of today. America's relationship with its founding fathers is complicated by the juxtaposition of their support or apathy towards racial and social injustices with the nostalgic narratives we have learned as and taught to our children for centuries; how can someone we tell our children to be like be so evil? How could we tell our children to be like someone who has participated in slavery? How could we continue to associate our national identity with men who no longer represent the interests of our nation in its entirety?

Man, Myth, Legend

No biographer was (or has been) more well-known than Parson Mason Locke Weems, who released *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits of General George Washington* in 1800, just a year after Washington's death. Weems invented these myths he wrote about George Washington as a form of propaganda in the year after George Washington died. These narratives stem out of existing stories about real people and events, but chronological distance and socio-political purpose allowed the narratives to be formed in this way. These stories cover Washington's childhood, his father's death, his tenure as a surveyor and an officer in the British Army under General Braddock, and ultimately moments from his life leading up to,

happening during, and in the days and years after the Revolutionary War. This collection of vignettes is introduced in the front matter with this brief poem:

A life how useful to his country led!

How loved while living! How revered now dead!

Lisp! Lisp his name, ye children yet unborn!

And with like deeds your great names adorn.

(Weems viii).

Here, the unnamed "his" is George Washington himself – "useful" to the very end to his country, and indeed beyond even that. If the first line introduces Washington's value to the idea of America, then the last three lines expound on the impact of this implicit value on society. Namely, Washington as a person is revered after death, children "yet unborn" should be aware of who he is and what role he played, and in a combination of due reverence and childhood instruction, children should, in turn, imitate him in their deeds. For a narrative like the one Weems weaves in his book, this last point is key. His stories capitalized on the didactic forms and themes found in the genre of American myths and legends to appeal to a younger set of readers (and to parents and instructors of younger readers).

Throughout the narratives, there are moments that speak directly to the audience, specifically children. These moments are rallying cries that resound with tenets implicitly expressed through the characterized and idealized version of Washington but which become explicit by their upholding certain aspects of American ideology. A passage out of Chapter 10 dealing with the closing of the American Revolution contains one such passage. "Happy farmers," "Happy children," "Happy citizens" are given their great commissions to restore the land, to "make yourselves the future glory and guardians" of the nation, and to rebuild the

Church (Weems 162). These three things (claiming the land, protecting the nation, and establishing the church resound not only with earlier scenes from this biography) moments when Augustine Washington discusses the orchard and its growth when Weems lauds George for pursuing an education, and when characters break out into sermons about the sovereignty of God – but also with the concept of the American identity as it was established in the previous chapter. Due to the exploitation inherent in society, narrators (those who tell stories) who did not align with the white, male, Christian American idea of self-hood could not, therefore, experience this call in this way.

That these vignettes are presented as easily accessible and highly pandering children's tales heightens the impact of this calling and lack of response; there is a call for all Americans to answer, but only if they align themselves totally with the identity being expressed in the narrative (an impossibility for women or people of color, despite any other sense of national identity). In her essay "American Children's Narrative as Social Criticism, 1865-1914," Gwen Athene Tarbox discusses what she calls "imperatives for nation-building" which are affirmed through narrative when "youthful protagonists were shown to prosper, both financially and spiritually, in direct proportion to their willingness to espouse societally sanctioned ideas" (Tarbox 428). As Weems leads readers through the stages of a younger George Washington's life, those societally sanctioned ideas are confirmed as beneficial in the minds of impressionable children, making it difficult in the future to break free of this cultural understanding of appropriateness to see the possibility for separate versions of narrative perspective. In this narrative, there can be no higher power or authority than Washington. Though folkloric figureheads from earlier American history may have born passing resemblance to certain saints or biblical figures, Washington is confirmed as Christ when the introduction presents him "bright as his own Potomac, reflect[ing] the

morning sun, and flames like a sea of liquid gold," transfigured like Christ was on the Mount of Transfiguration or as he is depicted in Revelation (Weems 10). Here is a deified George Washington after his death being prepared to reveal to a loving audience what their duties are as Americans.

While this portrayal is in line with the Second Great Awakening, Washington is portrayed as more than merely Christ-like, but as a kind of perfected Messiah himself. The comparison does not end with Washington transfigured. As with early narratives of the life of Jesus, Washington's siblings are, for the most part, absent. For all that Weems suggests that he intends to portray him as "the affectionate brother" there is no mention of this familial relationship beyond the acknowledgment that it existed. Augustine, the oldest of his brothers, is most often portrayed, but only as a vehicle to transport a young George from one point in the narrative to another. In their absence, they only serve as a foil for Washington's apparent greatness, even in his childhood. George, as the hero and demigod he is portrayed as, "carried with him his virtues, his zeal for unblemished character, his love of truth, and detestation for whatever was false and base" (Weems 31). Never mind his age at the time this passage is narrating (11 years old), he is depicted as literally flawless and despising the sin of others yet loving them in his magnanimous 11-year-old heart – overtaking even Christ, who only began his ministry when he was 12 (Luke 2:41-52).

George Washington's narrative deity is also reinforced through the narrative representation of his parents. Augustine and Mary Washington, representing Joseph and Mary are depicted throughout their roles in Weems' biography to having some greater sense of their son's spiritual duty to the nation and being in possession of a higher standard of Christian morality, they are the ones who give George his call (just as the narrator eventually echoes that

call to us). The connections between the Marys are clear and culminates with her dream in Chapter 8. “When a man begins to make a noise in the world, his relatives (the Father, sometimes, but always that tenderer parent, the Mother) are certain to recollect mighty odd dreams” and narratively, it makes sense for the Mother, both as a representative of Mary, Mother of Christ, and as the “tenderer” figure of the family to have such a dream. Mary, Mother of Washington, is suggested to have a deeper connection of prophecy by her relation to her son and by virtue of the mother as the spiritual locus of the home, which when under threat necessitates a savior. The home under threat being America, though this scene predates the narrative of the Revolution itself, and the savior being the unwitting mother’s son, George. Similarly, as the tender woman, Mary Washington is responsible, not for the fighting herself, but for the witnessing of the fighting – she is the character in need of protection or else wise the tragic backstory. Washington is represented through this anecdote as a charismatic leader to whom all hardworking people rally; such is the manner in which Washington’s role in the Revolution is presented. He is the dedicated and diligent leader who continues on even after he has been left by most of his people.

However, one of the most well-known American fables – that of Washington cutting down his father’s cherry tree – is portrayed in the first chapter as Augustine Washington speaks to the benefits and blessings associated with honesty. Through this scene readers are introduced to the idea of the planting and growth of a legacy (both Washington’s legacy and the legacy of the nation); sacrifice and suffering are depicted as steppingstones for prosperity – like the family who had struggled with only one apple between their children the year before has now been blessed with a bountiful orchard. The famous scene, “I can’t tell a lie, Pa” comes at the end of this thematic episode and sets George on his path to greatness as “such an act of heroism in

[Augustine's] son is more worth than a thousand trees" (Weems 23). The introduction of and the connotations with his heroism as a child and his patriotism and heroism as an adult provides a narrative gateway for children – presenting the cultural standards as worth upholding, even as national identity was beginning to skew away from the traditions of its representation.

A New Narrative Front[ier]

While the people east of the Mississippi River faced burgeoning conflict in the face of their differences based on narrative delineations between the people who belong to the nation and the people who do not, as well as how people west of the Mississippi, belong in the nation, America was rapidly expanding, and the American narrative was being transformed to suit the new landscape. Henry Howe's 1852 *Historical Collections of the Great West: Containing Narratives of the Most Important and Interesting Events in Western History* displays these narrative shifts, even as the title touts otherwise. Namely, the understanding of narrative time as it exists for most people (though in different forms, extents, and striations) as the depiction of time progressing through the telling and retelling of events and the circumstances surrounding them shifts into a more individualized narrative. A step away from the telling of history through those mainstream episodes considered great by the masses, Howe and other narrators of pioneer and frontier stories give brief glimpses into moments in time less commonly romanticized – scenic views of hunting and trapping, of native flora and fauna, and of community in westward-expanding America intersperse narratives about traversing dangerous terrain, war, heroism, and tragedy. These narratives serve the function of broadening the narrow understanding of the American identity in which the masculine role of orator/soldier began to include familiarity with the land and its dangers, and women, who could return "safely" to their domestic sphere, should they be forced into fighting, no longer had that retreat as "their nerves became strengthened by

the trials which they were obliged to undergo, and their minds inured to danger by their constant peril from a savage enemy" (Howe 150). The complexities in the American narrative raised by Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny opened the path for all manner of Peyser's "chaos" to take hold, the narrative portrayal of women being only one.

The family dynamic which was presented so thoroughly in Weems' biography of George Washington as having clear roles for each member (Father, Mother, Child) becomes disjointed in Howe's narrative "Heroism of the Pioneer Woman" which illustrates a much less hypothetical role for both Mothers and Children in the defense of the home. However, this is in exchange for character development; women and children become folk heroes, but their narratives lose a sense of individuality when told in this way. This narrative is a combination of many brief unconnected episodes from the settlement of Kentucky, that of Mrs. Davies, Mrs. Merrill, and Henry Johnson. Both Davies and Merrill were, responsible for the distraction and death of the Native Americans invading their homes in individual occurrences. Howe notes of Davies that she was "accustomed to handle the gun so that she could shoot well" and Merrill, that she "seized an ax and gave the savage a fatal blow" (Howe 154). Henry and his brother (12 and 9 at the time of their abduction by Native Americans) killed their captors and escaped under cover of night. These violent scenes from the American frontier are less romanticized retellings and more of a narrative account of individual events that marked the life of a pioneer. When examined in relation to the scene from Weems' book in which Mary Washington dreamt of her son putting out a fire that was burning their home, there is a clear absence of reliance on the Father/Son figure, or in the case of Henry Johnson, on the Father figure, to save the day. These women and others like them were, by necessity placed in roles in which they were equally necessary to survival as their male counterparts.

Howe's "Character of the Western People" portrays a much more pleasant image of society at large in the West, which reinforces a social understanding of an existing utopia, unaffected by chaotic narratives. The people, which "are as thorough a combination and mixture of all nations, characters, languages, conditions, and opinions as can well be imagined" (Howe 301). In this narrative, the idea of the American Promise Land is still alive and well – portrayed through a harmonious image of affectionate brotherhood between people capable of "meeting halfway" between prejudices in order to become an unprejudiced utopia (Howe 302). This sense of utopia has very little to do with an order or the lack thereof within society and more to do with this being a fantastical advertisement for the settlement of the Western territories. This does explain why the identity of a Western, white, male pioneer can be assimilated into the collective narrative, without risk of being othered as Native American and female narratives are; the concept of "cleaving to" one's kind suggests the establishment of the same societal and narrative traditions that existed in the eastern region of the nation. The "rough and sturdy backwoodsman" who depends only on "God and Nature" is merely a new iteration of the war-weary soldier/farmer/orator who returns to worshiping God and tilling the earth after the war is over – the only difference is that for the former, the struggle to survive never ends (Howe 302). The American man is a fiercely independent, lover of God, protective over their land, loyal to their community; this does not introduce the possibility for the acceptance of apparent aberrations into the collective narrative, rather it only reestablishes what already exists.

At the same time that these gory stories of the experiences of real women and children and the idyllic examinations of society in the west were being published more fantastical stories were also appearing, such as "Wild Bill, or the Mississippi Orson," which was a short story about a child (Bill) who was found feral, living on his own in a swamp. The story reports on

attempts to reintroduce him to society upon his capture by townsfolk. The feral child narrative is not uncommon or unfamiliar to Western narratives as a whole (stories of changelings permeated European folk tradition), and this narrative broaches in an interesting way the topic of savagery. In my previous chapter, I discussed the othering of Indigenous tribes, despite their efforts to display varying levels of assimilation with white narrative culture. In "Wild Bill," readers are presented with a child who is "slender, well-proportioned, […] hair sandy, complexion florid [flushed]" who "swim[s] with the eased of an amphibious animal," and "doubling like a fox" fled from the people in pursuit of him (Howe 289). Similarly, it was "difficult to overcome his appetite for raw flesh" (Howe 292). While Bill may have the appearance of a white child and is lauded throughout his story for his good mental development and his ability to learn how to speak English, he is predominately a wild animal, literally. For example, he displays an active threat when he is backed into a corner, even as he is reintegrated into society (he physically attacks small children when he gets too excited). But never once throughout his story is he referred to as a savage, even as he ages and maintains his dangerous habits.

Bill's social acceptance despite his behavior stands as a foil for Indigenous people who are still referred to as savages throughout these frontier narratives, even as they had been assimilating into the developing white culture for over a century. While even Bill is capable of humanity, in Howe's collection of short stories, very few Native Americans are portrayed as capable of the same and are referred to as "savages" throughout the majority of these stories. While calling all Indigenous people completely innocent is to oversimplify a complex issue, to suggest the further removal of autonomy from a historical demographic that had already experienced a removal of autonomy would be another narrative injustice. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, several massacres, removal of rights, forceful assimilation, and abduction marred

the already tenuous relationship between the white pioneers and the Indigenous tribes they faced at various stages of Westward Expansion. Howe calls this tension "symptoms of hostility among the Indians" in "Incidents of the War of 1812, in the West" (Howe 259). He then goes on to describe these hostilities in terms of heart removal/consumption, scalping, and guerilla tactics as white soldiers and Indigenous people clashed again and again on and off the battlefield. While notably gruesome in the narrative approach to the telling of these stories, they are no more so than scenes from "Heroism of the Pioneer Women" which has the violence turned around on invading Native Americans.

So even the narratives exist in a grey area in their portrayal of the complexities of the broken relationship between settlers and Indigenous people, yet one thing still tips them over in favor of the power remaining in the hands of white storytellers. Aside from Howe being a white storyteller himself, his repeated use of the word "savage" is used 170 times in some way throughout his collection. Most often associated with negative language and tone – "cupidity," "gory," "hostile," "superstitious," "cunning, but lacking a civilized mind" "subtile." If George Washington was so obviously compared to Jesus Christ in his narrative, then Native Americans were portrayed as entirely deviant, savage even in their acknowledged positive characteristics such as bravery and strategy, and much like Satan, a creeping snake in the grass, lying in wait for the unsuspecting white settler.

Conclusion

This disparity in equality, while obvious, speaks of a certain level of forgetfulness in the American narrative as a whole. Weems and Howe, and others like them, suggest the possibility of an open acceptance into the collective narrative. In reply to the narrative featured in the first chapter they seem to say if you make the right appeals to divine authority if you display the

appropriate love of family and community if you love the land if you acknowledge the greatness of these people – then will you be established as insiders within the cultural standards. J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, an early American philosopher, once said concerning this that "who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds" (Crevecoeur). But this is fundamentally a continuation of the same forms of bigotry that were present in the Old World, now permeating new stories for a new country, a new "people," a new generation, rebranded as new – because of "equality." And as the government becomes again more insulated from the people it represents, the former representatives of the people become closer to divinely appointed demigods, the people become more anxious about changes to the way of life which had been just recently established, and the pressure to expand beyond the scope of true national control causes tensions to racket up both internally and externally, the nation sets itself on a track towards a somewhat predictable outcome. As several, older sovereign nations had experienced, tensions from within often lead to civil unrest and eventually revolution or general war.

If the Revolutionary Era was one of brotherhood, equality, and development, then the liminal chimera that was post-Revolution America was an era of mutation, division, and uncontrollable nationalism fed by the tall tales and legends of the likes of George Washington, who was perfect in every way, or the narratives from the Western frontier that depicted an unpredictable pendulum of an idyllic life with danger at every turn. While each growing faction believed in America as a concept, it was the application of that concept that left room open for dispute. Abolitionists, slaves, and people who had been slaves, white women, Native Americans, white traditionalists, and supremacists scrambled to establish some measure of authority over

both the management of the nation (representation) and the management of the national narrative (acknowledging variations on narrative perceptions). Working against othered groups seeking acknowledgment were the pre-existing national narratives that were often tailored not just for adults, but also for children, thereby establishing interest in the upholding of the status quo at a younger age. Similarly, sensationalized narratives circulated in newspapers, magazines, and short volumes made adults more receptive to the propagandizing necessary to hold their attention on certain ideas and ideals – the place of women in the household, the rights (or lack thereof) of Native Americans, and Black people, the function and purpose of the government.

The dichotomies that split the nation's attention and heart are what Llyod Kramer refers to as the foundation for the "meanings of nationalism and national identity […] that define the nation in terms of its differences from other places and people" (Kramer 526). That is to say, a national identity (and therefore the national narrative) can often only be determined by what it is not – not female, not Native American, not Black – so these apparent aberrations that appear within the narrative order must be presented as less valuable and worthwhile in some way to maintain the existing idea of the utopic nation. In this way, stories must be forgetful (forgetting the past to preserve the present and promote a utopic future), at least to a certain extent, as the narratives dealing with self-representation of marginalized groups, or at least a more sympathetic representation of those groups cannot be accepted into the fold without decentralizing the pre-existing hold on the power of and within the national narrative. In response to this perceived threat, these narratives are pushed to the margins, taken in as exceptions to an "obvious" cultural rule, if not outright suppressed and forgotten as part of the narrative time (allowing white men to still portray their version of the history of great men under the guise of individualized histories).

Therefore, storytelling exists in this era of American history as both a tool for the oppression and erasure of those episodes in history in which a national sense of shame or fear is deeply rooted – such as the hostile takeover of the American Southwest being reduced to "Remember the Alamo" and a few stories of Texas Rangers and cowboys versus Indians or Westward expansion being reduced to a few scant scenes – as well as a tool for the perpetuation of those literary identities that add depth of identity to the American narrative based on regionality. "Sharing experiences with others through storytelling is a necessary condition for cultivating a narrative sense of self" which means that our identities are completely subsumed by our ability to communicate in our voice and that we are affected as individuals, but also as members of a community when our identities are shaped by the way we interact with the social world to which we belong (Kramer 536). In a nationalistic society, membership and participation in the society involve a good deal of communication beyond the oral traditions of storytelling. National identity is formed through the creation and dissemination of the narrative of national authors, stories in national newspapers, and school materials, such as maps and textbooks.

But national identity isn't just in narratives of unity, and indeed for a nation like America, which is torn by various regional and cultural struggles, it cannot be found only in unity. The linguistics of difference creates pockets of identity which people "decide to belong to their nations as they decide to live by or affirm their deepest beliefs" and through that belongs profess their own beliefs and reaffirm their adherence to the beliefs of the nation to which they belong. But the issue is that division of narrative cannot last forever without also causing the division of peoples – regionalism and nationalism do not allow for the existence of narratives that don't work to affirm the cultural values and mores they attempt to uphold. As Lincoln would later say, "a house divided against itself cannot stand" (Lincoln 1858). When the narrative is divided in

purpose and not only representation, though one could argue that overall purpose and representation within narratives cannot be divorced from each other, the nation is at risk for conflict, not only from outside the territory, but from within, and not only true, real, or actualized conflict, but also the fear of conflict. “Interpretations have to work for the whole of the text” (Abbott 100). This means that as people “join” the nation, so to speak, their narrative cultures must become either fully assimilated into or forgotten by the collective narrative in an establishment of the cultural norm, which flies in the face of the possibility of multicultural narratives and narrative approaches.

Once again, in light of modern technology, it is difficult to understand how these stories could have been kept so separate, even as the traditions began to bleed over. More difficult to understand is the division of strength and weakness, civility and savagery, which are associated with American demographics in a variety of ways – with white men always being held as the epitome of strength and civility. The concept of the soldier-orator may not look the same as it did when Americans were moving westward and looking directly (only one generation removed) to the founding fathers for something like spiritual guidance, but the patriarchal binary persists, nevertheless. Most confusing is how, when even narratives coming out of the antiquated American West portray women as strong and independent, and people of color as civil and intelligent, stories of “women in the kitchen” and violent/ignorant people of color exist and continue to be retold and rewritten, continuing to other and silence these groups. Thankfully, we live in a time in which no story can truly be silenced; the truth will out, even if it happens decades after the fact.

CHAPTER 3: THE NATION OF MAGNIFICENT DISTANCES

Introduction

The Civil War was not a sudden rupture in the tenuous regional relations between North and South. For decades prior to the war, divisions persisted throughout American culture, in politics, in the developing economy, and the stories being disseminated to individuals and groups throughout the nation. In April 1861, *Harper's Weekly*, based out of New York City ran a "Humors of the Day" column that would cease to be humorous only a week later as Confederate forces captured the Union base Fort Sumter off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina. "For if these secessions and ruptures continue much longer, it will be America itself that will soon be known as 'The Nation of Magnificent Distances'" (*HW* 227). The information exchange rate had already prevented the stirrings of that last great rupture from reaching the public outside the American South; New York wouldn't officially hear of the rebellion that would spark the Civil War until nearly two weeks after that column first ran. But that doesn't prevent the narrative waters from being muddled – the murmurs of war had been in everyone's ear for over a decade by the time the first shot was fired. Speaking directly to the conflict inherent in the increasingly complex multi-party system that attempted to represent the interests of all people within the federal Colosseum that was Washington at the time and also to the literal erosion that certain areas along the Potomac and James Rivers are especially prone to, the pun made in this brief clipping is meant to suggest that the conflict had spilled out beyond what could be contained by Washington alone. The image of an "ever-widening gulf" not only eroding the physical representation of the nation's seat of power, but also posing a threat to that cultural power seems simultaneously humorous, as intended, and terrifying from the perspective of hindsight.

The rising Abolitionist movement had caused socio-economic and political waves throughout the growing nation. New territories were being settled and the battle for those territories between proponents of slavery and its opponents sought more room to lay claim to more political representation. While the Missouri Compromise may have attempted to address the rising tensions through the reinforcement of regionality – slavery was meant to be a strictly "southern" institution – the Kansas-Nebraska Act destroyed any possibility of that. The legality of owning other people would be determined only by a state's popular vote – causing a flood of settlers from both the North and South to rush towards both burgeoning states in a prolonged conflict so violent, the stories of Bleeding Kansas can be found not only as a part of the state's history but in other state histories as well. That Harper's Weekly can only call them "ruptures" seems somewhat understated for a nation that was quickly barreling towards war.

Tensions were not improved by the rapidly approaching Industrial Revolution and the nation was further divided as most of the economic capital settled in the North – in factories and railroads, rather than in the South's agrarian society. There was some reasonable hurt in that; the South, for all their failed attempts at improving their economy by owning people, was beginning to see the long-term impact of the fiscal slump brought by the distaste for institutionalized slavery and a lack of supply chain, as the states seceding had few factories to process the raw materials they did produce. In addition to this, civil rights movements – centered around the rights of women, Native tribes, African American slaves, factory workers, manual laborers, and other "minority" groups – made choosing sides the question of the day. What happens as the nation builds to and erupts into Civil War is this: each faction, in this case, the North and South, had a certain narrative perception of events shaping the course of the conflict – multiple "truths" existing simultaneously – and their adherence to those narrative perceptions affects, in turn,

Benedict Anderson's idea of the "experience of simultaneity" (Anderson 145). That is to say, rather than the nation as a whole experiencing the same narrative at the same time, the Civil War and the circumstances leading up to it had engendered enough narrative conflict that there were two separate narratives representing the national identity, battling for dominance. For the South, their localized simultaneity benefitted them in the creation and perpetuation of romanticized histories even after they suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the North. The North lacked that strength and made up for it in numbers. All other conflict was sidelined in the face of a new Other, which looked the same but stood for something different (regardless of the region).

Interestingly, the experience of simultaneity associated with the Civil War seems to be vanishing. While the narrative themes of "state's rights" and "no slavery" were very clearly in opposition before, during, and after the Civil War, modern discourse, that is modern tolerance for intolerance, is closing that gap. The narrative is being whitewashed (if it hasn't already happened), which is not to say that central Black historical figures are being replaced by white people (though stories of the Underground Railroad being run by white people and the Harriet Tubman biopic that almost had Julia Roberts cast as the leading lady indicate this as well). The history surrounding the Civil War, the complex relations between races, the reality of the institution of slavery, and the way American heroes participated in it are being overwritten in favor of a version that minimizes the white guilt associated with those things. Controversy surrounding monuments, statues erected in cemeteries and on battlefields around the country, and public buildings and entire towns being named for people who were blatantly racist is seen as a point of debate – debate as in there is more than one apparent side to the issue. This means that even though the Union technically won the war, the conflict surrounding the rights of Black people in this country are still at risk, even today.

But the conflict then was not only found between the warring factions and the people belonging to each of them; the government's insistence on attempting to find a compromise which everyone could agree to lasted up to the moment the Confederate Army fired on Fort Sumter. But realistically, peace cannot be established through the tolerance of intolerance. Lincoln, faced with the dissolution of the nation the founding fathers had worked to build less than a century before, and therefore the spectral disappointment of the titans of American democracy, was determined to see the nation remain whole. In his first inaugural address in 1861, he claimed

> I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.
>
> (Lincoln 1861)

The Southern states, having determined that Lincoln would not defend their interests on a national level, began to secede immediately after his election, throwing their support behind the idea of the Confederate States of America and its president, Jefferson Davis, scrambling alongside the Union to sway supporters, through propaganda or violence, to their side. Lincoln, when his attempts to placate the Southern representatives and their constituents proved futile, he turned to sabotage. The South, with an economy heavily reliant on free labor slavery provided, minimal access to railroad supply chains for food and ammunition, few resources to process and market the raw materials they did produce, such as cotton and sugar, their wool uniforms, was running on borrowed time when they instigated the war. When the Emancipation Proclamation promised freedom for slaves in 1862, as long as they could escape, and the inclusion of Black

soldiers in the Union Army hinted at the chance to fight for freedom, the South was further wrecked as their economy loss what little stability it had.

Why would a failed nation, the South, need to be vindicated, or rather, why does the South succeed in being vindicated over and over again on a national level? While to South may have surrendered at Appomattox, the narrative success of their propaganda began to sway people to their side once more after the death of Jefferson Davis. Here was a group of downtrodden people who had allegedly been wronged by the American government and the North. Southerners wealthy enough to move after the war traveled North and West, planting seeds of their ideologies where they went. Their story remains part of that national narrative of Truth and the romanticized "rebel South" remains an ideal of what it means to be an American. State's rights – to rule themselves, to be equally represented, for their people to vote and those votes to matter – conceals a darker underbelly of slavery and racism, nationalism, and a disdain for the actual truth, regardless of narrative value. In the wake of the Civil War, the national identity and confidence in the foundations of the American ideal as a whole were tenuous – it was easy for a nation that wanted to ignore the devastation of the war and return to the status quo to elevate Confederate soldiers in the same way it did Union soldiers.

A week after the Battle at Fort Sumter, *Harper's Weekly* ran another column as their headliner. Their oath to maintain the truth of the war, from both sides, would go for the most part unanswered, but the idea continued throughout the war and into the century following. The truth of both sides, accompanied by letters and narratives from Union and Confederate soldiers alike would shape the national comprehension of the wider impact and implications of the Civil War.

Nationalism has shaped the narrative landscape of America from its conception, but in saying that, one cannot claim that it has a distinct beginning or end, as the "us versus them"

mentality lingers and will linger as long as there is difference and difference. This knowledge, however, does not prevent those doing the telling from attempting to pin the blame on long-dead groups in an attempt to justify violence and hate. In one instance, Thomas Norwood, former Georgia senator, writes that the Puritans were to blame for the seeds of "Religious Fanaticism and Insatiable Avarice" as well as their fanatical offshoots "Intolerance, Religious Persecution, Superstition, [and] the hallucination of being God's Chosen People" (Norwood ix). The idea that the Puritans alone are responsible for the conception and perpetuation of these hateful seeds, both in American society and American narratives, is outrageous, not in the least because the Puritans were long dead by the time these concepts infiltrated the narratives of the South – conceptualizing war as the reasonable response of people deeply wronged by a union that refused to acknowledge their "certain way of life." It would make more sense to claim that the American Confederacy laid their hands on the seeds of these ideas, planted them in romanticism, and sold them as viable for consumption to the rest of the nation and history, without care for narrative revision or pruning, as it were.

American history keeps narratives like humans hoard photographs or clothes. These stories get taken out of the closet, dusted off, and handed down between generations like so many priceless antiques. What this amounts to is the idealization, the idolization, of historical figures that were real – their actions had real and often damaging consequences – but who are presented in a fictional light. On the other hand, in the American North, the proliferation of narratives touting the immortality and more notably, the infallibility of the Union create narrative gods, as opposed to the narrative martyrs to the south.

Securing Southern Narrative Identity

The South experienced what Anderson refers to "as unisonance," which is presented in the context of Imagined Communities in relation to song (Anderson 412). But the idea that a group of people is connected across distances by a shared experience of similar narratives explains the Southern determination to die for their belief that the war truly was about state's rights, which has trickled into the modern understanding of the Southern cause, overwriting the true cause – to continue to enslave and exploit other people. The South was unified in both their willingness to exploit and abuse people of color (their ability to other) as well as in their belief that the North was the true enemy (their ability to portray themselves as the other). This process of othering and being othered is present throughout Southern narratives, but nowhere as prominently as in the journals and diaries written by the women left to hold down the fort at home while their husbands, fathers, and sons were at war – particularly *Yankees A'Coming* by mother/daughter duo Mary Sharpe Jones and Mary Jones Mallard, which was written during the Union occupation of Atlanta and Savannah from 1864-65.

While written in the format of journal entries, Jones' and Mallard's work reads much more like a traditional narrative. Featuring dialogue, monologue, and a well-developed sense of setting, this seems to be more of a dramatized telling of their situation as the Union army moved through Liberty Country, Georgia. They address the sense of danger from the beginning of their narrative –a rapid-fire dialogue between the narrator's mother and a "Yankee" soldier that stops her on the road; the tension is clear – here is a man stopping an older woman carrying personal effects to her home at gunpoint; that readers are meant to have an understanding of the clear dangers of the situation – a young man, armed, against " a defenseless woman, a widow with only one motherless child" with only a driver for protection – is assumed by the text (Jones and

Mallard 34). Rife with gendered, classist, and regionalist tension, this is the scene that sets the tone for the rest of the narrative, not only in the danger of the situation but in Jones' courage in facing down the man threatening her. She becomes a sympathetic character – readers fear for her, her family, and their future.

And there are many references to family, friends, and children in *Yankees A'Coming*, which opens the narrative to the idea of innocence. A "motherless child" barely escapes being the victim of an attack at the beginning of the narrative (34). A baby is born to a family who has had everything, aside from their lives, taken from them in the terrifying conditions established by the possibility of the entire group needing to beat a hasty retreat in the face of arriving Union soldiers (51). But more than this, the narrative innocence has levels in terms of Southern narratives. At the base level, there are children and slaves. For the former group, they are often referred to specifically as "innocents," A scene from the final chapter of *Yankees A'Coming* presents the dire circumstances of children during the Union occupation – "allowed under a Strict watch & guard to run a little in the Sunshine, but it is always under strict apprehension" (72). Even children, who are rarely in the American narrative presented as capable of violence, are prisoners as their mothers are.

The latter group, enslaved people, is never portrayed as abused within the context of these narrative home fronts – merely "faithless" in their freedom and happiness, but mentally inferior in their slavery. (48, 76). Their existence within the narrative, like children, represents a group in need of protection. Mallard remarks of them "with their emancipation must come their extermination." This implied that the granting of their freedom will lead them to their deaths. They are "incapable of self-government," never mind evidence to the contrary. Freedom for slaves in this narrative presents the threat of "having their brains blown out" for continuing to

"wait upon [the family]" (73). They are presented as wanting to remain with the family when faced with the opportunity of escape. Much like children, Mallard and Jones present slaves as reliant on the protection of the family they are enslaved to – less like children in their narrative affections and more like domesticated pets.

In perfectly exemplified motherhood, these women are often only concerned about these innocents. And this is the next level of innocence, as well as the final level of innocence in civilians, represented in the narratives of Southern women. For Jones and Mallard, this is an upholding of the domestic sphere, even in the absence of the father figure.

> We have had a day of rest. All the women & young people assembled in the Kitchen & we had a pleasant religious service, singing, reading the Scriptures & prayer, & a Selected piece on true faith.
>
> (79).

This kind of scene is present, particularly in the final chapter "How Desolate We Are…" which builds to the ultimate loss and abandonment of their family home and plantation, Montevideo. The language of this section is reminiscent of struggle and, as I mentioned before, martyrdom. These people face hardship, yet they persevere and trust in the sovereignty of God through that hardship. Their upholding of these religious moral standards to the best of their limited ability, even more than their courage in facing the injustices leveled at them by Union soldiers, makes them more sympathetic to a contemporary reader (and to more conservative modern readers). The process of the justification of their wrongdoings – as regardless of religious and moral fiber, it is evil to own other people – can be extrapolated from narratives like this one. That they didn't know slavery was wrong, that good people make mistakes, that maybe they were nice to their slaves can be inferred from the reading of their women's stories; these women couldn't have

known about the cruelty inherent in institutionalized slavery or they wouldn't be able to exhibit this kind of love for each other and God. Never mind that religion and loving one's own family or people does not make a person inherently good.

However, as the narrative and the abuse on the part of the Union soldiers continue, it becomes easy to feel outraged at the invasion of privacy and the sense of injustice as Montevideo is raided for food, arms, and ammunition, and valuables. The scene "he put his hands into everything, even a little trunk containing needlebooks, boxes of hair & other small things," though is technically physically innocent, resounds with the echo of rape – "he put his hands in everything," according to Mallard's entry, to look for firearms. The violence of soldiers in the home stands in opposition even to the stories surround Molly Pitcher; in those fables, you had a woman for whom the battle came remarkably close to home but never invaded it – she went out to the battle. In Mallard and Jones' narrative, these women are not the kind filled with righteous indignity at the death of a husband, they are the last line of defense between their home and livelihood and complete annihilation by the Yankees.

And the soldiers themselves are presented in an interestingly familiar way. They're "rough," more liable to "break something open" than ask for a key, implied thieves (particularly of family relics, such as the pocket watch, sword, and spyglass), drunkards, "yelling, cursing, quarreling & running from one room to another in wild confusion" as opposed to the true officer they meet, who is portrayed as polite, sympathetic, and justice driven (45). If this social dynamic seems familiar, it's because it can be superimposed over the concept of the Indigenous tribes as they were presented in Henry Howe's collection of historical narratives (and in other works like it). The violent "savages" were greatly contrasted by the figure which Tecumseh struck within the narratives; the former presented as evil in the religious, physical, and social threat they posed,

and the latter portrayed as a respectful and respectable leader, soldier, and speaker. At the same time, their lack of honor allowed for the claim that "they were all officers & would do as they pleased." The Northern soldiers were suddenly being presented in a way similar to common national (as the portrayal cannot be confined to North or South) portrayals of people of color – wild animals, in contrast to humanity and refinement; unintelligent, with a reduced mental capacity, as opposed to both intelligent and empathetic.

The threat of violence leveled from men towards women is not narratively strange, but it is thematically out-of-place In the work of Mallard and Jones, this portrays a lack of honor brought on by a lack of unity in the Northern forces. While the officers could say one thing – "it was contrary to orders for the men to be found in houses & the penalty was death" – reality had family and friends waiting "in fearful anxiety" (Jones and Mallard 47). The Northern soldiers of this narrative exist as subhuman – they have no wife or family, they seem unfamiliar with the concept of sentiment, and even more unfamiliar with the fact that food is necessary for survival – leaving a highly sympathetic audience, not to the North who won the war, but to their Southern victims.

This representation of Northern soldiers makes their comparison to Southern soldiers even starker. Southern soldiers are presented as either children forced to defend their "mother-state" from the Union, or as fathers removed from their families or finding their children in the younger soldiers they meet on the front lines (Romance i). The author of Romance of the Confederacy (who is anonymous in original editions of the novel) claims these Southern soldiers are "Beardless yet dauntless," which does denote some measure of truth as soldiers on both sides of the war were often young men in their later teens. However, this kind of language fails to acknowledge their complacency and enjoyment of the institutionalized abuse of other people and

their willingness to fight for the continuation of that construct. In the journal of Jones and Mallard, even the older men, such as Reverend Jones, "good men" are taken unjustly captive, even without actively fighting in the war are portrayed as completely innocent. This is in spite of the fact that Jones' keeping of slaves helped other Southern Christians justify slavery across the state. Soldiers returning to their Southern homes served as a rallying point for the people left on the home front and their narratives. "[The children] regarded him as a deliverer & crowded into his lap & around his knees" in a scene that is reminiscent of Jesus tending to the children in Matthew. Here is a faultless, Christ-like soldier representing the hope of living to fight another day to his people.

While empathy is not an immediate threat to the narrative status quo, the fact that Southern narratives are much more unified in their collective stories and representations makes them dangerous in the face of a victorious North that lacked a unifying central narrative. They had no good stories to rally to, so when the narratives of "their emancipation must lead to their extermination" clashed with Northern ideologies, it could be transformed and disseminated through the country. Here were people who had been freed but did not deserve to possess the same rights as white people. Similarly, narratives of Confederate "boy soldiers" allowed for the deification and admiration of Southern soldiers, even in the North – their heroism, and the heroism of the older, more experienced generals who led and protected them, could be accepted into the narrative canon without once again dividing it.

Stories Straight: Northern Narrative Confusion

To the North, there existed not only a justification of institutionalized abuse but also the demand to put an end to such abuse. Without a unifying narrative, the North became narratively open to influence by what is commonly accepted to be "Southern" values today. Perhaps most

notably in Louisa May Alcott's "The Brothers," which is also known by the name "My Contraband," detailing the relationship between a dying Confederate soldier and his Black half-brother. Putting aside the obvious sexual assault that occupies the story's subtext, the notion of the Black man being referred to as "contraband" throughout the narrative reveals a little-known, rarely taught fact about slavery during the Civil War. While Lincoln did "free the slaves" with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and the divide between the North and South hindered the success of the Fugitive Slave Act, the Black people who escaped from the South were considered "illegal goods." By classifying these escaped slaves as captured Southern resources, Northerners could justify refusing to return them to the people responsible for tracking them down. The language of ownership – even on the part of Northerners – is prominent in Alcott's short story.

Alcott's narrator refers to the man as "my contraband," tacking on an unnecessary possessive in her address of him as she tells the story. Readers can understand the "my" she includes to be superfluous, as the man refers to himself only as "a contraband," one of many; the narrator claims him as belonging to her, specifically – she is responsible for him, she provides him with her pity and her attraction, but ultimately, she narrates herself as the divine voice of reason against the violence of a "lunatic" (Alcott 1335, 1341). Similarly, when she asks for his name (he provides Bob and refuses to allow her to call him by his former master's name), she renames him Robert to please herself (Alcott 1336). This scene subverts the concept of self-ownership – the reclamation of autonomy lost (or never had) when a person is born into slavery. Bob, for all his newly found freedom in the North, is still unable to fully lay claim to his identity, as contraband, he is still relegated to his Otherness, and all his seemingly inherent virtue is anchored in his othering. This is not simplified by the fact that he is clearly mixed-race (the

offspring of his Black mother and a white slaveholder). He is physically placed away from all other people in the hospital – both Black and white. He is separate from them narratively because his white heritage makes him "high and haughty," but symbolically because he cannot be defined by the qualities and features of either group. He identifies himself as Black within the narrative, through his interactions with the narrator and his dying brother – he recognizes himself as a man of color. Once again, however, this identifying quality is removed from him by the narrator who observes that "he possessed all the attributes of comeliness belonging to his mixed-race" and proceeds to list the ways he comes close to being white, without quite reaching that ideal (Alcott 1334).

If his whiteness makes him attractive to the narrator, then his blackness makes him pitiable. "Freedom was too new a boon to have wrought its blessed changes" for Bob, the former slave, whose lover was murdered by his half-brother because she wouldn't sleep with him (1334). The trauma of the experience of slavery lingers for him like the scar that bisected his face; the semi-healed wound symbolizing in the narrative the liminal space Bob (and millions of people like him), the narrator, and the captain find themselves in. The "wound" wrought by the abuse of the institution of slavery cannot be healed until, in Alcott's story, the bitterness held by the wronged party is released. And this is the way final way the narrator removes his autonomy from him. Robbed of his chance to name himself, and of his belonging to a specific group of people or race, his opportunity to deliver justice to his abuser is taken away in favor of a narrative of "letting go and living well." But in this, Bob ends his story – free, with a family, and newfound faith, but still shackled by the return of the title "my contraband."

The portrayal of a pitiable, uneducated, but hard-working heathen is a common one in narratives during the American Civil War, beyond Alcott's "The Brothers." These stories were

used to garner support from Northerners, who, upon hearing stories of exaggerated lack of mental capacity, diligence, and physical beauty (which in turn, usually marked some inner beauty and innocence) were driven to action – though whether their action was driven exclusively by their morality or if the opportunity to exploit an allegedly and infamously unintelligent group of people for what they physically had to offer would be excluded wholesale from white savior propaganda. Though the South is most known for their negative portrayals of Black people, Northern narratives, and eventually American narratives once again, were not faultless. However, this shifting of the blame allows for the erasure of and ignorance towards earlier narratives that established the narrative othering of people of color long before the Civil War.

The caricaturing of Black people both carried over into national narratives as the Abolitionists and slaveholders went toe to toe over the continuation of slavery in the expanding nation and stood in stark opposition to the non-fiction narratives being told about the slave rebellions unfolding throughout the South and Midwest. The national favor for letter-writing and the collective fascination with sensationalized print media (which was becoming easier to access for all people as mass-market presses began to take hold and literacy rates rose for white people) drove these stories deep into the sense of the American identity. Just as stories of white explorers, settlers, and soldiers, men and women, instilled the notion of God's divine favor (for white people), nationalistic duty, the perfection of the democracy, and the authority of the rich and powerful, stories of violent "savages" to the South, and pitiful sub-humans to the North allowed for these portrayals of Black people – free and enslaved – to become ingrained in the collective national identity. That is to say, what it meant to be Black in America became rooted in these negatively exaggerated narratives built on the supposedly innate identifier of Black

people (and people of various levels of mixed heritage) as slaves. There could be no true reformation of American culture with Black people as social equals to white people, as even people opposed to slavery could only focus on Black people as slaves and shaped their stories thusly.

In representing themselves, the propaganda returned to the only point in American history in which the nation was united under one narrative ideology – the years after the Revolutionary War. A notable precursor to the division of the nation, Arron Burr was tried for treason in 1807 for the implied crime of attempting to start a new nation in the West. He was acquitted, but the narratives surrounding the situation and the general lack of clarity on the truth of the matter cemented his betrayal in the American narrative. Edward Everett Hale wrote his short story "The Man without a Country" in response to the division of the nation in 1863. This narrative follows Philip Nolan, in the context of this narrative, Burr's co-conspirator who outright rejected America as his homeland during his trial. In a fantastical twist, this is his punishment: "that you never hear the name of the United States again" (Hale). This punishment symbolizes the damnation the Southern states were condemning the nation to. They refused to see themselves as part of America, despite the United States giving them "the uniform they wore, and the sword by their sides," then they would come to deeply regret it as Nolan did in the narrative. Cut off from even the mention of places like the Bermudas which are suggested that America has a tertiary claim on, Nolan chokes on the realization of his loss; such would be the fate of the South, cut off from returning to their state of belonging to the Union, Nolan's withering death, cut off from his homeland, would be theirs too.

> Think of your home, boy; write and send, and talk about it. Let it be nearer and nearer to your thought, the farther you have to travel from it; and rush back to it, when you are

> free, as that poor black slave is doing now. And for your country, boy," and the words rattled in his throat, "and for that flag," and he pointed to the ship, "never dream a dream but of serving her as she bids you, though the service carry you through a thousand hells.
>
> (Hale)

The suggestion of true freedom and captivity in this passage being the difference between being able to return to one's home and family which one has been separate from – a key characteristic of the Civil War, which was notable for the division of families across the North and South – and the lack of ability to return to that family and home as punishment for the betrayal of the national ideologies. Here, the best state the South could hope to long for is its reunification with the North or complete exile from the homeland as they are banished for "attempting her ruin" (Hale).

Conclusion

The Confederacy deserves no kind of vindication. The idea of vindication, the desire for it, is reserved for those who believe they should have rightfully won – those people who believe their culture needs to survive, that they were righteous in their cause, and they contribute something of import to the society to which they belong. In the years following the war, the former Southern soldiers were further alienated from the Union, this time without political recourse, as their generational disenfranchisement continued for the span of the Reconstruction. It is true that for many, actually owning slaves was outside their purview before and during the war; many (economically, not pitiably) poor Confederates were convinced that Lincoln, the Abolitionist Movement, freedom for slaves threatened their way of life – Confederate propaganda was surely more successful than the actual Confederacy. The economic devastation in the South after the war is most romantically illustrated by Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, published in 1936, nearly a century after the war. One would think that the arrogant

daughter of a former plantation owner wouldn't be a protagonist readers could relate to, and one would be wrong. A bestseller of its time, eventually adapted into a film and a stage production, *Gone with the Wind* stood as an anti-war novel in the years leading up to World War Two. Through the struggles of Scarlett O'Hara, Mitchell portrayed the devastation of war on the people who experience it, more specifically, the people who live where the battle is fought. Indeed, the South struggled financially after the war – its population had dived, as people left the rural towns and plantations of the region for larger cities around the country, and building the entire economy on the enslavement of a specific group of people could only be doomed to failure when those people obtained freedom. Those associated with the Confederate Army and their families were disenfranchised for some time during the Reconstruction (which, as the name would indicate, was meant to support and rebuild the South after the war). This historical era was difficult all around for people of lower classes as the nation struggled to rebound. The romanticization of the South in its antebellum glory found new favor as people struggled; we are experiencing a similar nostalgic movement as the new generation both struggle to make ends meet for themselves and has more access to historical information and media through the internet. Romanticization on its own, however, isn't particularly effective as a call to change, as it informs customs and group behavior in such a way that people who hear a narrative told in this light will long for those customs and behavior, even if they weren't as wholesome as a romantic would have you believe. So when a storyteller tells shares stories like *Gone with the Wind*, or *A Romance of the Confederacy*, or even *Yankees 'A Coming*, their listeners don't always absorb those narratives reflexively, with a modern understanding of the complications of the position held by the narrator or the storyteller themselves – taking them "with a grain of salt," as it were. Instead, these stories, with authorial authority often overwrite historically accurate interpretations

for less informed audience members – specifically children, but also people who have a standing prejudice that doesn't align with historical accuracy. It isn't that these stories are bad, poorly written, or that the writer or speaker isn't justified in their complex feelings for their circumstances, it's just that ignorance is so pervasive despite literacy.

The fear of lack of representation on a national scale, of smaller governing bodies, such as states, being unable to be heard and having their concerns and decisions be taken into account inspires a deep sense of terror in Americans, no matter the era or region. But the continuation of Confederate ideals and traditions sheds light on a rarely asked question: that of education. Education could have easily been used to completely remove the dogma of the South from the war, especially as Confederate soldiers began to die and the Sothern states were disheartened by their war-torn economy. The truth from the North is that while freedom was offered to Black people – those who fought, those who escaped, and those who remained in the South – Northerners cared very little about what happened to those free men and women. The Union didn't care about people – they cared about winning. Many former slaves found themselves with little by way of support and little choice other than to return to those who had been their prison-keepers before the war.

Grasping at the dying animal that was the remnant of their "way of life" before the war – the way of life that seemingly had been irrevocably shaken at its very foundations – Southerners turned to the final weapon in their arsenal: storytelling. A region torn apart by war, left to its own devices, uneducated in the way the lasting consequences would impact their home told stories to preserve what was left of the ideologies they still believed to be righteous and their children, witness to their disenfranchisement (which would have been spun as baseless in narrative form)

would develop an image of the North that was threatening and oppressive; the South alone could remember the cruelty of the North, and in their remembering, they found their revenge.

In the North the disjointed narratives of an ideal Union – one that could withstand even the most violent scrutiny – left people simultaneously open and closed off from revisionist histories. The Union, victorious, would have liked to leave the war in the past – it cost them the president, their peace of mind, thousands of lives. Moving on from the war meant that the image of heroism presented in their narratives would remain untarnished from their lack of concern for the millions of freed slaves, both in the north and south, and the memories of their war crimes committed in the name of a nation that could not fail. The nation could not fail; whole again, there was no reason for concern over continued hostilities beyond a few continued border skirmishes, violence at polling places, and Jefferson Davis' reemerging fame. Southern propaganda peaked after the war around the time Davis' body began making its rounds through the former Confederacy. Davis was elevated to the status of martyr – someone who died without seeing their "righteous" goals accomplished – and more importantly, to the status of Abraham Lincoln, whose body was also sent around the country for an episode of prolonged mourning.

Both Lincoln and Davis represented a long-standing American narrative tradition – the preservation of real people as figures of legend, leaving room for romantic ideation and yarn spinning. No longer were they merely men; their legend transcends their humanity for better or for worse. For their supporters, but more so for the generations following after their direct supporters, Lincoln, Davis, Lee, Grant, and other major players in the war became folk heroes, just as much as Washington and the other founding fathers did, just as much as the people who settled the nation, like Davy Crockett or Johnny Appleseed. Entered into the American canon was a dual sense of the truth of the war – the story had split just as surely as the nation had,

spinning out into a million falsehoods surrounding the true natures, motivations, and histories surrounding the Civil War.

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APPENDIX A:

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Office of Research Integrity

April 1, 2021

Kristin Maynard
PO Box 915
Chapmanville, WV 25508

Dear Ms. Maynard:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled *"American Mythology? How Storytelling has Shaped Cultural Perception of History."* After assessing the abstract, it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction, it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director