

## ABSTRACT

### INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN AFRICAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURES

by

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The enslavement and persecution of African and Native peoples has been occurring in the U.S. since the 1600s. There have been justifications, explanations and excuses offered as to why one race feels superior over another. Slavery, according to the Abolition Project, refers to “a condition in which individuals are owned by others, who control where they live and at what they work” (e2bn.org, 2009). Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart researched the concept of historical trauma as it relates to American Indians, whereby she found that trauma due to unresolved grief, disenfranchised grief, and unresolved internalized oppression could continue to manifest itself through many generations. This thesis will examine the intergenerational effects of historical trauma as they are depicted in selected African and Native bildungsromans. These specific works were chosen because they allow me to compare and contrast how subsequent generations of these two cultures were still being directly affected by colonialism, especially as it pertains to the loss of their identities. It also allows me to reflect on how each of the main characters, all on the cusp of adulthood, make choices for their respective futures based on events that occurred long before they were born.

Chapters One and Two highlight specific works from African American authors Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, depicts the life of an African American girl in the rural South of the 1930s. In this work I will examine how the loss of the male traditional role of provider and protector has affected the family dynamics and led to the male assuming the role of oppressor. In Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, I will examine the importance of identity and how one man's flight from slavery has affected the family structure of four subsequent generations. Both of the protagonists, Celie and Milkman, were born free, and yet still feel enslaved, just as their ancestors were, by their lack of choices as well as their quest for purpose and personal justice.

Chapters Three and Four will discuss literary works by Native American authors Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie, both vocal advocates of educating the lost generations - those who were forbidden to learn of and practice their language or tribal rituals due to colonialism - as well as Anglo-Americans on the importance of preserving the culture and heritage of their people. In Erdrich's *The Round House*, young Joe Coutts' family is tragically ripped apart by a physically violent attack on his mother. In an attempt to discover the truth of what really happened and who harmed her, Joe embarks on a journey in which borders, both literal and figurative, jurisdiction, and justice will be defined. The choices made by Joe, the adolescent, will have a direct impact on the evolution of Joe, the adult. In Alexie's *Flight*, Zits is a fifteen year old boy who seemingly belongs nowhere and to no one. It is this lack of identity that initially leads him down a path of destruction and on a magical journey of self-discovery where he will learn that he has within himself the ability to overcome his own personal tragedies, define who he is, and find happiness. The final chapter introduces the concept of restorative justice, a legal term that emphasizes repairing the harm done to crime victims through a process of negotiation,

mediation, victim empowerment and reparations. I will also briefly discuss how both African and Native people are reclaiming their cultural identities through naming, ceremony, and traditions. I will briefly define a new concept developed by Dr. Joy Deruy Leary, referred to as post traumatic slave syndrome, and will show that like historical response trauma, its symptoms can be traced back generations to the enslavement of African people. I will argue that justice, identity and the lack of choices are major themes identified in each of these works which tie them all together. I will also argue that these themes have a direct correlation to the signs and symptoms of both Historical Response Trauma and Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome as defined by Dr. Braveheart and Dr. Leary, and how ultimately each of these protagonists used some means of restorative justice to stop the cycle of trauma and begin the process of healing.



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HISTORICAL TRAUMA IN AFRICAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURES

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## INTRODUCTION:

### Identity Loss of Africans and Native Americans Due to Colonization and Forced Assimilation

*For the oppressors 'human beings' refers only to themselves; other people are 'things.' For the oppressors, there exists only one right: their right to live in peace, over and against the right, not always even recognized, but simply conceded, of the oppressed to survival. And they make this concession only because the existence of the oppressed is necessary to their own existence.*  
(Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 10-11)

The practice of slavery predates written records. In ancient Greece, slavery was established as a means of repaying a debt owed, as a punishment for a crime or were prisoners of war. In early societies considered to be more structured, written records refer to slavery as an established institution, and there were prescribed punishments for those that attempted escape as well as for those who sheltered or aided in the escape of a slave. While there were many types of enslavement, *chattel*, or traditional slavery, is the most common. In this form of enslavement, individuals are treated as property, a commodity to be bought and sold on a whim, without regard to the feelings or thoughts of the individual, and it is on this type that the focus of this thesis will concentrate. For those enslaved and thought to be little more than personal property, there was no consideration as to how the loss of their freedom and cultural ideals would affect future generations. They were, after all, only slaves. This attitude of indifference towards the effects of slavery would continue through the establishment of the institution of slavery in the newly discovered Americas. This thesis will concentrate on the period of the enslavement of both Native and African peoples and will show how forced enslavement, deprivation of their cultural identity and forced assimilation caused a traumatic wound to the spirit of a people that is so deep, it has yet to be healed.

Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart has conducted extensive research on historical or intergenerational trauma in relation to Native Americans. Similar to a type of generational

cancer, Brave Heart found that trauma due to unresolved grief, disenfranchised grief, internalized oppression, shame and destructive behaviors could continue to spread and metastasize in subsequent generations from which the original trauma occurred. This trauma can be inherited even when there is no conscious acknowledgement of its origins. Further studies have noted that the grief can be displayed as shame and degradation in one generation and as aggressive anger and destructive tendencies in another. In his article entitled “Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African-American Identity, Ron Eyerman found that “slavery is a cultural marker: few African-Americans can avoid its impact on their identities”. The social condition of slavery, which all blacks in the U.S. either endured or feared until 1863, has been transformed into a symbolic condition affecting all the descendants of slaves.” (n.pag.) This thesis focuses on those subsequent, post-colonization generations, to show that literary works depicting life for the descendants of African slaves and Native American Indians reflect a loss of cultural identity due to their enslavement and forced assimilation. This work will emphasize the period from the early twentieth century to the present and will show how the suffering inflicted upon these two ethnic groups was similar in nature with one ultimate goal by their oppressors – conquer or kill.

The works selected for this thesis represent a cross section of both cultures to show that identity loss and trauma were not class or gender specific, but rather racially driven by a group of ethnocentric European colonists who thought themselves to be morally, culturally and spiritually superior to Africans and Natives. *The Color Purple* and *Song of Solomon* are both bildungsroman novels about a young woman, Celie, and a young man, Milkman, who are socioeconomic polar opposites. What they share, however, is the driving desire to discover who they are and whom they have the potential to become. This can only be accomplished through a process of healing from a trauma inflicted during the enslavement of their African ancestors.

Morrison in *Song of Solomon*, explores the possibility of flying, through her use of magical realism, while Walker, in *The Color Purple*, uses an epistolary approach through Celie's letters to and conversations with God. Similar to Celie and Milkman, Zits, the protagonist in Sherman Alexie's *Flight*, and Joe, the protagonist in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* are also socioeconomic opposites. They also initially seem to be polar opposites in their sense of self, with Zits being an orphan no one seems to want, and Joe having a close knit circle of family and friends. What they share, however, is how they perceive and achieve justice. Similar to Morrison, Alexie's use of magical realism allows Zits to fly and evolve by inhabiting the bodies of individuals that have also experienced some kind of loss and how the choices they made affected both their lives and the lives of those around them. Erdrich uses the issues of legal boundaries and jurisdiction between local and tribal laws to show how Joe, frustrated and angry at the prospect of no one being held accountable for the brutal attack inflicted on his mother, decides to seek a vigilante style justice himself. While predominantly set in linear time, she also employs the use of magical realism when Mooshum, Joe's grandfather, is asleep and shares with Joe the stories of Wiindigoo, the mythical spirit said to have the ability to possess and consume the bodies of others.

Dr. Brave Heart noted that intergenerational trauma is often manifested in feelings of shame, loss, anger, and depression, which lead to acts of violence against self and others, low self-esteem and the inability to form positive interpersonal relationships. Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary explores the trauma on subsequent generations of enslaved Africans and is credited with developing the term post traumatic slave syndrome. W. E. B. DuBois described the story of black slavery as "the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new-found Eldorado of the West. They descended into hell" (Graff

184). Africans were kidnapped from their villages, chained and forced to walk miles from home only to be placed in the bowels of a ship, forced to wallow, naked, in their own waste. Nearly one-tenth of the Africans who boarded such a ship did not live to reach America; their enslavement, while brutal, was short-lived. They might be considered the fortunate ones. Often ship captains would mix groups of the captured from different villages, ensuring they spoke different languages and could not communicate with one another during transport. This practice was also used by slave owners to lessen the chance of a revolt on the plantation.

In 1619, the first African slaves arrived in Jamestown, Virginia. Physically weak and vulnerable to disease, many more perished. As it had been throughout history, they were considered to be expendable and others could be purchased to replace the ones lost. There was very little effort and expense put into their clothing or to adequately feed them, but conversely, more emphasis was placed into the need to assimilate the “heathens” into Christianity, in the attempt to save their souls. African customs of chanting, drum beating, song and ceremonies were thought to be barbaric and were either discouraged or forbidden all together. Plantation owners often renamed the slave with a Christian name and punished those who refused to acknowledge it. Slaves were forced to practice and observe Christianity and many, according to Laurie Maffly-Kipp, developed a type of religious creative fusion in an attempt to preserve portions of their cultural religious traditions. Slave owners insisted that slaves attend white controlled churches where the idea that “obedience to one’s master as the highest religious ideal” (n.pag.) was promoted. To keep order, plantation owners resorted to beatings, maiming and branding.

In addition to the cruel physical tolls of slavery were the psychological tolls as well. Those enslaved lost their families, the ability to go home, and their customs. They had nothing

to connect them to their place in the world or to their cultural history. The plantation owner sought to make and keep the slave completely dependent upon them for their clothing, shelter, food and overall subsistence. In an article entitled “Slavery and Personality: a Further Comment,” Mary Agnes Lewis, quoting Stanley Elkins, noted, “In the slave system of the United States – so finely circumscribed and so cleanly self-contained – virtually all avenues of communication to the society at large, originated and ended with the master” (114).

According to John Jacobs, who writes about his life as a slave in “A True Tale of Slavery”: “To be a man, and not be a man – a father without authority – a husband and no protector – is the darkest of fates. . . . He owns nothing, he can claim nothing. His wife is not his, his children are not his, they can be taken from him and sold at any minute.” (n.pag.) Children were separated from their parents and siblings, and husbands separated from their wives and children, with the ultimate goal as subjugation – a goal that to some would continue well beyond the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment. This total dominance of one race over another is what Paulo Freire, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, referred to as the oppressor-oppressed relationship, and while there were individuals of the dominant race that were sympathetic to those being oppressed, primarily the Abolitionists, they were unable, according to Freire, to completely understand the loss felt by slaves simply because they had never been put in that position. Freire continues:

. . . [T]he fact that certain members of the oppressor class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, thus moving from one pole of the contradiction to the other.

. . . Theirs is a fundamental role, and has been throughout the history of this struggle. It happens, however, that as they cease to be exploiters or indifferent

spectators or simply the heirs of exploitation and move to the side of the exploited, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations... They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust. (12)

Freed blacks, including men such as Frederick Douglass and John Jacobs, would go on to later pen what would be referred to as slave narratives. In these stories of their life of bondage and servitude they would convey their skepticism of the White Abolitionist, feeling that they had their own agenda, rather than the best interest of slaves. They tended to be leery of their sincerity and felt, as Freire had, that there was no way they could completely understand the powerlessness and complete domination of slavery because it was something they had never experienced for themselves. Douglass notes, "I wish I could be free, as you will be when you get to be men. I am a slave for life." (n.pag.) Douglass knew that freedom, for blacks, was only a word and that the bonds of slavery were more than something tangible. The onset of the Jim Crowe era following the reconstruction period would prove the point Douglass was attempting to convey.

Since the first Africans were kidnapped and sold into slavery, they as well as their enslaved Native brethren, have been unified in their determination that their cultures not become extinct due to their forced enslavement. On Christmas Day in 1521 the first slave revolt occurred in the Spanish Colony of Santo Domingo. This was the first recorded slave revolt and involved African and Native slaves, united together to assert their independence. This unity



would be only the first of many between these two people and occurred some thirty years after the initial contact with the native Arawaks by Christopher Columbus and his men. The fact that children are taught in grade school that Christopher Columbus discovered the New World, and was thought by many to be a hero, are further examples of how European settlers created and designed their own version of history rather than acknowledge the bloody violent truth.

According to Peter Montague in his article entitled, “Celebrating Columbus Day”, Columbus was a plunderer and killer. In his letters back to the monarchy, Columbus noted that the natives, referred to as “Indians” because he thought he had landed on the Continent of India, were, “...so artless and free with all they possess, that no one would believe it would having seen it. Of anything they have, if you ask them for it, they never say no: rather they invite the person to share it and to show as much love as if they were giving their heart...” (468). Columbus, and others after him, would exploit that childlike state of trust and innocence and would attempt to kill off a race through enslavement, rape, torture, starvation, disease and despair. George Washington would later refer to them as sub-human, comparing them to “beasts of prey” (470), and subsequently Andrew Jackson would supervise the “mutilation of 800 or more Cree Indian corpses the bodies of men, women and children that [his troops] had massacred – cutting off their noses to count and preserve a record of the dead” (470). Professor Jack Weatherford, in his article “Examining the Reputation of Columbus” notes:

The United States honors only two men with federal holidays bearing their names. In January we commemorate the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr., who struggled to lift the blinders of racial prejudice and to cut the remaining bonds of slavery in America. In October, we honor Christopher Columbus, who opened the Atlantic

slave trade and launched one of the greatest waves of genocide known in history.

(n.pag.)

By 1730, approximately twenty-five percent of the slaves in the South were Native Indians. They too would suffer greatly at the hands of the European settlers. Colonization is achieved in various stages which include a level of military violence by the foreign entity as well as the exploitation of the resources from the colonized nation. This can easily be identified in the broken treaties between the United States Government and the Native tribes, as well as the unilateral rape of the land with little concern of how this decimation would affect subsequent generations. The stages are masked under the guise of bringing civility and enlightenment to a race considered to be “primitive” people. Ironically, it would be found by archeologists, and noted in Charles Mann’s article entitled “1491,” that these “primitive people” actually built complex roadways and transacted commerce with other indigenous peoples of the Americas and maintained a sentient relationship with their ecosystems hundreds of years before first contact was made. Unfortunately, first contact would bring with it the diseases that would, ultimately, wipe out the majority of the Incan population. They included typhus, influenza, small pox, diphtheria and measles. Mann quotes one settler, who noted on the arrival of the Mayflower, “The good hand of God favored our beginnings. . . . by ‘sweeping away great multitudes of the natives...that he might make room for us’” (3).

With the arrival of settlers and their ultimate expansion westward, the way of life for the Native Indian population was quickly dissipating. They were removed from their ancestral land by military force and forced to live on proportioned land assigned to them by the newly formed governmental entity. They were no longer allowed to hunt or gather food, and similar to the African slaves, they became dependent upon the government for their subsistence. They

depended upon those considered to be “friends of the Indians” to help communicate and negotiate agreements with the government. One such “friend” was Richard Pratt, who had his own personal agenda that was in direct conflict with the survival of the Native way of life. Pratt’s policy, according to a report prepared by Andrea Smith for the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, was to “save the man; kill the Indian” (n.pag.). He advocated for the necessity of assimilation so that the Natives could effectively communicate with the white government and negotiate treaties that were fair to both sides. His ultimate agenda, however, was cultural rather than physical genocide.

Pratt felt that in order for Native Indians to become fully human, they would have to give up their Native culture. Under the guise of friendship he went to tribal chiefs to convince them of the importance of sending their children to learn the white ways. Some children were sent voluntarily, while some were forcibly removed from their reservations. Christian denominations were given the authority to set up the boarding schools under Grant’s Peace Policy of 1869-1870. Funds were set aside for schools to be built with churches and missionary societies that would oversee their administration. Similar to the Child Savers of London, in the early Nineteenth Century, some individuals believed it to be their Christian duty to bring civility to the “heathen” natives in order to save their souls. However, all they succeeded in doing was to take away their cultural traditions and enslave them through displacement. On recalling his experience at the Carlisle Indian School, Luther Standing Bear noted that the general opinion was that “Plains people merely infested the earth as nuisances” (Hurtado and Iverson 140). The education provided by Pratt, at Carlisle, would be much different than what he had promised. His strategy was to separate the children from their tribes, at a young age, to instill Christianity and white values into them. Rather than to teach them how to work for the betterment of their people, they

were taught manual and menial labor skills. Boys were taught to farm and perform manual labor while girls were taught only domestic work. Pratt and others felt that it was more economically feasible to kill the culture rather than to wage war and kill off the Indians.

Upon the natives' arrival at the school, they were forced to remove their native clothing and issued what was deemed to be more appropriately civilized. Their hair was cut and many were forced to answer to Christian names, rather than to their given Native names. Similar to the African slaves, the Native children were given inadequate food and medical care and were leased out to white homes for little or no wages during the summer rather than being allowed to return to their homes. Often, they would not be allowed to return to their tribal villages until they were young adults, at which time they had spent more time in the white culture than in their own. They were too dark to be thought of as whites and they had failed to learn their Native culture. They truly belonged nowhere and to no one. They were trained only in service positions and taught about an economic system that valued money over culture. They were unable to speak the language of their ancestors and did not know the stories of their cultural beginnings. This loss of their "native self" would continue to be passed down through many generations to a point where some tribal languages and stories would become extinct.

Gilda Graff, quoting Schwan, noted "A person who refuses to mourn incorporates the lost object by disavowing the loss, thus keeping the object 'alive' inside. Incorporation is a defensive operation based on a denial of loss" (194). This can be seen in the trauma experienced by both Africans and Natives. It is reflected in their actions, their mannerisms and their perception of self and others. These "haunting legacies" are reflected in each of the works chosen to be discussed. Each character will choose a path in life towards the healing and reclaiming of their cultural history. Both of these peoples have shown that while the oppressors may have had the

ability to break the bodies of the oppressed, their inner strength, faith and resilience remained intact and their resolve to heal continues to grow stronger.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### *SONG OF SOLOMON: A NOVEL BY TONI MORRISON*

*“The fathers may soar / And the children may know their names”*

(Morrison, *Song of Solomon*)

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* is one of the two novels penned by African American authors that will be discussed in this thesis, depicting the struggle for self-definition in the wake of prior generations whose identities had been stripped from them through enslavement. Themes that include a loss of self and cultural identity, restlessness, and the fear or inability to form healthy relationships, as well as the inability to advance emotionally beyond a childlike state of selfishness' are just a few of the symptoms of historical trauma displayed in this and subsequent novels. All of these can be causally traced back directly to the enslavement of their African ancestors. In both of these works there are examples of racism as well as inter-racial sexism. When at one time only a slave owner would treat slaves as expendable and disposable pieces of property we now, however, see that manifested through the generations of the black culture itself.

In *Song of Solomon* Morrison's focus of themes can be directly connected back to the initial trauma. Themes discussed in this chapter will include flight and abandonment, the importance and significance of names, symbolism, the power of voice and song, the disruption of the traditional gender roles, and the power of strong female relationships.

*“O Sugarman done fly away*

*Sugarman done gone*

*Sugarman cut across the sky*

*Sugarman gone home...” (Song of Solomon 7)*

The cultural trauma of Milkman's family can be traced back four generations to his great grandfather Solomon, a slave who "flew away" leaving behind his wife, Ryna and his twenty-one children. This abandonment left a wound on subsequent generations that has only grown and festered with time. As a result of his flight, his wife Ryna went mad and his children failed to learn their familial history. Subsequent generations would abandon or "fly away" from who they were. This included Solomon's son Jake, through the mistaken change of a name; his son Macon Dead, II, through the refusal to acknowledge his heritage and culture; and his son, Macon Dead, III, known as Milkman, who does not have the ability to connect with or value anyone or anything. To some extent he symbolizes the slave owners, in that he feels people around him are inconsequential and disposable.

Flight is discussed and described throughout Morrison's novel both figuratively and literally from Solomon to North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent, Robert Smith, who attempted to fly from the roof of a building, to Pilate, and finally to Milkman himself, who will learn that flight can be achieved. Susan Blake, in her article entitled "Folklore and Community in *Song of Solomon*", notes that the ability to fly "represents an identity that the African-descended tellers of the tale believe they would have if they had not had another identity forced upon them by slavery" (77). Morrison describes Solomon's flight as the most magical and Milkman's the most satisfying. She notes, "Milkman believes he is risking his life in return for Pilate's, yet he knows his enemy has disarmed himself. These flights, these erstwhile heroics, are viewed rather differently by the women left behind." (n.pag.) Milkman's first attempt at flight comes when he is four years old. When he fails to be successful it is noted that he essentially loses interest in himself. Because of the economic status of his family and the physical disability he has, he is further alienated from the community and his peers. "As the stars

made themselves visible, Milkman tried to figure what was true and what part of what was true had anything to do with him” (75). Later, physically adult, yet psychologically child-like, Milkman yearns to escape his life and the confines of his family, to which he holds no emotional ties. While physically present, he has abandoned his family, friends and culture emotionally. Catherine Lee notes that Milkman is “an emotionally isolated, alienated black man” (109). She further notes that his poverty is spiritual rather than material, and that, “his sensitivity is that of adolescent self-centeredness” (110).

When given the opportunity to leave his home on the shores of Lake Superior on a quest for lost gold, he jumps at the chance, not giving any consideration to how his leaving will affect the women, including his mother and his lover Hagar, who he will leave behind. “He would not pretend that it was love for his mother. She was too insubstantial, too shadowy for love . . . Never had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own” (75). He regards Hagar, his cousin and lover, as he has every other individual, something to be used and tossed aside when they were no longer useful; “. . . [H]e wasn’t sure he wanted to keep it up. Keep up the whole business of ‘going with’ Hagar. . . Everybody who knew him knew about Hagar, but she was considered his private honey pot, not a real or legitimate girlfriend” (91). Milkman’s “flight” from Michigan, however, will take him further than he ever imagined. He will embark on physical and spiritual journeys that, according to Catherine Carr Lee, “strips him of superficial external mooring and submerges him in the communal and spiritual culture of his larger family” (110). Like the last piece of a puzzle, Milkman will become a complete individual with the ability to heal the future by learning of his cultural past. He will go from being passive and irresponsible to active and authentic. It is only when Milkman begins to believe in the possibility of flying that he stops feeling alienated from



his race and culture and begins to have a sense of belonging. In the end, it would be Solomon, who abandoned his family, who would be revered and remembered as a hero of the community. Solomon, ironically, would have a beautiful mountain peak named in his honor, while his wife Ryna, left abandoned, alone, driven to madness, and too weak to carry on, would have a dark, scary gulch named after her. This is evidence that history does indeed become sanitized over time. While some label Morrison's work as exemplifying "magical realism", Morrison herself notes during an interview with Christina Davis at Rutgers University that "I was once under the impression that the label 'magical realism' was another one of those words that covered up what was going on. . . . If you could apply the word 'magical' then that dilutes the realism but it seemed legitimate because there were these supernatural and unrealistic things, surreal things, going on in the text . . ." (n.pag.). The flying African tribe referenced in this work has been noted to be part of the cultural folklore, a shape shifting being, that is still present in the African culture today. I would agree that to label this work as one containing "mystical realism" is simply attempting to gloss over the fact that flying away as a means of escape also depicts another of the symptoms of trauma due to enslavement.

In the forward to Morrison's novel, she calls attention to the significance of names and how from the very beginning of the novel there are names, words and phrases that she placed in strategic locations to reference the oppression and cultural segregation of blacks, even in the North. She noted that she chose the name North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance as the employer of Robert Smith for two reasons: because it is a black-owned company and because it depends on payments by black clients to continue to exist. Also contained in its corporate name Morrison notes, are the words "life" and "mutual", giving the indication that this company values life and

the ability to mutually work together with its insurers, neither of which have been valued in the African culture since slavery.

Because of his flight, Solomon's son, Jake, would be raised by an Indian family and would later marry their daughter, Sing. It is with Jake and Sing that the family name gets lost. At the time of emancipation, freed slaves were required to provide a first and last name with the Freedman's Bureau. Many of the freed slaves opted to take the last name of their last master or one that had been the most kind. In the case of Jake, however, he received his name due to the ineptness of a drunken clerk. When he tried to correct the mistake his wife, Sing, insisted that they keep it in an attempt to wipe out the horrors of slavery:

He asked Papa where he was born. Papa said 'Macon'. Then he asked him who his father was. Papa said, 'He's dead.' ...and in the space for his name the fool wrote, 'Dead' comma 'Macon' . . . 'Mama liked it. Liked the name. Said it was new and would wipe out the past. Wipe it all out.' (53-54)

It is at this point that the family name will be lost until recovered and claimed by Milkman. This is another means of an identity being forced upon them, removing them further from their true identity given to them at birth.

Macon Dead was like many freed black men of the time, unable to read and write. At the birth of his child he thumbed through the Bible, and according to Morrison, "chose a group of letters that seemed to him strong and handsome" (18). Ironically, even with Macon Dead II denying his family heritage, he carried on the same tradition for his first two children, naming them Magdalena, called Lena, and First Corinthians. His son was his namesake. With the socioeconomic standing in the community there was not much of an opportunity for interaction with their neighbors and so the Dead family was for all intent and purposes spiritually,

emotionally and culturally dead. According to Mahboobeh Khaleghi's article "The Quest for Authenticity and Cultural Identity", "His self-realization is hampered by his embrace of the materialistic and acquisitive philosophy that he imbibed from his father." (1)

Milkman's father, Macon Dead, II, didn't begin his life mean-spirited and bitter, but according to his sister, Pilate, was a sweet child. It was the death of their father at the hands of White men who were envious of his success at farming that caused Macon Dead to become bitter, essentially living up to his name. He set out on a quest to accumulate possessions and wealth, even marrying the daughter of a prominent doctor. He only valued what could propel him to be more powerful, which did not include family. He turned his back on his past, his sister, and eventually his wife and daughters. He taught his son that only through the collecting of wealth would he ever gain power and respectability:

Macon Dead dug in his pocket for his keys, and curled his fingers around them, letting their bunched solidity calm him. They were the keys to all the doors of his houses, and he fondled them from time to time as he walked down Not Doctor Street to his office. (17)

Here Morrison gives us a glimpse of just how important these materialistic things are to Macon Dead. He fondles an inanimate object in the same manner one may fondle an individual they hold in high esteem or care deeply for. For Macon Dead wealth was his lover, something he owned and something that could not be taken from him. Rather than teach him how to better the community and work towards the betterment of the black race, Macon teaches his son that he is superior to others, which is primarily considered to be a White and racist ideal.

Macon Dead III received his name "Milkman" because of his mother's insistence on breast-feeding beyond the time when most children have been weaned. This too would serve as

another means of alienating him from his peers and community. It also aids his mother in keeping him in a more child-like state of dependence, similar to what slaves were subjected to by their masters. This also suppresses his ability to define himself as an individual rather than part of a collective whole. With his additional disabilities, he finds that forming lasting relationships are difficult and he lacks the ambition to try very hard. His only friend, Guitar, himself a victim of abandonment due to the loss of his father at a mill accident, is the only individual that is willing to overlook Milkman's eccentricities. Their relationship begins to change, however, with the brutal murder of Emmitt Till:

“I don't know, Guitar. Things seem to be getting to me, you know?

Don't let 'em. Unless you got a plan. Look at Till. They got him too. Now he's just an item on WJR's evening news. . . .

Yeah, well, fuck Till. I'm the one in trouble.

Did I hear you right brother?

All right. I didn't mean that. I . . .

What's your trouble? You don't like your name? . . .

No, I don't like my name.

Let me tell you something, baby. Niggers get their names the way they get everything else – the best way they can. The best way they can.” (88)

Guitar has learned from the school of hard knocks by being raised by his elderly grandmother. He understands, unlike Milkman, that life isn't easy or pretty. Milkman's isolation due to his family wealth has insulated him from the ugly side of racism. He may have read about it, but has been emotionally and physically unaffected by it. This will be the catalyst that will ultimately drive a wedge between Milkman and Guitar, leading one to attempt to kill the other.

I chose to reference Pilate in this section because, while her name is significant, its symbolism is even more important. Pilate received her name, perhaps fatefully, from her father's choice from the Bible. Pilate, in the Bible, was the statesman responsible for ordering Christ's death. He was, essentially, the pilot for our souls to be saved through Christ's death and resurrection. Pilate, in Morrison's work, pilots Milkman on a journey to self-discovery and to the discovery of their lost family heritage. She also serves as his moral guide. Never afraid or ashamed of who she was or what she stood for, she is an enigma to her family as well as the community. She aided in Milkman being conceived, thwarted attempts to kill him before his birth, and has watched over him his entire life. She is also the only individual to which Milkman feels any kind of emotional connection. Incapable of cruelty, she welcomes one and all into her home and shares what she has: "She never had a visitor to whom she did not offer food before one word of conversation – business or social-began" (149). She has survived the same racism her brother, Macon did, but managed to come out of it without acquiring the bitterness. She teaches Milkman the song of Sugarman ("Solomon") and he will use that on his journey south. Mahoobeh Khaleghi, in her article entitled, "The Quest for Authenticity and Cultural Identity: A Study of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*", notes that Pilate is also the one that "nourishes his mind with some stories of her childhood, of his father, of his grandmother and of his grandfather who has been murdered; such stories awaken his consciousness about his family's past" (2). According to Catherine Carr Lee, the American South is crucial geographically because that's where the trauma associated with slavery was the strongest. Morrison also uses the symbolism associated with the South, in that, Pilate lives in "Southside". Milkman will have to travel south, to the side of town where Pilate lives, and geographically, to find his highly sought after treasure.

The treasure hunt begins with the telling of a story by Macon Dead II to Milkman about some lost gold. The gold, according to Macon, is at Pilate's house hanging from her ceiling in a bag. This prompts Milkman and Guitar to break in to Pilate's house and steal the bag. What they find, however, are bones rather than gold. These bones are actually the bones of Milkman's grandfather, and the wealth Milkman is searching for. At this point, however, he has yet to embark on the journey to discover this. When Milkman travels south to Virginia he carries with him his superior clothing, as well as superior attitude. It's not until he sheds the clothing and attitude that he begins to be receptive to change and his quest for gold and the tangible wealth it would bring evolves into a cultural and spiritual wealth that will, ultimately, offer him the means to define him as an individual and to heal family. It becomes a wealth of knowledge of his family's past, including their resistance, liberation and of their loss. "He was only his breath, coming slower now, and his thoughts. The rest of him had disappeared. So the thoughts came, unobstructed by other people, by things, even by the sight of himself" (227). Milkman enters the woods of the Blue Ridge Mountains as a man of tangible wealth and finds that by letting go of the weight of those tangible things he is able to become aware of his true spiritual self, and perhaps, he will find he is now light enough to fly. He only begins to feel heavy with life's burdens when he realizes that someone, Guitar, is trying to kill him. It is here, in the South, where his family's roots are that Milkman will, for the first time, feel a connection to the land and the people. With his transformation comes open-mindedness and acceptance. In talking with local people that remember his family, he begins to understand that his father too has suffered and that the past loss experienced by Macon Dead II aided in shaping the present situation where Milkman now finds himself. Milkman becomes fully aware of how his actions have been interpreted by others when he realizes for the first time: "[H]e thought he deserved

only to be loved – from a distance though – and given what he wanted. And in return he would be . . . what? Pleasant? Generous? Maybe all he was really saying was: I am not responsible for your pain; share your happiness with me but not your unhappiness” (280).

In Shalimar, he leaves the woods a new man. According to Lee, he is “no longer alienated from the earth nor from his fellow human beings; he is 'walking the earth like he belonged on it” (118). As a sign of acceptance into the community, Milkman is sent to a woman named Sweet who will help to make his transformation complete. Where he had been selfish and one-sided with Hagar, with Sweet there was a mutual exchange of caring for another individual and this is cleansing to his soul. He finally understands that the reason he loves Pilate is because she tried to love everyone. Just before she dies by a bullet meant for Milkman, she tells him, “I wish I'd a knowed more people. I would of loved 'em all. If I'd a knowed more, I would a loved more” (336). Like Solomon, Pilate was able to fly without her feet leaving the ground. She chose to cast off the burden of societal constrictions, and in doing so, kept her spirit light and free. To Milkman, she was a pilot, mentor, friend, confidante and teacher. She taught him what love felt like by giving and receiving. Through her, Milkman found the definition of family and home. Through her stories he was able to give back to her a family name, which acted as a means of healing for them all. In the end, Milkman chose to love, rather than to hate Guitar, and offered to sacrifice his life to his friend – his brother of the heart. Milkman had learned through Pilate and through his great grandfather Solomon that, “if you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it” (337). Morrison, in leaving the ending unresolved allows the reader his/her own interpretation. Regardless of the outcome Milkman now knows he is light enough to fly because he is no longer weighted down with the burden of denial, selfishness and ignorance. His flight will not carry him away from those to whom he has ties, but towards them. Through his journey,

Milkman found out who his family had been and the kind of man he had the potential to be in the future. Milkman gained an understanding and appreciation of the struggles and pain endured by his African ancestors due to slavery, and in doing so found, according to Sanasam, “that the past can provide the solution to the problem facing today” (63).



## CHAPTER TWO:

### *THE COLOR PURPLE: A NOVEL BY ALICE WALKER*

*“Prayer is ten times more powerful while sitting in the violet light shining through a stained glass window” - Leonardo da Vinci*

One theme common to both this novel and to Morrison's is that there is at least one strong female presence that serves as a healing balm attempting to lead the lost in finding the answers they seek and heal the suffering of their souls. This healing will be discussed further in Chapter Five, but serves as a reminder that it is women who nurture, give life, and often times bond together to exact societal change. Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, also contains themes having to do with the effects of trauma brought on by the enslavement of African people. While some critics feel that her creation of Celie and a group of unique characters to have the ability to speak to the human condition of that time, Charles Proudfit notes that others criticize her for the “depiction of violent black men who physically and psychologically abuse their wives and children...and for the depiction of lesbianism” (12). I would argue that society has a history of banning what is found to be offensive by those proclaiming themselves to be the moral compasses for the masses, and recreating a more “appropriate” version along with explanations and justifications. Walker offers an accurate depiction of life in the rural South during this era, showing us that the guilty weren't all dressed in white sheets. Some wore the same skin as those they oppressed, and that is where Walker's focus lies, at the heart of how to break the cycle of violence within members of the same ethnic group and how to heal the spirit of the wounded. In this novel, Walker takes an epistolary approach with Celie, the protagonist, talking to God about what cannot be spoken aloud. In an article by Shilpa Shukla and Niroj Banerji, they note that this means: “recreates the mode used by slaves to denounce their situation” (n.pag.). It is also a

method by which women were able to gain access to the literary world. Walker begins the novel in *medias res*, with Celie on the apex of a childhood lost and an adulthood she is ill prepared for. The power of narrative and voice allows Celie to express what she thinks and how she feels, both of which are critical in her development of an identity, and both of which have been taken away from her by the oppressive men in her life. In addition to Christian faith, symbolism and the power of strong female bonds are major themes in this novel. Even before the book has begun, Walker acknowledges her faith has an appreciation for the gift bestowed upon her, writing: “To the spirit: Without whose assistance neither this book nor I would have been written.” (n.pag.)

The color – purple. It is not a primary color but considered a secondary color; a blending of red (which is associated with rage) and blue (which is often associated with depression). Perhaps Walker, from the very title of the book, is covertly referencing the fact that for many generations individuals from African descent were considered “secondary”. Regardless, the color purple has many meanings and connotations to many cultural and ethnic groups. Purple is symbolic of spirituality and faith, of magic and mysticism, and of bravery and courage. It is also noted to be the color of gay pride. It is the color, Walker notes, that’s “always a surprise but is everywhere in nature” (n.pag.).

“You better not tell nobody but God. I'd kill your mammy” (1). Thus begins Celie's conversations and letters to God in an attempt to understand what is happening to her. Raped and impregnated by the man she believes to be her father, sold into marriage as soiled goods, Celie is a young uneducated girl who only knows how to survive: “Don't let them run over you, Nettie say. You got to let them know who got the upper hand. They got it, I say. But she keep on, You got to fight. You got to fight. But I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (17-18). It is her sister Nettie, foreseeing that she will not be able to continue living

with Celie and Albert due to Albert's infatuation with her, who will teach Celie how to read and write, conveying to Celie that she is of value. Charles Proudfit, in his article entitled "Celie's Search for Identity: A Psychoanalytic Developmental Reading of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*", finds that the abuse heaped upon Celie first by her "father" and then by her husband Albert, equates to "soul murder". Celie notes: "It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree" (30). Because of this trauma and in order to survive, she begins to relate and identify with the approach of her male aggressors later telling Harpo, her step-son, that he should beat his wife Sophia for not minding him. Celie is, as Proudfit describes, "a mechanical obedient automation harboring a murderous rage", a rage that will ultimately be dispelled towards Albert and will begin her process of self-identifying and healing. When Celie interacts and forms bonds of friendship with a small group of strong-willed women, she will learn what it feels like to love and to be loved. She will also realize that she is worthy of more than what she has thus far received.

Celie's struggle for identity is multi-faceted and includes struggles with racism, as well as with religion. In talking to God, Celie's image is that of a white man. In discovering herself, she will also find that she has the ability to create her own image of Him. It is her faith in a higher being that sustains her and at the same time disillusiones her. When the violence against her continues, she rails that God must be asleep. Once she understands the possibilities of her image of God, she writes in her last letter, "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples, Dear Everything. Dear God" (291). In this she reconciles that God is everything and everything is God. When God created the beautiful flowers in the field he created them for her. She must also try to find where she fits in the world, her community, and more importantly, within her own culture that has, up to this point, treated her as nothing more than property to be used and

discarded. When Albert is asked by Harpo why he beats her, he simply replies, “cause she my wife” (23). Like Milkman in Morrison's novel, Celie is on a journey to find out who she is, and in doing so, she will learn from where she came and how deep is her resolve to survive. Also like Milkman, there will be those placed in her life's path that will assist in guiding her to enlightenment, acceptance, and, ultimately, to forgiveness.

While there are multiple women who participate in helping to establish Celie's identity, the women most prominent in her life are her sister, Nettie, her daughter-in-law, Sophia, and Shug Avery. From Nettie she will learn to read and write. Her letters to Nettie sustain her even when she fears that Nettie is dead because she doesn't receive responses. In the second half of the book she will learn from Nettie that the man she believed to be her father, and with whom she had children, was not actually her father, but was, in fact, her step-father. This will, for Celie, relieve some of the shame she has felt. She will also learn that in her early years she was loved by her parents. Proudfit notes, “. . . [S]he lived for the first two years of her life as the only child in a loving family. The father adored his pregnant wife and, we would expect his daughter Celie” (18). Proudfit finds that Celie experienced traumatic events from the beginning of her life and those would aid in her inability to establish a firm sense of self in both adolescence and adulthood. Similar to what Milkman learned of his grandfather's demise, Celie learns that her real father was killed by jealous white merchants. The abandonment of her father, through death, caused her mother to go mad and made them susceptible to the brutality she would later experience at the hands of her step-father. She also learns from Nettie that her children, Adam and Olivia, are with Nettie in Africa, having been adopted and raised by the missionaries with whom she is traveling. Through Nettie's letters Celie begins to feel a sense of

self. She was loved by her father, is loved by her sister, and has borne two healthy happy children.

Through her daughter-in-law, Sophia, she will learn about inner strength. Sophia is an independent thinking, strong-willed woman. She is unwilling to be controlled and ruled over by Harpo and is reduced to a state of submission when she strikes the mayor after the mayor's wife asks her if she would like to be their maid. She is sentenced to twelve years as the mayor's maid – which is to say twelve years of slavery. She is only allowed to visit with her children one time in eight years, and that visit is cruelly cut short by Ms. Millie. The Sophia who returns home after the twelve years is emotionally damaged and serves as a reminder that the cost of resistance in combating racism can be high. Sophia has a better understanding of how strong Celie actually is and tells Celie that whenever they asked her to do something, she pretended to be Celie and just do it, rather than respond in a manner that would ultimately lead her to more pain and suffering. Her submission is not unlike the breaking of the spirit many slave-owners did in order to achieve compliance.

It is through Shug Avery that Celie for the first time will experience love, desire, and worthiness, as well as her sexual awakening. It is Shug that encourages Celie to create an image of God other than that of the white man. It is Shug that stands up to Albert when she finds out that Celie is beaten for not being Shug, and it is Shug that will ultimately remove Celie from Albert's home and provide her an opportunity to grow and evolve into her potential in Memphis. The relationship with Shug is an awakening of Celie's mind, body and spirit, and it is this female bonding that allows Celie, according to Proudfoot, to “work through old traumas, and achieve emotional maturity and a firm sense of identity” (14). With Shug’s help, Celie begins to heal. Celie views Shug as a role model because she fights for what she perceives as rightness –

something Celie to this point had not been strong enough to do. When she finally finds the strength to leave Albert, with the help of Shug, she confronts the person who has sequestered and enslaved her and who is the epicenter of her anger: “You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter into the creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need” (202). It is at this crucial point that Celie has the strength and courage to assert her independence and take control of her future.

Both of these novels address the importance of healing from the trauma inflicted upon their ancestors due to slavery. They show how these symptoms are manifested in their inability with which to connect or identify one's own culture, their depressed self-image, and their lack of understanding and empathy of the sacrifices made by those that experienced the trauma. They also both show the racism and sexism that was viral in the South during the eras in which these works were set. Morrison and Walker have addressed them both, showing that healing begins to take place through acknowledging the trauma and reclaiming what was forcibly taken – a sense of self-worth, self-pride and cultural awareness. Healing is also achieved by the ways Morrison and Walker have chosen, which is by remembering, commemorating and honoring the memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. While there are numerous novels and critical essays that speak to the racism that occurred interracially, there are fewer that addressed the issues of the violence that occurred within the African race. Walker and Morrison have offered a voice for their once silenced African descendants, a voice that says to them, “Listen and remember”.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### *THE ROUND HOUSE: A NOVEL BY LOUISE ERDRICH*

*“There are a lot of things that people in America don’t have any idea about. History has been sanitized”- Everett “Tall Oak” Weeden*

One theme common to both this novel and to Morrison’s is that there is at least one strong female presence that serves as a healing balm attempting to lead the lost in finding the answers they seek and heal the suffering of their souls. This healing will be discussed further in Chapter Five, but serves as a reminder that it is women who nurture, give life, and often times bond together to exact societal change. Rosemary Whitesfield noted that with “cataclysmic events impacting Native peoples across North America, many Native people assert a CUMULATIVE WOUNDING has occurred that SPANS GENERATIONS and most, if not all Native Nations” (n.pag.). Citing the research of Dr. Marie Yellow Horse Brave Heart, associate professor of social work and direct Lakota descendant of Sitting Bull, Whitesfield noted this fell under the diagnosis of HRT – Historical Response Trauma. According to the research conducted by Dr. Brave Heart and others, Historical Response Trauma can be found both individually and culturally and can seriously impact the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of those affected. Unlike Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which is tied to a specific event, Historical Response Trauma, according to Brave Heart, “is a collection of characteristics formed in reaction to the trauma that a group of people have endured” ( n.pag.). Genocide, which was experienced by the Native people of all Nations, was a cultural genocide whereby generations, subsequent to the initial trauma, were denied the ability to practice their traditional ceremonies, learn the history of their people through their oral traditions, and learn the languages of their ancestors. The loss resulted in the abandonment of the family unit through violence, depression, substance

abuse, elevated suicide rates, anxiety and loss of cultural identity. The novels discussed in this thesis offer examples of how today's subsequent generations of Native people continue to be affected by the trauma inflicted upon their ancestors more than one hundred years ago.

In Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*, the primary themes are violence, jurisdiction, justice, and understanding. Set on an Ojibwa reservation in North Dakota, and narrated retrospectively by a now grown Joe Coutts, Erdrich sets the tone of the book with her first sentence. "Small trees had attacked my parents' house at the foundation" (1). This serves as a prequel to the pending violence that, like the trees attacking the house, will attack and attempt to destroy the foundation upon which this family is built. Bazil, Geraldine and their thirteen year old son, Joe Coutts, are by most standards, what would be classified as a typical middle class family. What sets them apart, however, is the fact that they live on a Native American reservation, and their standard of living is significantly higher than that of their neighbors. Bazil Coutts is a tribal judge, who takes his position very seriously, scrutinizing every decision, ensuring that he has followed the letter of the law so that there can be no second guessing his rulings. Joe notes that the job of Geraldine, his mother, is "to know everybody's secrets" (149). She works as a tribal enrollment specialist who handles complex, often confidential information. She maintains a tribal role and it is her responsibility to ensure those persons who have claims of Native descent meet the criteria. Joe Coutts is a young man on the cusp of adulthood with an inquisitive mind. He enjoys *Star Trek* as well as spending hours perusing his father's law books with an almost sacred reverence:

I quit at last, sneaked inside and slipped into my father's study. I took out the law book my father called The Bible. Felix S. Cohen's Handbook of Federal Indian



Law. It had been given to my father by his father; the rust red binding was scraped, the long spine cracked, and every page bore hand-written comments. (2)

The financial status of his parents affords Joe the ability to not be directly affected by the poverty and domestic violence occurring within his community. He does, however, seem to have a quiet understanding that it is occurring, especially in the home of his aunt and uncle. When Geraldine is violently beaten and raped, their idyllic world is turned upside down. The once tenacious Geraldine is reduced to a zombie-like state of fear and shame, a shell of her former self. With Geraldine unresponsive to family and friends, the Coutts men are left to pick up the pieces of their broken family and to heal themselves by seeking justice for the attack. Poring over Basil's legal books, he and Joe initially work independently and finally come together in search of legal precedence that will hold the attacker accountable. The problem comes when Geraldine begins to speak of her attack, and is unable to remember if it occurred on tribal or state land and the issue of jurisdiction takes center stage.

John Williams, quoting Louise Erdrich, notes that the plot, "partly revolves around the problem of jurisdiction that keeps some brutal crimes on tribal land from be efficiently investigated and tried" ( n.pag.). As the law stands now, tribal courts can only prosecute tribal members. If a non-tribal member commits a crime on tribal land, the tribal courts have no jurisdiction and often times the offender goes unpunished. Was the crime committed on tribal lands? Was the perpetrator Native or White? This violent attack forces Joe to grow up, seemingly overnight, and unites his family as well as the tribal community with their ancestors, in that they, too, have become victims to the boundaries and restrictions placed upon their land by the Federal Government. While the reservation can serve as a means of preserving Native cultures, it also acts as a means of segregation, a no man's land where there is no guarantee for

justice. Joe recounts: “If there was one law that could be repealed or amended for Indians to this day, that would be Public Law 280. But on our particular reservation Bjerke’s presence was a statement of our toothless sovereignty” (142). This sovereignty, which was created as a result of treaties made between the Native people and the U.S. Government, would later be made “toothless” by new laws that would limit and sometimes revoke their powers of prosecution for crimes committed on tribal lands. There is also the message from the Native people that regardless of what continues to be taken from them, they remain sovereign to each other. This is exemplified in the fact that members of the tribal community are willing to cover up who killed Lark, the man who attacked Geraldine. What is perceived by some to be a crime, they see as a means of justice that predates contact with Europeans.

Frustrated by what he perceived as his father’s handicap (by the conflicting laws regarding local, state and tribal jurisdiction, as well as the slow pace of the law), Joe takes it upon himself to seek justice for his mother. This, too, according to Erdrich, is sometimes the only option left for victims of violence on reservations. Justice, divided by tribal and skin color distinctions, often leaves Native American victims with no legal recourse. In an article for the *New York Times* entitled “Rape of the Reservation”, Erdrich cited that while the Justice Department reported that one in three Native women are raped in their lifetime, the actual number is probably significantly higher. With federal prosecutors declining to prosecute the majority of the sexual abuse cases, Native women are too humiliated and demoralized to pursue justice. This gap has attracted non-Native sexual predators to tribal lands. According to Erdrich, “Tribal courts had such jurisdiction until 1978, when the Supreme Court ruled that they did not have an inherent jurisdiction to try non-Indians without specific authorization from Congress.” (n.pag.) Congress feared a non-Native perpetrator would not be afforded his Constitutional right

to a trial by an impartial jury, not recognizing the fact that there are many non-Natives currently residing full time on tribal lands. What Natives are left with, again, is a message by the Federal Government that the rights of a Native are less important than those of a non-Natives.

In a novel of justice and the realization that one's present and future are shaped by events of the past, Erdrich also uses Native stories from the past to act as a compass, guiding Joe on his journey of understanding and healing. With Joe's Grandfather, Mooshum's, stories of survival as well as the origins of the Round House, Joe develops a sense of his spiritual ancestors and how his worldview has been shaped by the generations that came before him. He has an open mind to the spirit world and what they can tell him of his mother's attack. Joe recalls:

There was a moment of intense quiet. Then a low moan of air passed through the cracks in the silvery logs of the round house. I started with emotion.

The grieving cry seemed emitted by the structure itself. The sound filled me and flooded me. Finally, it ceased. I decided to go forward. . . . He attacked her here.

The old ceremonial place had told me – cried out to me in my mother's anguished voice, I now thought, and tears started into my eyes. (59-60)

When Joe hears from his father that the suspected "carcass" has been captured, he immediately recalls the story from Mooshum about how he survived a winter storm by crawling into the carcass of the Old Buffalo Woman, speaking to the strength and resilience of his Ojibwa ancestors. He also recalls the story of the legendary wiindigoo, who could cast its spirit inside a person and turn him or her into an animal that preys on other humans. To Geraldine Coutts, Lark, her attacker, is the reincarnated wiindigoo and she must find the inner strength to stop him from hurting anyone else: "It's something Daddy told me. A story about a wiindigoo. Lark's trying to eat us, Joe. I won't let him, she said. I will be the one to stop him" (248). In telling her story

and saying his name, Geraldine is able to begin to heal from the violence inflicted upon her. She is determined, as were her ancestors, not to allow adversity to destroy her spirit. Joe, however, is still angry that his family has been forever altered due to this violent attack and justice cannot be served due to an imaginary borderline drawn on a map. Because of this, Joe travels down a path that will continue to haunt him for the rest of his life.

With the criminal justice system failing him, Joe feels that he has no recourse for justice other than that of vigilantism. With the firing of a rifle, Joe not only aids in the killing of his family's nemesis, but in killing what is left of his childhood. When his parents walk into the police station to retrieve him after a car accident he recalls:

And there was that moment when my mother and father walked in the door disguised as old people. I thought the miles in the car had bent them, dulled their eyes, even grayed and whitened their hair and caused their hands and voices to tremble. At the same time, I found, as I rose from the chair, I'd gotten old along with them. (317)

In attempting to heal his mother's spirit, his is forever altered. When Joe is told by his parents that Lark has been murdered, he replies stoically that he is glad. He notes: "My mother's eyes did not leave my face. She was intent on believing anything I said. But she shuddered all over, suddenly. A ripple passed over her body. The shock of it reached me" (292-293). In attempting to come to terms with the death of Lark and the part he played in it, Joe finds that the relationship with his parents now includes an element of suspicion. In a conversation with Joe, his father, Basil says that he would make a legal argument of traditional precedent in order to protect the person that committed the act: "Lark met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that with no other recourse; his killing

fulfilled the requirements of a very old law” (306). This exchange is significant in that it shows that out of desperation Native populations have had to resort to justifications in the absence of legal sovereignty, for their actions in ensuring that the guilty are held accountable; something that even the criminal justice system of today is refusing to do on reservation land. In their article entitled “Fighting Back Against Sexual Violence on Indian Reservations”, Katherine Reilly and Marielle DeJong note:

Complicated jurisdiction, institutional problems, and limited resources all contribute to an inefficient law enforcement system, which perpetuates the prevalence of sexual violence on Indian reservations . . . It is of utmost importance that the criminal justice system be improved to more effectively deter and prosecute perpetrators. It is equally important that preventative policies be adopted to reduce the amount of sexual violence. (n.pag.)

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### *FLIGHT: A NOVEL BY SHERMAN ALEXIE*

The features of historical response trauma, or HRT, as defined by Dr. Brave Heart and others studying the effects of historical trauma on Native generations state that symptoms, including survivor guilt, depression, low self-esteem, anger, suicidal ideation and self-destructive behaviors can be present. In the case of Zits, the protagonist in Sherman Alexie's novel, *Flight*, many of these symptoms are evident. Zits is a fifteen year old boy who doesn't belong. Since the death of his mother, the half Irish-half Native boy, although his Native status is unconfirmed, is shuffled from abusive foster home to abusive foster home. He is seemingly unwanted and unloved by all. The sarcasm that emanates from him not only insulates him from the pain and suffering that is eating at him, but also serves to further isolate him from his peers. Zits thinks to himself: "I'm ashamed that I look like a bag of zits tied to a broomstick. I wonder if loneliness causes acne. I wonder if being Indian causes acne" (4). Zits is angry at many things, notwithstanding his lot in life because he never met his father and his mother died at such a young age. He has no name and no family; he has only betrayal and shame to keep him company. In an interview by Ase Nygren entitled, "A World of Story-Smoke: A Conversation with Sherman Alexie", he notes of Alexie's work:

The characters are muted by the traumas of hatred and chaos, loss and grief, danger and fear, and cannot- except in a few rare cases- articulate their suffering. Instead, they tend to resort to self-destructive behavior, including violence and substance abuse. Thus, while Alexie's narratives demonstrate the need to give suffering a language, they also call attention to the inherent unsharability of suffering. (150)

Such is the case with Zits. He feels that there is no one with whom he can articulate the pain he is experiencing while being unwanted and unloved. These feelings of loss, shame, and low self-esteem continue to make him a perpetual target for predators, first by the sexual abuse he experienced at the hands of his aunt's boyfriend and later at the hands of Justice, who will recruit and exploit him for his own personal view of how justice should be achieved. Initially with Justice, Zits begins to feel for the first time (since the death of his mother) that there is someone in the world that genuinely cares about him, noting: "Suddenly, the pretty white boy is my best friend. Maybe the only real friend of my life. We talk for hours. He *understands* me" (24). To Zits, with Justice on his side, he becomes power incarnate. Justice convinces Zits that he can get justice through random acts of violence. When Justice teaches him how to shoot a gun by setting up targets in the warehouse, Zits notes: "There are moments when a boy can feel immortal. I practice killing people until it feels like I'm really killing them" (33). Justice convinces Zits that by killing people he could get his parents back. Zits thinks: "Jesus, what a question. Justice lets me think about my answer for two or three minutes, but I can't say yes or no. I don't know what I would do if I knew that killing someone would bring my mother back to life" (32). Zits soon finds himself in the middle of a busy bank and on the apex of a life changing journey. With a paintball gun in one hand and a real gun in the other, Zits proceeds to open fire on the customers in the bank, only to be hit by return fire by the security guard. Perhaps, this could be the point of no return.

Thinking he has been killed or at the very least mortally wounded, Zits is surprised to open his eyes and find that he is lying in a hospital bed. Even stranger is the fact that there is a man standing over him calling him by the name "Hank". Zits is magically transported back in time, to the year 1975, into the body of FBI Special Agent Hank Storm. The FBI is in the middle

of Indian Rights Movement regarding tribal sovereignty. Zits recalls from a documentary he saw that Indian Rights Now, or IRON, members protected Indians from the centralized tribal government referred to as HAMMER. Members of HAMMER, however acted as double-agents, working with the FBI to kill IRON members. Zits, a.k.a. “Hank”, is again faced with a potentially life changing decision of whether to take a stand or to go with the status quo. Zits not only inhabits the body of Agent Hank Storm, but is able to feel what he felt and is privy to the motivation behind the violent act of torturing and killing Junior, a young Native IRON member. When “Hank” becomes physically ill at the sight, he is reminded by Elk that he has killed before. Zits realizes that his willingness to arbitrarily kill strangers in a bank make him no better than these men. At the climax of the action, Zits is once again transported back in time, where he finds himself in the middle of an Indian camp preparing for war that would later be called The Battle of Little Bighorn.

Alexie allows the quick wit of Zits to remain intact, even while occupying the body of an Indian youth. Zits quips: “Then I solve a mystery: I look under my loincloth. Ok. I know for sure now that Indians didn’t have any underwear beneath their loincloths” (63). Alexie also allows Zits to experience the bond of love that occurs between a father and his son, something he has never had, noting: “This guy loves me. He’s singing to me. Who knew that old-time Indian braves serenaded their sons? It’s beautiful. I’m in love...I have a family. A real family. A true family. I am happy for the first time in my life” (65). He is also able to see how the father drives the son to violence, something he already feels he has firsthand knowledge of. Through this embodiment, Zits is shown that even the imperfect children of the world are worthy and deserving of love. The feeling of euphoria is soon replaced by sorrow in knowing that the faces of the people into which he is lovingly gazing will soon die of disease and starvation. He knows



that their children will be shipped off to boarding schools. He knows that their way of life, as he now has seen, will cease to exist:

Their hair will be cut short and they will be beaten for speaking their tribal languages. They'll be beaten for dancing and singing the old-time Indian songs. All of them are going to start drinking booze. And their children will drink booze. And their grandchildren and great-grandchildren will drink booze. (66)

Alexie, often criticized for stereotyping Indians as being poor, abusive and alcoholic, retorts in an interview with Rebecca Roberts for National Public Radio, that it's not stereotyping, but rather a, "cold, damp reality" (n.pag.). Alexie notes:

I am a recovering alcoholic, so it's part of my daily life. My mother, my father – and in fact my father died three years ago of alcohol-related kidney failure after being on dialysis for seven years...my sisters and brothers are all alcoholics. My aunts, cousins are all alcoholics in one stage of recovery or another. (n.pag.)

Alcoholism is just another in a long line of historical trauma response symptoms that is passed intergenerationally because other ways of diffusing the guilt, shame and anger have not been acquired. In reintegrating the problem in all of his works, Alexie is attempting to send the message of just how severe the problem has become and that failure to acknowledge and address it, doesn't make it go away – it only serves to exacerbate the wound.

While embodying the Indian youth, Zits realizes that he's standing next to a true warrior – Crazy Horse – and he seems to be different from the way he's remembered by history: "I am standing right next to him. And his eyes are gold-colored. I think the greatest warrior in Sioux history is a half-breed mystery. I think this legendary killer of white men *is* half white, like me" (68). Through this boy, Zits is afforded the opportunity to see that greatness and inner strength

comes not from the color of your skin or your racial composition, but comes from within.

History remembers Crazy Horse as a killer of White soldiers. Zits has seen the man – a warrior with pride – fighting for a cause he believes in, willing to wage a war.

In his next embodiment, he assumes the consciousness of a White soldier named Gus, who is fighting the Indians simply out of revenge for the killing of a little girl. Upon seeing the massacre unfolding before him, Gus attempts to help a White soldier who is attempting to save a wounded Indian boy. Zits notes: “With his ancient broken body, Gus could never have done that. I own this body now. And how can this small pony carry three people and not collapse or slow down? Because of fear. Because of grace. Because we want to live” (95-96). Zits is beginning to see that he has, within his own genetic make-up, the strength and resilience of a people that have been persecuted, but still fought for what they believed. He has within him the ability to survive.

In his next embodiment he gets up close and personal with the feelings associated with betrayal. Not that Zits hasn’t experienced betrayal before – he feels as though his life has been a constant stream of betrayals. He felt betrayed that his father never acknowledged him, betrayed that his mother died leaving him alone without other family, that his aunt that allowed sexual abuse to occur, and that the foster homes he was placed in tolerated yet never really accepted him. This type of betrayal is new to Zits. This is the betrayal of friendship which leads Zits again to the deaths of innocent people. Zits realizes: “I can fall so far inside a person, inside his memories, that I can play them like a movie. And I can feel the pilot’s emotions. He misses Abbad. Misses him very much. I can feel his heartbreak” (112). When Jimmy thinks about betrayal, Zits thinks of betrayal as well. For Jimmy, he was betrayed by Abbad, a man he considered his brother, and, in turn, Jimmy betrayed his wife with Helga. Zits betrayed the

people in the bank that trusted him to be a better person than he was. As Jimmy begins to see how he allowed Abbad's betrayal to affect his life, Zits begins to acknowledge the part he, too, has played in his own spiral into darkness.

His final embodiment would be, for Zits, the most significant because it would give him answers for which he has been searching his entire life. In this last transfer, Zits is back in the present, and the homeless man he has become is full of rage and anger. The homeless man yells: "Fuck you", I say again. I don't want to say it. Not really. But this homeless guy's anger is even stronger than my anger. And anger is never added to anger. It multiplies" (136). The man is angry because he's homeless and dirty, angry because he's sick and angry, because he's pitied by those that pass him on the street. He has a conversation with a white man on the street, and when the man asks him if he has any children he pulls out a picture. Then Zits realizes the pictures are of him, a five year old Zits. The man he has embodied is his father. He walks over to a truck mirror and sees himself noting: "I am older than I used to be. I am battered, bruised, and broken. But I know who I am. I am my father" (150). "Why did you leave me?" I ask. He doesn't answer... "Why did you want to carry a photograph of me but not *me*?" (152). In an attempt to retrieve the answers he so desperately seeks, he forces his father to remember so that he, too, can know. Zit's father, abused by his father, is afraid of continuing the cycle. Through his father's memory he recalls: "I want you to know what I know", my grandfather says. "You ain't worth shit now. And you ain't ever gonna be worth shit" (155). Zit's father feels broken and not worthy; he wants better for his son than was afforded to him. Zits realizes: "He cannot be a father. And so he runs. And as he runs, he closes his eyes. And as he closes his eyes, I close my eyes" (156). THIS is the very core of how historical trauma is passed intergenerationally. The symptoms of unresolved grief are passed from generation to generation, potentially manifesting

itself differently, without conscious knowledge of the actual traumatic event, as the wound continues to fester untreated. In this work, Alexie is able to take readers on a journey, and through Zits we are able to experience traumatic events throughout history from the perspective of both the oppressor as well as the oppressed.

Zits has now come full circle and knows who he is, which is not the same boy that he was before. The experience changed him and allowed him to understand that he is not, nor has he ever been alone. Many that came before him have faced decisions that could potentially be life altering. Many have lived lives wrought with violence, betrayal and shame. Those experiences, while they have the ability to shape us, only have the power to define us if we allow it. These embodiments acted as a pilot for Zits, guiding him through similar adversities others have experienced and back to the point of origin, for a second chance at his life. This novel was described by Rebecca Roberts as “a journey of understanding violence for the main character” (n.pag.). It was a journey of showing to Zits that he was a victim like his father and others before him, and not just a loser kid who has no name, no story, no history and no future.

Zits “awakens” to find himself again in the bank with the .38 caliber pistol and paintball gun still securely hidden in his pockets. He sees a mother and a little boy in the bank. To Zits, that boy represents everything good and everything he wanted for himself. In the span of a few seconds he reconstructs his life and realizes that while he has been a victim, he doesn’t have to continue to be. He notes: “But I am tired of hurting people. I am tired of being hurt. I need help” (161-162). In acknowledging his pain and his desire to stop the cycle, Zits has begun the process of healing. He seeks out the only adult that has shown him any kindness, Officer Dave, and asks for help. He is placed with Officer Dave’s brother and sister-in-law, a couple that have always wanted children but weren’t able to have any, and for the first time since his mother’s death, he

feels wanted. He notes: “Mary hugs me. She hugs me tightly. It feels great. I haven’t been hugged like that since my mother died...I’m beginning to think I might get unlonely. I’m beginning to think I might have an almost real family” (182). He’s found a family, a place in the world where he can begin to heal and feels that he belongs. He is now in a seemingly healthy and loving environment where he now feels that he is worthy of carrying his real name – not Zits, but Michael. The name “Zits” has a connotation of being dirty or infected, not unlike how Indians were viewed by whites. The name Michael, a Christian name, could be associated with the archangel Michael, who fought his battle and won. By giving Mary his name, he is acknowledging that he has triumphed over the feelings of worthlessness that have plagued him his entire life due to his father’s absence, not being acknowledged culturally, the death of his mother, the abuse of his Aunt Zooey’s boyfriend, and her subsequent betrayal and abandonment. In learning to value himself through the transformations and the kindness Officer Dave, his brother Robert and wife, Mary offer him, he feels worthy of being named, rather than simply being identified by a physical characteristic. Zits, himself, undergoes his own transformation, and begins to heal from the trauma inflicted upon him. He finds that being beautiful is not about the exterior that others see, but about what and who he strives to be on the inside.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND OTHER MEANS OF HEALING

*“Like the Thunderbird of old I shall rise again out of the sea; I shall grab the instruments of the white man’s success – his education, his skills, and with these new tools I shall build my race into the proudest segment of your society.” – Chief Dan George (Salish)*

Restorative justice is a term used primarily in the criminal justice system and emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal acts or behaviors. While there may not be direct references to the way restorative justice is employed to promote healing within cultures, the ingredients needed for healing to begin are contained within each research model involving historical trauma response as well as post-traumatic slave syndrome. It is noted that restorative justice is best accomplished through a cooperative process that involves both the offender as well as the injured party. Restorativejustice.org, a website dedicated to the education on how to best implement features of restorative justice within communities, notes that there are three primary principles that form the foundation of the concept:

1. Justice requires that we work to restore those who have been injured;
2. Those most directly involved and affected by crime should have the opportunity to participate fully in the response if they so desire;
3. Government’s role is to preserve a just public order, and the community’s is to build and maintain a just peace. ([www.restorativejustice.org](http://www.restorativejustice.org))

Additionally, the site notes key values by which restorative justice programs are characterized. These include creating the opportunity for the victims and offenders to meet and have an open discussion; the expectation that the harm done needs to be repaired; the restoration/reintegration of offenders and victims; and the opportunity for parties to participate in developing and

implementing a resolution. This final chapter will not only examine a few of the current solutions being discussed by both Native and African descendants to reclaim their cultural identity, but will also reflect back to show how the protagonists in each of the novels previously discussed worked towards breaking the intergenerational cycle of trauma and violence that can be traced directly back to the colonization of the Americas.

Each of the stories previously discussed is referred to as a bildungsroman, or a coming of age novel. Each of these works contain pilots within them that act as guides who attempt to help these individuals traverse the murky waters that lead to adulthood. They also attempt to help them understand the trauma of the past and work towards healing not only themselves, but also their future generations. In Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Pilate serves as Milkman's guide to reclaiming their ancestral name and to finding out the man he has the potential to be. During the story, we see him transition from self-serving to self-sacrificing. Through Milkman we learn the importance of a name and how reclaiming a lost name can begin the process of healing. We also see Milkman return home rather than continue the cycle of abandonment of the family that his great-grandfather Solomon began. In his returning, he is again aiding in the healing process of his family's wounds.

In Walker's *The Color Purple*, Celie's initial pilot is believed to be God, but I would argue is actually the close-knit circle of women that help her to establish her identity and self-worth, which ultimately leads to her asserting her independence and stopping the physical and emotional violence she has incurred by the hands of the man she believed to be her father, as well as her husband. The most influential of her pilots is Shug Avery. Not only does Shug help her to see that she is worthy of love, but she also helps to reconstruct Celie's view of a God that she feels has thus far ignored her suffering. Her image of God changed from an image of a

white, dominant, oppressive man to an image of a God who is omnipotent and present in all living things. Celie then begins to understand that God has been with her in all ways and in all things, and that her struggle has strengthened her resolve to not only survive, but to thrive. Both Mister and Harpo personify the effects of the power lost to men due to slavery and colonization. Their rage and anger has led them to commit acts of domestic and sexual abuse. They have both attempted to assume the role of oppressor over their wives. It is only through Celie's assertion of her self-worth as an individual that causes Albert to capitulate, and subsequently, a relationship based on mutual respect begins to develop.

In Erdrich's *The Round House*, Joe is guided by both the example his parents have provided, as well as the spiritual world of his ancestors. Through his grandfather Mooshum, he learns the importance of the oral tradition, and it is through the stories of the past that he learns how his ancestors survived even the most debilitating situations. They did what had to be done in order for their people to survive, and in that, Joe's resolve to do the same for his family is strengthened. He was also guided by the law books that he pored over, especially the books containing the handwritten notes by both his father and grandfather in the margins. These represented the struggles past generations had endured to gain the rights their tribes now had. It also served as a reminder to continue to fight and to never forget who you were and who your people were. From this, Joe was determined to follow down the same path and continue to be an advocate for laws that would provide justice for his people.

Finally, in Alexie's *Flight*, Zits is guided by other individuals throughout history who have faced potentially life-altering decisions, including his own father. He learns of survival, guilt, and the price of sacrifice. He learns that he is not alone in the grief he has experienced in his life time. It should be noted that Alexie chose to have Zits inhabit the bodies of non-Natives,



and in doing so allowed Zits to develop a sense of empathy for those caught up in violent acts and to acknowledge that there were non-Natives capable of kindness and empathy towards Native people. Serving as the final guide in his “embodiment” journey, his father is able to answer the question Zits has had his whole life – the question of why he wasn’t wanted by his father. This feeling of abandonment has made Zits feel unloved and unworthy of love. What he learns from his father is that it is his father’s fear of the continuing cycle of violence that drove him away. His father’s absence wasn’t because Zits wasn’t loved, it was because he was. Rather than inflict the pain on Zits, his father chose to make the sacrifice for his son. Through the embodiment, Zits learns the depth of his father’s pain and what he was willing to endure so that Zits would not have to endure it. Each of the protagonists, on their journey to adulthood, learned of the traumas inflicted on their ancestors due to slavery and forced colonization, and while the characters may not have understood why the traumas continued to happen to subsequent generations, they each made a conscious effort to begin the healing process for themselves and their families.

African and Native peoples have bonded together in their fight against oppression and slavery since the first Africans arrived in the colonies. Patrick Mingos, in his article entitled “Beneath the Underdog: Race, Religion, and the Trail of Tears”, noted: “In the fields and homes of the colonial plantations of the United States in the late eighteenth century, African Americans and Native Americans forged their first intimate relations in their collective oppression at the hands of the ‘peculiar institution’ of slavery” (453). They worked together, lived together, shared recipes, remedies, myths and legends. They also began to intermarry, thereby creating a new threat to the colonists; that of strength in their union. In response to this perceived threat, various safeguards were installed to ensure dissent between the races.

Miscegenation laws were passed, African slaves were used against Indian uprisings and Natives were used to quell possible slave revolts. Native peoples were also offered bounties for capturing and returning runaway slaves in an attempt to foster a growing hatred between the races. This, however only served to forge the bond between these oppressed peoples. Today, they bond together, in solidarity, to reclaim what was stolen from their ancestors – their land, heritage, traditions, identities, and their cultures.

In the research conducted by Dr. Brave Heart and others, relating to the historical response trauma theory, it has been concluded that Native people have a connectedness with the land in identifying who they are. The denial of their cultural identity has contributed to feelings of persecution, oppression, and devalued self-image, as well as taking on the status of a victim. The denial of their ancestral lands not only deprived them of sacred lands, but also denied them the ability to properly feed and clothe themselves from the land, as was their tradition. As a result of colonization, and in order to survive, Natives began to be dependent on the food provided by the U.S. government – food which contained high amounts of sugars and fats. This has ultimately resulted in the Native population having a high rate of obesity and a high rate of adult onset diabetes.

As previously stated, the genocide committed against African and Native peoples was an attempt at cultural genocide. However, it should be noted that thousands of Native and African people were killed by the U.S. Army in their quest for dominance. Men, whose traditional role was that of warrior, provider and protector, felt they were no longer in a position to do so. This, according to research, is a contributing factor in Native and African men adopting an oppressor role against their own race which includes, according to Whiteshield, “power through control, intimidation, manipulation, lack of respect for equality and nurturance of women, abandonment

of family and responsibility, and a lack of honesty” (n.pag.). Subsequently, the broken family unit, through the abandonment of the traditional male role as fathers and providers, has left Native and African women with the daunting task of trying to provide for and protect their children alone, often in extremely impoverished and hostile environments.

Internalized oppression plays a major role in the continuation of historical trauma response. According to research conducted by Central Oregon Community College, Internalized racism:

. . . Occurs both consciously and subconsciously. It can affect any race, group, or person, whether it be due to color, sexual status, or even medical issues. Basically it occurs when a person begins to believe all of the negative stereotypes and images that come from other people, history, media, or any other sources that depict oppressing images, which often lead to self-hatred of the person or group being oppressed. These images create the oppressed person or group as inferior, such as the white oppression against people of color. (cocc.edu.)

This internalized racism has contributed to the declining self-image of Native and African people, which has in turn lead to increased instances of violence, addictions, higher than average incarceration rates, and higher than average high school drop-out rates which only serves to remove them further from their ancestral identities.

According to Aaron Denham, “the term trauma is Greek in origin, meaning to physically wound, disturb or pierce the corporeal boundaries...today, its meaning is expanded to incorporate the emotional insult or shock to the mind resulting from physical and/or emotional injury” (395). Historical trauma is but one of the many terms used to describe the suffering of ethnic groups. Other terms include intergenerational trauma, historical grief, collective trauma,

historical response trauma, as well as a relatively new concept referred to as post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS). Regardless of the name or acronym, the effects and results are the same; brokenness in need of healing. In *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary finds that there are a specific set of behaviors and beliefs associated with the trauma of slavery experienced by the descendants of African slaves. It is a theory, similar to the research by Dr. Brave Heart's historical response trauma which hypothesizes that slavery, followed up by racism and oppression of subsequent generations, has resulted in behaviors originally implemented as a strategy for survival by the slaves. These behaviors included abandonment of the family structure, instances of domestic violence, sexual abuse and the effects of extreme poverty. These behaviors are shown throughout the novels of Walker and Morrison previously discussed. Additionally, Silja J.A. Talvi, in discussing Dr. Leary's work on post-traumatic slave syndrome, found that, "subtle forms of racism have damaged the collective African-American psyche – harm manifested through poor mental and physical health, family and relationship dysfunction, and self-destructive impulses" (n.pag.). Dr. Leary's book, according to reviewers Pamela Hammond and Bertha Davis, "likens racism to a serious illness that has been allowed to fester for 400 years without proper attention" (n.pag.). She reminds the world that while slavery has occurred worldwide, the institution of slavery in the United States was built on the foundation of perceived black inferiority. While in other parts of the world slaves had the opportunity to buy their freedom, slaves of the Americas were considered property and only calculated to be three-fifths of a person on census rolls. According to Leary, slavery's children have been socialized to accept racism and low self-esteem. Until this way of thinking is relearned and redirected

towards one of positive growth as an equal race, the chain of violence that keeps these people “inferior” will not be broken.

Both African and Native people are looking to identify the problems, create open dialogues to promote healthy positive discussions on how to fix what has been identified as broken, and to move forward towards the restoration of their cultural roots. While there are many opinions on how to begin the healing process, the consensus is that in order for these people to thrive in the future, the healing must occur. Dr. Brave Heart believes that many are tapping into their history – not the trauma, but in the many years of strength, resilience and spiritual awareness of their ancestors. She finds that Native people are attempting to reconnect with their Creator, Mother Earth, as well as their own sense of spirituality. Many are participating in what has been referred to as trauma narratives, where, similar to slave narratives, they are able to share their experiences and grief. In “Rethinking Historical Trauma: Narratives of Resilience”, Aaron Denham found that, “trauma narratives transmit strength, optimism and coping strategies that family members internalize and use to ‘emplot’ their own narratives, or organize ‘life events and experiences into a coherent and ever-evolving story’” (392-393). This communal sharing allows the sense of shame to be removed as well as the label of victim. The narrators empower themselves and each other to lend their voices to the ever-growing chant for survival.

Denham noted that one Coeur d’Alene family he studied is healing through teaching future generations how to reconnect with their heritage. While he acknowledges that this is only one family out of thousands, it is representative of the conscious choice this family has made to no longer be victims but to take back the culture that was stolen from them and teach the next generation. This assertion, in addition to preserving a heritage on the brink of extinction, also

serves to strengthen the family bonds. Referred to as the “rock culture”, this focuses on collective memory as the first stone in a building block of traditions. According to Denham: “Personal and collective memories would be lost if society did not play a role in the process of keeping the memories alive, as each collective act of remembering increases the likelihood that individuals will remember and tell their personal stories” (399). The rock culture is a metaphor for the traditionally dense steady nature of their familial culture; and for this family, it extends to a time before contact with the Europeans. The emphasis is placed on a special round rock as being the center of the family sweat house fire. As long as the rock glows, the heart of the family continues to beat. The teaching of the lessons comes from the heart, the heart is but one of the blocks, and each block builds upon other blocks to form the foundation. This family is also joining a growing movement for Native families to participate in ceremonial powwows, recounting oral histories and participating in other activities that promote the confirmation of their identity and strengthens the identity for future generations. In quoting one family member, Denham notes that there was always an emphasis placed on identity. “Up until he died, my Grandpa always reminded us, ‘Don’t forget who you are and don’t forget to tell your children that as well’” (400).

African Americans are also taking steps to reclaim what was stolen from their ancestors – their very identity. Randall Robinson, in his book *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, notes that only through the reclaiming of their past and heritage can blacks begin to build the foundation for a successful future. He calls for the government to make reparations to the ancestors of African slaves in the form of monetary payments, educational programs and true equal opportunities that will ensure both social and economic success. Others are taking it a step further and actually finding out from where they came by tracing their DNA through genetics.

Africanancestry.com is a website where people can reconnect with their African heritage. For some, it gives them a sense of peace and spiritual healing, and for others, it is a starting point for a journey that began when the first Africans were taken from their homeland, chained and loaded onto ships. African Ancestry provides an “at home” DNA kit that enables individuals to collect a biological specimen, send it in, and trace either their maternal or paternal lineage. Once tribal origins are identified some have chosen to take it a step further. They return to their ancestral lands to travel the route their ancestors made as slaves, but as free men and women. Many have found the experience to be simultaneously empowering and humbling. Frederick Lowe, quoting advisor Eric Chinje notes, “The trips are designed as an opportunity to welcome home our long-lost brothers and sisters and give them a chance to reconnect with the land of their ancestors.” (n.pag.)

William Shakespeare asked, “What is in a name?” To both Native and African cultures, names were significant in that they were part of the collective history and life experiences of the people. Names were not just chosen at random, but were chosen as a marker – their position in the tribe or community, and by denying them their birth names, colonizers were denying them their sense of who they were and from whence they came. By reclaiming their birth names both Native and African peoples are, according to Mphande, “redefining themselves and dismantling the paradigm that kept them mentally chained for centuries” (104). In the Ojibwe culture, there was a naming ceremony which “remembers the sacrifices of Original Man in naming everything” (Callahan n.pag.). The ceremony typically required that a medicine man be asked by the parents of the child to seek a name. This was done through the spirit world – by fasting, mediation, prayer or through a dream. The Natives often referred to the children by a nickname, believing that if the spirit world became too familiar with the child’s name, he or she may be

called back. The spirit world and the tribal ancestors both watch over the child and prepare a place for them for when their life on earth ends. Similarly, children born in Africa were traditionally named for ancestors, spirits, places, or events occurring around the time of their birth, including a harvest or flood. Their names signified their position in society as well as their place in nature.

Literature is one venue where these rememberings can be shared with others. As Toni Morrison observes:

Memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was – that is research. The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that particular way... Memory is for me always fresh, in spite of the fact that the object being remembered is done and past. (n.pag.)

In “One Generation from Extinction”, Basil Johnston finds that preservation of language is paramount to retaining an understanding of a people’s cultural identity, and if it is lost, then so too would be the ability to understand, sustain, enrich or pass on the heritage of that people. This is true not only of the tribal Native languages, to which he is referring, but to the many African languages as well. “Only language and literature can restore the ‘Indianness’” (10). Native languages, according to Johnston, are as much a part of this country’s heritage as the snowshoes and arrowheads that are collected and should be enshrined as such. He further found that while the publication of an “Indian” book may not be financially profitable, the wealth that it would add to our nation’s intellect and literary heritage is beyond anything that could be expressed in monetary terms. The message contained within the quotes of both Morrison and Johnston is the importance of preserving and sharing the history of the cultures through the memories of their



people – the oral traditions that have been the keeper of the tribal origins since the beginning. To remember, and to speak and write about the past keeps it fresh in the present generation and in future generations. To tell the stories of the past enables the memories of what both cultures have suffered through, together and apart, to be brought into the present and remain among the living rather than die out and be forgotten. Patrick Mingos notes:

We can be certain that whenever faces gathered around the campfire, there were Africans there to serve as spiritual guides into a different kind of wilderness.

When there were dances to celebrate, deaths to mourn, or festivals to mark the passing of the seasons, there were Africans present. On the Trail Where We Cried, there were also African tears. This we must never forget. (470)

The bonds of these two cultures are interwoven with one another through the loss, pain, and suffering as well as the joys and triumphs they've shared. As was the case with their ancestors, these two cultures stand in solidarity to let the world know of the struggle of their ancestors and that the voices of the present are now able to speak for the previously silenced past and hope for a better future.

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