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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Life Matters: Nineteenth-Century Women's Autobiographical Narratives

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Laurie Nies

Committee in charge:

Professor Sara Johnson, Chair
Professor Kathryn Walkiewicz, Co-Chair
Professor Rachel Klein
Professor Rosaura Sánchez
Professor Erin Suzuki

2023

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The Dissertation of Laurie Nies is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

DEDICATION

For PJ,
my North Star and forever champion.

-

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE	iii
DEDICATION	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
VITA	ix
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	x
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: Domestic Horror at the Intersection of Race and Gender	28
CHAPTER TWO: Staging Survivance	68
CHAPTER THREE: Every Image Tells a Story	101
CHAPTER FOUR: Testimonios de Mujeres Californianas	136
CONCLUSION	170

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1: Hattie E. Wilson Personal Ad.....	1
Fig. 2: Title Page of <i>Our Nig</i>	53
Fig. 3: “Princess Winnemucca”	87
Fig. 4: Paiute Delegation 1880	89
Fig. 5: The Many Faces of Zitkala-Ša	109
Fig. 6: <i>The Sun Dance Opera</i>	113
Fig. 7: “Plays and Players”.....	114
Fig. 8: On the Lecture Circuit	121
Fig. 9: The Machado Quilt.....	165

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Life Matters: Nineteenth-Century Women's Autobiographical Narratives

by

Laurie Nies

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Sara Johnson, Chair
Professor Kathryn Walkiewicz, Co-Chair

Women's life narratives of the long nineteenth-century, encompassing the period from the early 1800s to the early 1900s, emerged against the backdrop of significant social, cultural, and political transformations in the United States. Despite their rich historical and cultural value, narratives that deviate from the Western canonical model of autobiography are often overlooked by literary and history scholars. This dissertation addresses this absence by focusing on the heterogenous terrain of autobiographical genres and the "outlaw" modes of self-(re)presentation that served Black, Indigenous, and women of color (BIWOC). Employing a deconstructionist

approach that challenges the law of genre, as well as the authority and stability of genre classifications, I argue that classifications limit creativity, exclude marginalized voices, and reinforce power structures that are inevitably gendered, raced and classed. Adopting a more fluid, open approach to our understanding of life narration will allow new forms and possibilities to emerge. I analyze BIWOC stories within the geo-political moment and the positionality of the autobiographical/narrative “I.” I explore the African American slave narrative of Harriet Jacobs, *Incident’s in the Life of a Slave Girl*, alongside Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig: or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. The authors employed and upended gothic conventions to emphasize the unique horror of captivity for Black women, both in the South and the *free* North. Destabilizing the image of the domestic sphere and who should be feared, they challenge the paternalistic notion that slavery was benign. I then examine the life-telling lectures of Indigenous activists Sarah Winnemucca (Paiute) and Zitkala-Ša (Sioux). Their narrative performances function as tools of survivance that contest the notion of the “vanishing Indian,” preserve oral traditions threatened by assimilation, and reimagine Native Americans as U.S. citizens *and* Indigenous tribal peoples. Also employing performance as strategy are Mexican Americans Josefa Carrillo de Fitch, Juana Machado de Wrightington, and Maria Inocenta Pico de Avila. Their testimonios (re)figure women as active participants in California history. The cultural work these stories perform underscore the importance of recovering and (re)reading unconventional modes of life narration that complicate a master narrative that privileges hegemonic voices and histories.

INTRODUCTION

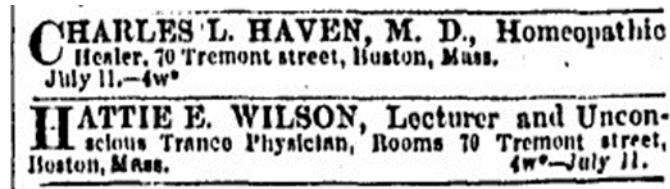


Fig. 1. Hattie E. Wilson Personal Ad.
“Advertisements.” *Banner of Light*, vol. 23, no. 17, 11 July 1868, p.5.

How do we determine if a text is autobiographical, or more precisely, what form of self-construction is distinguished as a life-telling narrative? The advertisement above (see fig. 1) was published in 1868 and placed by Black medium Harriet, “Hattie,” Wilson in the *Banner of Light*, a popular American Spiritualist newspaper.¹ Wilson had to choose her words very carefully; rates for advertisements are listed at 25 cents for the first line and fifteen cents thereafter. Note that she promotes herself as a “lecturer,” and a “physician,” professional titles that craft an image of respectability. She also assures the reader she is an “unconscious” medium, further lending an air of legitimacy to her profession and services. Placement of her announcement is also strategic, positioned below, but adjacent to Charles L. Haven, a medical doctor and homeopathic healer. Wilson skillfully aligns her credentials with Haven’s, suggesting a link between progressive medicine, homeopathy, and progressive religious ideology, Spiritualism. Their proximity in physical space, on the printed page and geographically, creates a tacit association. The two also

¹ Wilson’s advertisement, which ran for three weeks, with consideration given to inflation, cost a total of \$35.00. A number of prominent 19th century male doctors were members and promoters of the Spiritualist movement. It was also common for female mediums to advertise themselves as “clairvoyant physicians,” because they believed they were able to *see* into every part of their subject’s being, diagnose the problem, and facilitate healing. Clairvoyants therefore viewed themselves as professional practitioners. For more information see: Owen, Alex. *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, U of Chicago P, 2204. Pp. 107-138; and Packer, Jane B. *Life and Experiences of Mrs. Jane B. Packer, Clairvoyant Physician...* Sweet Publishing Co, 1892. Research on Charles L. Haven has produced little information. Records from Georgetown University suggest he graduated from medical school in 1865. Dr. Charles Linnaeus Haven, a resident of Maine, died at the age of 35 on Dec. 2, 1868. This would have been five months after working with Wilson in Boston.

occupy the same rooms or office space in Boston during the same time period, reinforcing the notion of an ideological and professional relationship.² This is not to imply that Wilson is embellishing or creating a false narrative, but instead, that this is how she views herself and wants others to do the same. I contend that this small snippet of printed material is self-referential. We can *read* Wilson's subjectivity and agency in the advertisement. It inscribes identity and informs public opinion, telling a story about the author, and a story she has carefully shaped. I consider this an autobiographical act.

Black, Indigenous and Women of Color (BIWOC), including Wilson, and the diverse ways they expand on the traditional form of autobiography, are the focus of this dissertation. I extend the argument of noted autobiography scholar Paul Eakin, who posits we create identity through self-narration. When we talk or write about ourselves, the autobiographical occasion, we are taking part in an ongoing process of self-construction that calls "our narrative identities into being" (2). Identity is not fixed, it is constructed and maintained through repeated performances of gender norms and behaviors. This highlights the ways autobiographical agency can be shaped by regulatory discourses of identity, and how this agency can be used to challenge or reinforce these discourses. Our identity(ies) and the stories we tell about ourselves are influenced by larger social and historical contexts that privilege some voices over others, and by doing so, shapes the ways in which autobiographical subjects are able to articulate and make sense of their experience. I am interested in the ways nineteenth-century autobiographical narrators used discourses of identity and the modes of life expression available to them to assert that their lives and experiences had value. By examining their stories, we gain profound insight into life

² The fourth week of Wilson's advertised availability was cut short. Reinforcing the legitimacy of their profession and their working relationship, "Drs. Haven & Wilson," issued a joint "Medical Notice" in the August 1st edition of the *Banner of Light*, p.5, informing their "patients and the public generally," that "the Spirit Cure Institute" would be closed while Wilson visited friends in Maine.

writing/narrating as a genre that resolutely affirms one's humanity, thus challenging the stereotypes and structures that perpetuate physical oppression, social marginalization, and political exclusion.

I add to existing scholarship with an exploration of non-traditional modes of self-referential life narrating expression. I argue that recognizing and valuing all forms of life narration as autobiographical lived experience is crucial for addressing historical silences and advancing a more complex, diverse and sometimes uncomfortable U.S. narrative. All forms of self and collective experience not only have value but perform important cultural and political work. I analyze the authors rhetorical strategies, and how they narrate their lives against the grain. In accordance with current scholarship, I consider an auto-bio-graph an *act* (self-life-write) and life narrating, a *practice* that does not privilege or value one life or form of production over another. This recognizes the many ways of narrating a life, and importantly, modes that do not conform to the canonical model of the Western autobiography. This includes African American slave narratives, Native American oral history and performance, and Mexican American or Chicana testimonios. These methods of expression are not culturally distinct. In fact, slave narratives are also testimonios, and many cultures are invested in storytelling and performance. Nevertheless, these specific genres have proven to be essential, productive forms of cultural, historical witnessing and testimony –as evidenced by their continued popularity. I demonstrate that these generic frameworks are particularly effective for self-affirmation, asserting collective identity and writing against U.S. national myths.

Life Narration as Alternative Discourse and Counter-knowledge

It has been forty-five years since French scholar Philippe Lejeune attempted to define the genre of autobiography and the unspoken “pact” that existed between an author and their

audience –a pact that established the author’s identity (they were real and also the narrator), and their narrative focus (their life or personality) (4). This naturally led the audience to assume what was presented was truthful and not a fictional story. Lejeune, however, would be the first to acknowledge, as evidenced by the numerous revisions made to his theory, that our understanding of the genre, similar to how we know ourselves, is constantly evolving. As scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, life narration is a “moving target, a set of shifting self- referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present” (1). Building on contemporary life writing scholarship, this dissertation seeks to explore and complicate our understanding of autobiography or life narration by focusing on various constructions of self-representation and the relationship between author positionality and their production.

Autobiography as a term is relatively new, emerging in the West at the end of the eighteenth century with the advent of the Enlightenment. Of course, self-writing and culturally informed life narratives occurred long before the term was coined. According to Robert Folkenflik, the genre flourished after its inauguration but it would be two centuries before the study of autobiography came into its own (8). What was frequently missing in scholarship was an analysis of life narratives that did not prioritize or privilege hegemonic culture and an independent individual with access to public discourse. In 1980, James Olney realized the critical potential of autobiography by connecting it to the cultural moment and contemporary interest in Black Studies, African Studies and Women’s Studies. Autobiography, he argues, provides historical insight, the possibility of counter narratives and “a privileged access to an experience ... that no other variety of writing can offer” (13). In her essay “Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography” (1992), Julia Watson extended Olney’s argument, urging

scholars to move beyond “mainstream theorizing,” which tended to focus on the exemplary *bio* (life) of a white male, and expand the canon of life narratives that were used to validate the discipline of autobiography studies. She posited that “women, people of color or those of low social status” were often ignored, the target of “bios-bias,” because they “lack[ed] the public dimension of a life worth living or recounting” (58-59). As a result, a number of critics have endeavored to broaden the scope of the field and its understanding of subjectivity, identity and the practice of narrating a life (Eakin, McCooley, Olney, Rak, Saunders).

In terms of subjectivity, it is important to consider the different processes at play, specifically, how the narrators remember their past and mobilize the authority of personal memory to make sense of their present self and negotiate its orientation within the particular socio-cultural public frame/sphere. “Memory,” Smith and Watson contend, is “the source, authenticator, and destabilizer of auto biographical acts” (*Reading* 22). Memories of lived experience authenticate and serve as evidence in autobiographical acts. It is how the reader or audience understands the narrator as a “uniquely qualified authority” (*Reading* 33). Authority of experience thus confers a political and public identity, providing those who have often been marginalized –women, the enslaved, the displaced or the colonized –an opportunity to speak and contest what the hegemonic culture of a given time and place contends should not be remembered or recounted. As a result, narrators will often explicitly assert narrative authority in the title of their works. Consider the autobiographical narratives of Black authors Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. Their lived experience as either a “slave girl” or a “free Black” reinforces their *authorial* knowledge (authority) and the veracity of their text. In a similar mode, Native American authors Sarah Winnemucca, *Life Among the Paiutes*, and Zitkála-Šá, “The School

Days of an Indian Girl,” use authority of identity to affirm their communal and personal expertise. Ironically, the titles announce and exploit a socially constructed identity that is subsequently complicated by the narrator’s story of self.

Identity is complex, multifaceted, a performative *production* because categories of identity –gender, class, sexuality, race, and ability –are constructs based on societal *norms* that are politically motivated and regulated by systems of power. Judith Butler argues, “[i]f there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a *woman*, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification” (79). In other words, identity is performative, the acting, reenacting, and perhaps, resisting of society’s evolving norms. Subjectivity is composed of overlapping models of identity that vary in the individual’s relation to others. Thus, how the narrator makes themselves known and how their audience understands them is through various collaborative, retrospective and reflective acts of “identification, implication, and differentiation” (*Reading* 38). The literal site of narration (the location and occasion) as well as the temporal moment (historical and cultural), additionally influence a person’s sense of self and how they interpret their lived experiences. This does not mean the life narrator passively accepts or transmits prescribed or socially informed notions of selfhood. As Smith and Watson argue, “we like to think of human beings as agents of or actors in their own lives,” with both the freedom and ability to act or speak in any given environment (*Reading* 54). In a sense, all life stories are an act of agency, but the degree of agency can be limited by social position and access to discursive practices. Relatedly, the narrator’s control of content can be restricted by societal standards or expectations. Gendered

constraints on autobiographical subjectivity, authority, and autonomy have contributed to new modes of life narration.

Autobiography traditionally privileges the white, Western man. As a genre, it is frequently bound by limits, “between literary and factual writing; between narrative as a literary device and narrative as lived experience; between autobiography and fiction” (McCooey 277). Fortunately, in the last twenty years, autobiography is understood in broader and contextualized terms, opening up new texts and cultural spaces for study.³ In Caren Kaplan’s essay, “Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects,” she argues for reevaluating and revising the generic limits of autobiography. Building on Barbara Harlow’s concept of resistance literature and its relationship to the geopolitical moment, Kaplan advocates for the inclusion of life narratives that challenge the *law* of genre and conventions of Western autobiography. These *outlaw*, oppositional life narrative forms work both “*for* and *with* women” to challenge the “hierarchal structures of patriarchy, capitalism and colonial discourses” (135-136). Although Harlow’s focus was Third World autobiographical texts, and Kaplan’s, on contemporary transnational life writing (including prison memoirs, testimonial literature, ethnographic writing, and cultural autobiography), their scholarship provides a lens for *reading* the life stories of resistance by marginalized U.S. narrators.

Drawing upon the concept of resistance literature and the importance of the political moment advocated by Harlow and Kaplan, my research delves into what Smith and Watson term the “forgotten century” (1819-1919), a period marked by significant transformations in U.S. territories and boundaries (*Before* 6). The status of women at the center of my analysis, African Americans, Native Americans, and colonized Mexican American women, underwent profound

³ In *Reading Autobiography*, authors Smith and Watson extend Kaplan’s the concept of the *autobiographical*, identifying sixty different, but not conclusive, genres that fall under the umbrella of life narration.

changes. Black women endured unique challenges shaped by both their race and gender. According to the Virginia Slave act of 1662, they were property and their children, who followed their condition of the mother, were enslaved at birth. Alongside the loss of family ties, the women were subject to physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and the challenges of motherhood within the constraints of slavery. Indigenous women faced the impact of settler colonialism, the removal and the loss of native land, containment on reservations, and assimilation practices that disrupted their social structures and cultural practices. Californio women, living in the context of expansion into the Western frontier, experienced the clash of their Hispanic heritage with the dominant Anglo-American culture.

Geographical setting plays an important role in graphing 19th-century women's identities and how they perceived themselves. Black authors Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson are critical of the lack of difference between the South and Jim Crow North, as the latter enforced the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and "aped the customs of slavery" (*Incidents* 135). For both authors, the domestic space (the Southern plantation and Northern home) were exploitive socioeconomic spheres of confinement, abuse and moral depravity. Place and location play a natural role in shaping the identity of Native American activists Sarah Winnemucca (Paiute) and Zitkala-Ša (Sioux). Indigenous peoples consider the land and all of its resources their *relations*; they have a kinship with the land (Justice, Howe). The Northern Paiute, were nomadic peoples who roamed over Northern Nevada and Oregon. Winnemucca experienced pre-contact life, and the Paiutes subsequent removal to a reservation at Pyramid Lake, NV. Advocating for sovereignty, she gave lectures in San Francisco, on the East coast and with her family, lobbied politicians in Washington, D.C. Born on a reservation in South Dakota and educated in at a federal government boarding school, Zitkala-Ša experienced the U.S. containment and assimilation

machinations first hand. Like Winnemucca, she too spent considerable time on the East Coast and at the U.S. capitol. The two women had multifaceted identities that encompassed both their Native American heritage and their interactions with the dominant Euro-American culture. They engaged with and were influenced by multiple cultural contexts, adapting and negotiating their identities within those frameworks.

Testimonio narrators Josefa Carrillo de Fitch, Juana Machado de Wrightington, and Maria Inocenta Pico de Avila enjoyed autonomy under Spanish rule and resisted Mexican authority. Constructing a unique identity, the Californios regarded themselves as *native* settlers of the land and California their home. For those who were colonized, as well as enslaved peoples, the concept of *home*, by which I mean community (local and national), was complex and mediated by varying power structures and ideologies such as slavery, the federal government and manifest destiny. Although Jacobs had been enslaved in the South, it was home, where she became a mother, had family, community and where she returns after the Civil War. BIWOC narratives of home are deeply rooted in the lived realities of captivity, land dispossession and displacement but their life stories serve as powerful testimonies to the resilience and agency of oppressed peoples during the long nineteenth-century.

Life Narration and Cultural Modes of Production

When examining *what* women wrote during the nineteenth century, literature scholarship tends to privilege the novel or poetry over the personal narrative. Historians generally read texts for their documentary value in terms of the domestic sphere (Smith and Watson, *Long*485). This not only ignores the specific motives, energy, and diverse practices that motivate life narratives but also the cultural traditions that inform their style and form. Indeed, many scholars take issue with the very term *autobiography* and its limits. Julie Rak asserts it is an exclusionary by nature

and therefore, should be viewed “as a discourse rather than as a genre, and as a discourse that is sustained by the trappings of identification that have underwritten what the self is and how it has been seen in much of the Western world” (*Negotiating* ix). This critique becomes even more relevant when examining the life stories of marginalized and socially Othered individuals.

The life narrations of these writers, despite their inherent complications and silences, hold significant value in advancing a more comprehensive, diverse, and multi-perspective narrative within the predominantly Western historical record. For example, in discussing African American slave narratives, John Ernest acknowledges the inherent problems when voice is often mediated by a white hand. Nevertheless, he asserts that the silences, the gaps, and complications are immensely valuable, “not despite such complications but because of them, for such complications are not incidental to the story of American slavery and its effects but very much a part of it” 10). Similarly, in her analysis of Indigenous life writing, Michelle Raheja suggests we pay close attention to “intentional rhetorical silences” as a key strategy in narrations of the self and of tribal knowledges, as well as a strategy of engagement with “white- controlled literary and publishing practices” (88). Despite complications with language, translation and autonomy, scholars also note the importance of reading Mexican American autobiographies and testimonies for what they add to our understanding of ethnic and gender history (Beebe and Senkewicz 3). Embracing the complexities and challenges faced by marginalized writers reveals the indispensable nature of their life narrations for shedding light on hidden experiences, amplifying marginalized voices, and countering the carefully constructed, whitewashed history of the United States. For these narrators the personal was real, truthful, and in terms of feminist theory, political.

Through an engagement with life writing studies, this project examines the way BIWOC employ life narration to counter absent or stereotypical representation and inscribe themselves within the U.S. historical record. It considers the way racial, religious, gendered and cultural differences inform personal and collective identity as well as societal perceptions. Through close *readings*, it responds to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," by investigating various forms of literary and performative expression, their availability and relationship to the intended audience. I specifically focus on cultural scripts that write against erasure and advocate for social justice. In slave narratives, Black women writers speak not only for their race but also as a group subjected to a unique and layered subjugation. Their stories graphically reveal the violence and unspeakable horror of human captivity, serving as a powerful challenge to ideologies that support and legitimize dehumanization and the institution of slavery. Indigenous narratives likewise underscore the importance for utilizing cultural modes of expression –oral and performative –to contest a dominant white hegemonic narrative by insisting "on difference, not as deficiency, but as *distinction*" (Justice 155). Drawing on storytelling and performance techniques, Mexican testimonios are equally powerful eyewitness accounts. Although the veracity or integrity of these first-person accounts are sometimes questioned, "the insufficiency of language, the failure of representation, the fallibility of memory, but most important, the very nature of trauma, engender silences that make testimony simultaneously the most eloquent and the most elliptical of writing" (Cavallo 1).

This is not to imply that ethnic groups only used or continue to favor one form of life narrating over another. Instead, my aim is to demonstrate the effectiveness of these narrative techniques for challenging colonization (including the colonized body), appropriation, and displacement. I'm interested in the *way* BIWOC narrators relate their life experiences. I explore

their mode of expression, delivery, and whether it is informed by the author/narrator's cultural background. I question whether popular literary genres of the era influenced their style and content. If so, did this impact audience reception? And significantly, did their narratives encourage reader or audience self-reflection and examination? My strategy is to examine the narrative and political moment, the positionality of the autobiographical/narrative "I," and the tactics the subjects employ to intervene and disrupt social and historical oppression. In sum, I aim to discover the ways that life narration bears historical witness and complicates the reader or audience's understanding of who can and should speak.

Feminist Practices: Making the Personal Political

Central to my project is an analysis of how Black, Indigenous and women of color drew on and narrated personal and collective histories to embrace what we now would consider feminist practice. They may not have identified as feminists, but they were actively taking part in the struggle to increase opportunities for women and oppressed peoples. They possessed some form of what Patricia Hall Collins would term "feminist consciousness" (31). The narrators understood that intersecting categories of discrimination, such as gender, race, and class exacerbated their marginalization and discrimination. While they may have experienced parallel forms of subjugation, they also recognized the lived experiences of African American, Indigenous, and Mexican American women greatly differed from white women. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that feminism, whether Black, Indigenous, or Chicana, is not a monolithic concept; it encompasses a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Individuals differ in what, how and why they choose to resist repression.

White and African American women faced significant challenges and limitations in society. While they shared common goals and aspirations –motherhood, education,

emancipation, faith, family and community –Black women faced additional struggles. More than a century before legal rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw would coin the term intersectionality, they understood the different forms of repression they experienced because of their race, gender or class could not be separated (140). In her speech, “Ain’t I a Woman,” delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention, Sojourner Truth pointedly underscored the difference in white and Black female subjectivity. White suffragists pushed back against the prevailing notion that they did not have the intellectual capacity to vote because they were pampered and protected –the weaker sex. Truth wondered how this logic applied to Black women, who worked equally hard and shared the same abuses as Black men. Even when they were *free*, Black women were never afforded the protection and basic *human* rights of white women because their femininity and autonomy were not acknowledged. Early Black feminist practices thus focused on abolishing slavery and attaining rights for all women, regardless of color.

Life writing was a powerful tool for highlighting shared aspirations and the barriers that denied African American women access to equal opportunity. In my analysis of the narratives of enslaved Black women, I explore how they express and articulate self-consciousness; how they utilize what Collins terms their “self-defined standpoint,” a perspective derived from concrete lived experience, to inform personal and collective knowledge (37). I’m interested in the ways Black women employed the gothic genre to subvert the reader’s understanding of monstrosity and pinpoint what was haunting U.S. consciousness. I analyze their use of language and teachings of Christianity to challenge the hypocrisy of a society that claimed to be Christian while perpetuating racial inequality and denying basic rights to Black women. Jacobs and Wilson emphasized the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals. Drawing on gothic tropes and religious rhetoric, their life narratives sought to expose the contradiction between professed

religious values and discriminatory practices. They challenged the dominant stereotypes and narratives used to justify slavery, exposing the dehumanization of enslaved individuals, particularly Black women. Their narratives shed light on the distinct oppressions they withstood, such as the denial of reproductive autonomy, the heartbreaking separation from family, and forced labor in domestic roles.

Nineteenth-century Native American women, on the other hand, held positions of importance and power within their communities that were often distinct from those accessible to African American and Euro-American white women. In many Indigenous nations, including the Northern Paiutes and the Sioux, the women had political and spiritual authority. They actively participated in governance systems, provided economic contributions, and preserved cultural traditions. According to historian Sally Rosch Wagner, the rights enjoyed by women of the Six Nation Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy served as an inspiration for early feminist leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage and Lucretia Mott (42).⁴ Within the matriarchal society of the Haudenosaunee, women owned property, controlled the land and the economy, and were granted equal and full participation in the government.

The Haudenosaunee may have informed the suffragettes' progressive perspective on women's rights, but white women were also influenced by a competing vision of Native American women. Popular literature, gift books and women's magazines routinely showcased captivity narratives, romance stories, and poems that depicted a fictionalized, sentimental, and stereotypical portrait of Indigenous women. "The volume of material," historian Linda Clemmons argues, "suggests a public fascination with a people who were believed to have

⁴ The six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy –the Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida and Tuscarora –occupied what is now upper New York state, close to the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls.

vanished from public scrutiny” (41) Tales focused on women’s morals, devotion to children and their beauty, which mirrored the standard attributed to white women of the era –a fair complexion, long tresses, pleasing figure, and fashionable clothing. White women imagined Native American women as a glorified, if somewhat exoticized, version of themselves. While many of the texts “portrayed women in a positive light according to the criteria of the day,” Clemmons concludes, “they simultaneously created a fictional Native-American woman, divorced from her cultural heritage and male counterparts and dependent on the white population for her identity” (54). Indigenous women employed a variety of tools to take advantage of and address these competing notions of Indigeneity.

Foreshadowing the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 70s, Native American women countered settler colonialism through political and social engagement –on the printed page and the stage.⁵ In a letter to her fiancé Carlos Montezuma, Zitkala-Ša (Yankton Dakota Sioux) echoed Sojourner Truth’s claim that women were as capable as men, particularly in terms of activism. At the time, Montezuma believed Indigenous men and women should work separately for reform. “Am I not an Indian woman,” Zitkala-Ša demanded, “as capable to think in serious matters and as thoroughly interested in the race as any one or two of you men put together” (Lewandowski 61). Indigenous women organized themselves into various groups, both within and across tribal boundaries, to address issues such as land dispossession, forced removal, and

⁵ In analyzing the nineteenth-century texts and performances from a feminist perspective I have been guided by a number of Indigenous women scholars. These include: Allen, Paula Gunn (Laguna Pueblo); Huhndorf, Shari (Yupik); Piatote, Beth (Nez Perce); and Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg).

the protection of Indigenous rights. Often joining with white women's groups, they aimed to resist the erasure of Native cultures and promote self-determination.⁶

Spanish speaking Mexican settler-colonial women residing in Alta (Upper) California, were similarly focused on cultural preservation and passing on their Spanish heritage to future generations. Californianas maintained cultural traditions, including language, music, dance, and religious practices, that reinforced their identity and asserted their unique contribution to Californio society. Their lives and their role in society, however, were shaped by patriarchal systems of power. Men held primary authority and women were expected to fulfill traditional gender roles, such as being wives, mothers and homemakers. Marriages were often arranged, with considerations of social status, wealth, and landownership. *Daughters of the land*, descendants of the first settler- soldier families, had little say in choosing their spouses, but Spanish law allowed them to inherit property and pursue legal action. Those who lived on ranchos played important roles in managing the household, including overseeing domestic affairs, and the ranching operations. Some women, particularly those from elite or influential families, were able to use their social connections and status to advocate for political causes or to influence government officials. Californio women, particularly widows and single women, acquired and managed land and property independently. They engaged in agricultural pursuits, owned businesses, and made economic decisions, demonstrating their financial independence

⁶In addition to organizing within their communities, a number of Indigenous women worked for the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) as well as the Society of American Indians (SAI), including: Laura Cornelius Kellogg (Oneida), who similar to Winnemucca and Bonnin, was a public speaker, author, and performer; Marie Louise Bottineau Baldwin (Métis/Turtle Mountain Chippewa) testified before Congress regarding Turtle Mountain sovereignty; and Susan LaFlesche, (Omaha) physician and activist. Others, such as nurse Estaiene M. DePeltquestangue (Kickapoo), artist Angel de Cora, and poet Ruth Muskrat Bronson (Cherokee), worked with the SAI only. On the role of Indigenous women in politics and activism see: Maddox, Lucy. *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race, and Reform*. Cornell UP, 2018; Cahill, Cathleen D. *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement*. The U of North Carolina P, 2020; and Hoxie, Frederick E., ed., *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era*, Boston: Bedford, 2001.

and agency. Unlike many of their husbands, Californianas were devout Roman Catholics with close ties to the mission institution and after secularization, to the church. The church exerted control, but it also offered limited educational and employment opportunities. Nevertheless, the church and Californio culture constructed a hierarchal race and class-based society, and women were often complicit in enforcing discrimination. By employing feminist theory to analyze the life stories of Californianas, as well as African American and Indigenous women, we not only gain critical insight into the intersecting dynamics of gender, race, and power, but also illuminate the unique experiences, resilience, and agency of their communities.

Autobiographical Performance: Staging Identity and Resistance

Performance theory serves as an additional framework for analyzing women's life-telling narratives. While text preserves the narrator's lived experience, performance provides a communal experience and an embodied representation. In, *Autobiography and Performance: Performing Selves*, Deirdre Heddon argues that women discovered that performance offered unique possibilities, a way to "reveal otherwise invisible lives" because they were no longer on the margins, but center stage with the narrative authority to "talk out, talk back, talk otherwise" (2-3). In addition to asserting selfhood, I argue that performance is also a means of resistance and reinvention. It creates a space for making appeals and an opportunity to (re)shape or complicate the audiences understanding of identity. As Smith points out, life narrations "become occasions for restaging subjectivity and autobiographical strategies become occasions for the staging of resistance" (Long 308). Staged performances were a platform for presenting matters of importance to nineteenth-century BIWOC, such as justice, autonomy, equal rights, education, and cultural preservation.

The very *act* of narrating a life is inherently political. Who gets to speak and how they represent or imagine themselves engages in the politics of subjectivity. Narrator representation and presentation can also be influenced or mediated by audience expectations. Nevertheless, a “here-and-nowness,” the sharing of space and time in concert with the narrator’s direct mode of address, has the potential to create an environment of intimacy, community and immediacy (Heddon 5-6). In live representation, unlike text, the narrator can respond to and engage with the audience. They have the immediate ability to gauge reaction, to recognize if their performance has the possibility to incite change or cultural transformation. Performance is a promissory act,” Della Pollock claims. “Not because it can only promise possible change but because it catches it participants –often by surprise—in a contract with possibility: with imagine what might be, could be, should be” (2). In this way, autobiographical performance serves not only as a means of individual expression, but also as a powerful instrument for political mobilization and cultural transformation. While Heddon acknowledges autobiographical performance occurred prior to the second wave of feminism, she argues its political potential was not “harnessed” until the 1970s (21). She further situates “the age of testimony,” which puts self-referential performance in conversation with the performance of history, at the end of the twentieth-century (51). Heddon makes some valid points, but her argument overlooks the political and historical work of nineteenth-century women who actively employed performance not as a means of theater or art, but as a means of feminine empowerment and resistance.

Performance during the nineteenth century opened up alternate and counter discursive spaces for those who were excluded or marginalized from the hegemonic public sphere. According to Michael Warner, “counterpublics” are formed by groups of people who share a common interest or identity and who create alternative modes of communication and expression

to challenge dominant norms and values (63). Rita Felski adds to Warner's scholarship, figuring counterpublics not simply as oppositional spaces, but rather, as complex and dynamic formations that provide a sense of belonging and community –spaces where subordinate groups have the power to challenge and transform the dominant culture from within. For example, a feminist public sphere, “serves a dual function: internally, it generates a gender-specific identity grounded in a consciousness of community and solidarity among women; externally, it seeks to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims, challenging existing structures of authority through political activity and theoretical critique” (168). Nancy Fraser further expands on the concept of counterpublics, arguing that they are crucial sites for democratic participation, social justice and spaces for knowledge production. She posits feminism is a subaltern discursive arena where women “armed with language,” either spoken or printed, “recast our needs and identities, thereby reducing, although not eliminating, the extent of our disadvantage in official public sphere (67). When considering women’s nineteenth-century life stories and performance we can see how narrators might have created parallel counterpublics, providing alternative narratives and perspectives that ran alongside dominant cultural narratives. Others may have been part of oppositional counterpublics, who challenged dominant cultural norms and values. Still others may have been part of subaltern counterpublics, who drew on their experiences of marginalization to create counterpublics that gave voice to their struggles and identities.

As a Black medium, Hattie Wilson employed autobiographical *afterlife* performance to construct identity (perhaps, an alternate identity), gain access to a public sphere and support herself financially. Ironically, *absenting* herself from the performance via trance, Wilson gained access to a counterpublic space where she could lecture or speak privately with spiritual and medical authority. For Indigenous peoples, performance is a cultural and traditional form of

expression. 19th-century Native Americans drew on oral traditions to lecture for women's groups and various reform movements to protest government policy and press for education rights, sovereignty, and citizenship. Others took part in *tableaux vivants*, living pictures of history, to control re/presentation and counter the notion they were on the precipice of extinction. Testimonios are intrinsically performative. The narrator acts out or enacts their memories to bring the past into the future through a number of rhetorical strategies. Information is staged through presence, a description of the setting, the narrator's voice ("I"), dialogue and other storytelling techniques. Californio women used performativity to craft identity. They used performance tactics to control the interview process and affirm their value not only in society but also in shaping California history. These brief examples recognize the historical and political work of 19th-century women who actively employed performance as a means of empowerment and resistance. Through a variety of tactics and rhetorical maneuvers, BIWOC were able to construct their identities, gain access to public spaces, and challenge dominant narratives. By analyzing the complex interplay of subjectivity, audience expectations, and performance techniques, we can gain a deeper understanding of the potential of life narration to inspire change and create new possibilities.

The Archive

This dissertation draws on an array of primary sources –slave narratives, speeches, letters, newspaper articles, and testimonios –to argue for the value in expanding our understanding of what we consider life narration or an autobiographical source. My fascination with archival materials led me in many directions. For the chapter on the Gothic slave narratives, I spent considerable time exploring information that was recently unearthed on Harriet Wilson. *The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occultist Periodicals*

(IAPSOP) was invaluable for their digitalized collection of the *Banner of Light*. While Cari M. Carpenter and Carolyn Sorisio's recent scholarship on Winnemucca gathers all of her newspaper correspondence into one tome, nothing compares to viewing print in its original context. The databases of *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* provided a glimpse into 19th-century society and what interested specific 19th century readers. Audience, geographical local, headings, article juxtaposition and page placement were all revealing in terms of perceived editorial or entertainment value. Zitkala-Ša's very first speech at Earlham College was available in digitized copies of the *Earlhamite*. Although the National Headquarters for the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) in Washington, D.C. was closed when I visited in September 2021, I was able to find digitalized copies of reviews for Zitkala-Ša's lectures in the *Federation News* and various newspaper databases. In addition to visiting her gravesite at Arlington cemetery, I viewed the surviving portraits of George Caitlin's *Indian Gallery* on exhibit at the Smithsonian. Fortunately, the Californio testimonios have been recovered from the Bancroft Library archives and translated. The San Diego History Center Research Archive in Balboa Park has materials on Carrillo de Fitch (although the majority of information relates to her husband Henry). The archive also houses pictures, land deeds, genealogical trees and an heirloom quilt for Machado de Wrightington.⁷

Overview of Chapters

The following chapters employ a framework of deconstructionism, feminist and/or performance theory, to analyze the culturally diverse and innovative ways women utilized life narration as a counterstorytelling tool to assert their agency, resist subjugation, and demand social change. Chapter one, "Domestic Horror at the Intersection of Race and Gender: The

⁷ Information is not collected in one file, but rather, under Ridington, Wrightington, and Machado.

Gothic Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson,” underscores the flexibility and generic hybridity of life writing and the importance of studying the rhetorical strategies and blended genres utilized by African American authors to create a counter-discourse. I analyze Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (which excavates the evils of slavery in the South) alongside Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* (an exposé of racial abuse and indentured servitude in the “free” North). Scholars have studied the sentimental tropes within narratives of slavery but have largely ignored their gothic overtones. This is surprising, considering the popularity of the American Gothic during the 19th century, as well as its continued use by contemporary authors to unveil this dark chapter in America’s history.⁸ I read their narratives as a racialized form of the female gothic. I argue the women encoded their narrative with gothic overtones to evoke fear and destabilize prevailing religious and political views regarding slavery. Their unique form of life writing upends traditional genre conventions, such as the haunted home, confinement, and the dark villain, to challenge a hegemonic narrative that posits slavery was a benign or paternalistic institution. Within their different geographical settings, the authors expose the brutal realities of slavery and the psychological trauma inflicted on enslaved individuals. Both Jacobs and Wilson flip the gothic script, revealing the hidden fear is not the Black female body, but rather, the monstrous, hypocritical white Christian.

In Chapters two and three I explore the Native American life-tellings of Sarah Winnemucca (Northern Paiute) and Zitkala-Ša (Yankton Dakota/ Sioux). The Western concept of autobiography is foreign to Indigenous peoples who do not value self above community. Indigenous life stories focus on recording history, customs, beliefs, and after European contact,

⁸ Contemporary writers Octavia Butler, *Kindred*; Toni Morrison, *Beloved*; Marlon James, *John Crows Devil*, and *The Book of Night Women*; Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage*; Brandon Massey, *Dark Corner*; and Tananarive Due, *Ghost Summer*, are just a few who have employed the gothic to articulate the horrors of slavery.

writing against erasure. I've divided my examination of Native American narratives into two chapters to underscore the different political landscapes and thus the liberties, or lack thereof, for those who performed their stories either before or after the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890). Scholars have extensively studied both Winnemucca's and Zitkala-Ša's autobiographies. I argue for the value of reading their performances as additional examples of life-telling. In this intervention I am engaging with Indigenous scholars who argue performance offers cultural advantages for life narrating that are not realized by text. I am also examining the spaces available to Indigenous people and women for production, drawing attention to their ability to create counterpublics through oral traditions and performance

In "Staging Survivance: Sara Winnemucca's Public Performances and *Life Among the Piutes*," I argue that her lectures functioned as political tools of resistance and social change – and not only against the dominant culture, but also among her own community. Her public performances and her engagement with newspaper media informed her written autobiography. In addition to increasing book sales, lectures given after publication provided a platform for gathering petition signatures and rallying support for Indian policy reform. Utilizing costume, storytelling, and sometimes humor, Winnemucca's presence and lectures challenged the myth of the *vanishing Indian*. Her speeches highlighted government corruption and advocated for Indigenous sovereignty.

Zitkala-Ša similarly used costume to (re)fashion an identity that complicated her white audience's understanding of *Indianness*. In "Every Image Tells a Story: Zitkala-Ša's Traditional and Transformative Life-Telling Performances," I analyze her productions and unique form of life storytelling – a combination of personal and community experiences, historical fact, sentimental rhetoric, with a dash of the trickster tale. A musician, orator and political activist, she

employed her skills to craft the *Sun Dance Opera* (1913) –a production that honored traditional but federally banned religious practices—and to champion Indigenous rights on the Women’s Club lecture circuit. Zitkala-Ša’s life-telling performances preserved oral traditions threatened by assimilation. I further claim they were transformative, for they reimagined Native Americans as U.S. citizens *and* Indigenous tribal peoples.

In the final chapter, “Testimonios de Mujeres Californianas: Actos de Resistencia,” I investigate the testimonios of Spanish-speaking Californio women who experienced the Spanish colonial period, Mexican independence, Anglo conquest, and subsequent U.S. occupation. I analyze the transcripts of Josefa Carrillo de Fitch, Juana Machado de Wrightington, and Maria Inocenta Pico de Avila. Carrillo’s interview demonstrates the ways that Californio women, despite various masculine systems of power, were able to subvert patriarchy and religious authority. Machado’s narrative, although troubling for its Indigenous racism, provides a nuanced assessment of Mexican colonialism. It is also notable for privileging the many roles’ women played on the rancho and as agents for the church. Pico’s testimonio offers invaluable insight on women’s awareness of the political climate and their active role in conflicts. Her engagement within the public domain in managing property, supporting Californio rebels, and her focus on preserving family and community honor disrupts discourses of gender. I argue the women used performance and various rhetorical tactics to challenge the prevailing notion of women as passive participants in history. Culture, the Western frontier (place), and various periods of colonization influenced their self-representation and sense of identity. In their testimonios, these women assert their agency in terms of what they withhold, what they tell, and how they inscribe their experiences as women into the historical record.

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CHAPTER ONE

Domestic Horror at the Intersection of Race and Gender in the Gothic Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson.

With descriptions of slavery as a feudal institution, horrifying scenes of torture and entrapment, lascivious masters and innocent slave girls, and curses on many generations, the slave narrative reads like a gothic romance with a single, crucial difference: the scenery is not staged but real. – Teresa Goddu (136)

In the nineteenth century the slave narrative became a salient vehicle for Black authors to write to against slavery and advocate for freedom. Increasingly the genre adopted a more novel approach that incorporated dialogue and elements from popular literary styles, including the seduction, sensational, or the sentimental genre. This helped authors who were traditionally marginalized appeal to a wider audience, and importantly, the opportunity to control their own narrative. Most slave narratives published during the antebellum period, or shortly after the Civil War, were written by male authors and incorporate common motifs and a standard plot progression. Predictably, they open with a portrait of the author, and an endorsement by a white Christian who provides coverture that attests to the veracity of the formerly enslaved person's story and their Christian morality.⁹ The narrative describes an abusive, dehumanizing master/mistress, uncertainty and concern over parentage, accounts of slave auctions and separated families, pleas for justice, the eventual journey to freedom, and the author's final reflections on slavery.¹⁰ These authors not only spoke for their entire race, but when written by free or fugitive Black women, for a group doubly marginalized and oppressed. The few memoirs

⁹ According to John Sekora, slave narratives resembled a "black message" sealed in a white envelope because they were bound by abolitionist endorsement or sponsorship. "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative." *Callaloo*, no. 32, 1987, pp. 482–515.

¹⁰ For a more detailed list of reoccurring genre conventions see James Olney's "'I was born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," *The Slave's Narrative*, ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Oxford U of P, 1985, pp. 148-174. In *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives*, Francis Smith Foster further argues the slave narrative is informed by Judeo-Christian mythology, follows four chronological phases and "parallels the structure of birth into death and death into birth" (84).

authored by women document physical, emotional and sexual abuse and the detrimental effect these had on familial relationships. Their narratives highlight women's loss of innocence and the commodification of their bodies, not only for labor, but also for reproduction.

While scholars have identified the reoccurring traits and tropes found in the narratives of the formerly enslaved, it is important to consider that their use is more complex and calculated than the reader might assume. In their comprehensive study, Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff note the difficulty in defining genres and whether they identify a specific type and style of writing, or if they “reflect, help shape, and even generate what they represent in culturally defined ways . . . and therefore play a critical role in meaning-making” (3). This may explain the enduring popularity of the slave narrative as a medium for challenging a historically dominant white perspective.¹¹ It is therefore valuable to analyze the role or function of genres encoded within their stories.

One of the most popular genres during the nineteenth century was the sentimental novel, sometimes referred to as domestic or women's fiction. Its focus was the “culture true womanhood,” which valued the characteristics of piety, purity, submissiveness, as well as eliciting emotions of sympathy for the tragic female protagonist. Similar to the slave narrative, it too follows a prescribed pattern. A young heroine, who must navigate difficult economic and moral situations, finds solace in religious faith and is rewarded with a happy ending –typically marriage. Scholars posit that utilizing sentimental modalities helped authors perform cultural and social work, particularly in bringing awareness to temperance and abolition causes.¹² Slave

¹¹ Contemporary writers of neo-slave narratives, including Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler, Shirley Anne Williams, and Zora Neale Hurston, continue to utilize the genre as a mode for politically engaging with and contesting the hegemonic narrative of the nation's history.

¹² Both Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, and Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-70*, offer a thorough discussion of the sentimental novel and its ideological uses.

narratives similarly employed, but also, reinvented, satirized, and subverted the sentimental genre. Enslaved females were rarely able to focus on home, family and modesty.¹³ Moreover, the protagonist's goal was freedom, not marriage. This significantly points out the importance of studying the rhetorical strategies and generic forms of life writing Black authors utilized to create counter-narratives.

This chapter analyzes the first narrative written by a free Black woman, Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) in tandem with Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859). The focus of the latter story is the protagonist's indentured servitude, but similar to Hazel V. Carby, I read Wilson's story as an "allegorical" slave narrative set in the North (43). Scholars have extensively studied these texts and their sentimental elements but have largely ignored both narratives' gothic overtones.¹⁴ This is surprising, given the popularity of the American Gothic during the nineteenth century, as well as its frequent use to expose and contest this dark chapter of U.S. history.

At first glance, the fictional gothic novel, which depends on imagination, and the non-fiction slave narrative, which relies on authentic lived experience, seem generically at odds. But as Alice Lesprance suggests, "there is nothing more gothic than our memory . . . to write about yourself is to double yourself, and looking back at your own life with present-you eyes is definitely uncanny." My analysis of Jacobs and Wilson's texts adopts Lesprance theory and

¹³ In his introduction to *Our Nig*, Henry Louis Gates argues Harriet Wilson transformed traditional sentimental motifs to critique slavery (xxvi-xxxvi). Francis Smith Foster, in "Adding Color and Contour to Early American Self-Portraits: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women," argues enslaved women not only used sentimental tropes to appeal to white Christian women but also to highlight the disparity between the two races and the slave's inability to realize the "Cult of True Womanhood."

¹⁴ Important scholarship on *Incidents* and its tie to the sentimental genre includes Jean Fagan Yellin, who verified the authenticity of Jacob's narrative; Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. Oxford U of P, 1987; Thomas Doherty, "Harriet Jacobs' Narrative Strategies: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," *Southern Literary Journal*, vol.19, 1986, pp. 79-91; Sarah Way Sherman, "Moral Experience in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *NWSA Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1990, pp. 167-185; and Franny Nudelman, "Harriet Jacobs and the Sentimental Politics of Female Suffering," *ELH*, vol. 59, no.4, 1992, pp 939-64.

engages with Kari Winter, who not only identifies similarities between female gothic novels and slave narratives, but also argues for reading them in conjunction with one another to illuminate how they engage with class, race and different ideological struggles (13). I additionally build on Donna Lee Brien's argument that analyzing life writing through a gothic lens aids our understanding of autobiography as "both a form of literature and writing practice" (146). Recognizing that life writing is a literary product and practice, means recognizing narration is dependent on memory and how that memory is reconstructed. In other words, how experiences are shaped, and the various effects that enhance the narrative or lend themselves to the process of illustrating one's life. A gothic aesthetic lends itself to the graphing of captive Black women's life stories. Moreover, it appeals to a female Christian audience, the primary readers of the genre and female abolitionists, the major supporters of the cause. The genre highlights the frightening reality of slavery, and the positionality of the captive subject, which for the previously enslaved, is already a ghostly rhetoric as the author is revisiting –and thus bringing back to life—their trauma, ambiguous subjectivity and liminality.

Captive Black women mobilize gothic life writing, subverting the traditional conventions such as the haunted home, confinement, and violent villains to (re)direct readers' fears and as Teresa Goddu posits, "haunt back" (132). Their powerful narratives capitalize on the abject,¹⁵ white transgression and the terrors of everyday life for the Black body, and significantly, the vulnerable, unprotected Black female body. Readers sympathetic to inequalities based on race or gender, are made to consider how overlapping identities of marginalization compound oppression and sanctioned violence. The abhorrently frightening narratives are further unsettling because they demonstrate the fragility of white superiority. Racism is portrayed in both novels as

¹⁵ The concept of the abject here refers to Julia Kristeva's theory in *Powers of Horror*, that abjection is what we must repress, because it "disturbs identity, system, order" (4).

a contagious social disease, which left unchecked, will infect the domestic space and destroy the nation's moral, democratic ideology. As Jacobs testifies, "slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks. It makes white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched" (46). The haunting texts of Jacobs and Wilson reveal the skeletons hidden in America's closet, the demons perpetuating fear, are white and intrinsically poisoned by slavery.

The American Gothic and the Slave Narrative

The British Gothic was a popular and prolific form of literature associated with a specific time period –from the second half of the eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries –that provided readers with an alternative to Enlightenment ideals and an escape from flowery Romanticism. Set in decaying, haunted castles or windy moors, the stories were inhabited by dark villains, unsuspecting heroes, and damsels in distress. The American Gothic, as Goddu points out, differs from its counterpart not only in its geographical and cultural setting, but also because it is marked by the contradictions and horrors of its historical context (10). This includes the romanticized story of the nation's origin, which glosses over Indigenous displacement and genocide; the paradox of enslaving over half a million African and African Americans while simultaneously proclaiming *all* men are created equal; and the confiscation of Native American and Mexican land under the auspices of manifest destiny. The production of American gothic literature additionally differs because it is not defined by one historical time period or group of writers. The genre importantly offers a strategy for revealing and destabilizing national myths and societal ills, including gender and racial constructions of identity.

Since Ellen Moers first coined the term "Female Gothic" in 1976, feminist theorists have extensively studied women writers who embraced the genre as an avenue for metaphorically

describing and contesting their place, or lack thereof, in a man's world. Indeed, a reoccurring theme in gothic novels is patriarchal control and women's disempowerment, a condition that naturally lends itself to haunting tropes and imagery. In her 1798 landmark book, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft argues married women are civilly dead in the eyes of the law because they are legally bound and under dominion of their husbands. Although Wollstonecraft was advocating for change, Mary Beard contends her use of this term unintentionally reaffirms a concept that "haunts thousands of printed pages. It is the image of woman throughout long ages of the past as a being always and everywhere subject to *male* man or as a ghostly creature too shadowy to be even that real" (56). White women's ability to debate this issue underscores they nonetheless enjoyed a liberty and a privilege unknown to Black women.

America's fear of, and desire for, the enslaved body played a crucial role in informing Gothic literature and the United States early canon. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison argues that authors such as Poe, Hawthorne and Twain, frequently relied upon the racial Other to articulate the nation's fear of the Black individual and assuage its guilt over enslavement (38). This Africanist presence, what she terms "Africanism," is "the ghost in the machine," that drives and haunts the American Gothic (*Unspeakable*, 11). This idea is further supported by Leslie Fielder's assertion that the genre was its most "fruitful" when it symbolically illuminated, through its machinery and décor, society's "psychological, social, and metaphysical" terror of the Black slave (28, 378). White female authors, including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, and Rose Cooke, who considered slavery analogous to their own gender oppression, deployed the Gothic to advocate for gender equality and social reform. Absent from 19th century American gothic fiction is the Black women's body. Was it

possible then for the formerly captive Black female narrator to manipulate the genre's same conventions and speak their unspeakable?

I'm not suggesting that gothic romances are analogous to slave narratives. On the contrary, the force of the latter depends on veracity and documenting a lived experience but this should not limit the creative artistry of the author. Employing a gothic aesthetic to Black captivity narratives demonstrates how race and gender compound the traditional Female Gothic. In Radcliffian literature, the white protagonist is confined by a patriarchal society, metaphorically buried within the home and her husband's bed. In contrast, a Black heroine is doubly unprotected, held within an enslaved/master dichotomy where power is not synonymous with passion, but a white right, sanctioned and upheld by the law. The *property* of another, both civilly and socially dead, she has no choice but to sleep in or at the foot of their master's or mistresses' bed. The concern of the enslaved woman is her lack self-determination and frequent sexual exploitation.

Juxtaposing the Eurocentric Female Gothic with the slave narrative and their respective discourses, underscores the flexibility of the gothic and its surprising effectiveness for contesting white racist ideology. The genre's inherent ability to exceed its own bounds makes it ripe for imaginative exploration. Toni Morrison argues that, "slavery enriched the country's [the U.S.] creative possibilities. "For in that construction of blackness *and* enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also . . . the projection of not-me" (*Playing in the Dark* 38). But Black authors demonstrate the gothic and "the ghost in the machine" can also be creatively employed to deny white "not-me" positionality. Upending traditional gothic conventions, they reverse the paradigm of terror: the plantation is the haunted house, and violent white slave masters, along with their unpredictable wives, are the demonic monsters. The damsel in distress is Black, and

she is always in distress, precisely because she is Black and female. These “oppositional” gothic narratives offer “in frightening ways, a skeptical, ambiguous view of human nature and of history” (Crow 2). What is frightening in these stories is slavery, recurring acts of violence, especially those against women, psychological and physical isolation or imprisonment, displacement, and frequent disablement. The body is metaphorically and literally marked or disfigured –a sign of the female captive’s ghostly disempowerment within the master/slave power structure. An analysis of Jacob’s and Wilson’s life stories, illustrates the master’s authorial tools, in this case, a gothic aesthetic, can be repurposed to create resistance narratives that promote and aid social transformation.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Jacobs’ experiences, published under the pseudonym Linda Brent, is similar to most slave narratives for it begins with “I was born,” chronicles her years of bondage, physical and mental oppression, and eventual freedom. While contemporary readers have been assured the story is genuine, the use of an alias, the introduction by abolitionist Lydia Marie Childs, and the educated style of writing, led many early readers to conclude the narrative was fiction.¹⁶ A nineteenth-century audience might also have thought her story fiction because it contained the gothic elements found in popular novels, albeit the villain is white, does not repent the error of his ways, nor is there a happy ending that results in marriage. I argue that Jacobs’ use of gothic conventions in her exposé was a strategic ploy meant to undo the stereotypical representations of the Black female body in the white imagination and expose the monstrosity of slavery. Her novel

¹⁶ In 1987, Harvard published English professor Jean Fagin Yellin’s edition of *Incidents* and authenticated the veracity of Jacob’s autobiography. This was the fruition of the scholar’s seven years of academic investigation, and the discovery of the true characters of the story. Linda’s antagonist, “Dr. Flint,” was in fact Dr. James Norcom; his wife “Mrs. Flint,” Mary Horniblow Norcom; and the father of “Linda’s” children, “Mr. Sands,” the Hon. Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, Esq. Although Yellin had “rescued” Jacobs from the archives, she discovered that Jacob’s had achieved some fame with *Incidents*, but later, was forgotten. In 2004, after 20 years of extensive research, Yellin published *Harriet Jacob’s: A Life*, an homage to the woman who has consumed her academic career.

challenges and subverts the white fear of enslaved people by exposing the underlying processes and ideologies that justify slavery. It highlights how these systems, along with the individuals who perpetuate them, should be the objects of fear and scrutiny, rather than the enslaved individuals themselves. She reveals pro-slavery justifications are based on flawed reasoning, moral relativism, and the preservation of power structures rather than objective ethical principles. Left unchecked, slavery was a contagion that would infect the domestic realm and white civilization.

In American gothic literature what is frequently considered grotesque and monstrous is the non-subject human body –the *Other* that threatens white hegemony and civilization. Black bodies are thus dehumanized through metaphorical and literal depictions as savage or beastly. Perceiving enslaved individuals as commodities or tools served as a means for slaveholders to emotionally and morally distance themselves from the suffering they inflicted. By reducing human beings to mere objects or property, slaveholders could detach themselves from the inherent humanity and rights of those they enslaved. They could focus solely on the economic benefits of slavery, which were legally enforceable by the American Slave Code –a set of rules meant to deter slave uprisings. As abolitionist William Goodell notes, the code objectified the enslaved by defining them as, “the one who is in the power of the master, *to whom he belongs*,” thus, the “goods” of another, meant to be used for profit and *pleasure*, and similar to other forms of chattel, was understood to “perish with the using” (77-78). Considered property, the owner was free to (ab)use his slaves as he saw fit and sell them with no regard to family kinship or bonds. Jacob’s gothic narrative turns the tables by humanizing enslaved people with a firsthand account of her lived experiences. Readers cannot distance themselves emotionally nor morally from the suffering of enslaved women in particular, nor the practices used to oppress them.

Pseudoscience of the era justified racism by misconstruing anthropology and developing a hierarchal list that ranked African Americans at the bottom. This not only rationalized slavery, as the Black body was considered *uniquely* fit for bondage and labor, it also defined the constitution and laws that regulated the nation.¹⁷ As Morrison argues, this had a tremendous impact on literary representation and the American canon. Stereotypical tropes figured the Black male body as demonic and a threat to white females, while the Black female body was cast as highly sexed, capable of corrupting white men and the destroyer of white families. Paradoxically, the female slave was “redoubled by her sexuality and her fluctability,” for her body was desired, but it was also a commodity that could be sold or traded away (Hurley 120). The gothic body of the enslaved woman was thus uncannily familiar, but still foreign in many aspects.

As an author, this posed a problem for Jacobs. How could she derive understanding for the enslaved’s plight and garner support from readers who depended on the Black body to define their own identity, social position and perceived superiority? Her solution was to make the enslaved body visible so it did not continue to function as Morrison suggests “shadowless” in the white imagination, while simultaneously eliciting empathy and action from her readers (*Playing in the Dark* 10). While Jacobs/Brent’s desire is to relate a true story, she frequently states it is not an easy task as words alone cannot express the violence of slavery and sexual exploitation. As Saidiya Hartman explains, it is difficult to describe this type of degradation due to the reader’s inability to understand its enormity, and also because an enslaved person might be viewed as an

¹⁷ Physical anthropology and phrenology were frequently employed during the nineteenth century to justify the exploitation of various groups of peoples. Leading figures of the era, including, Thomas Jefferson (*Notes on the State of Virginia*), Dr. Charles Caldwell and Dr. Samuel Morton, perpetuated the notion that intelligence and ability were inherently determined by race. See: Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Mismeasure of Man*. Norton, 1996. for a historical overview of scientific racism.

obscene provocateur instead of victim (107). To achieve her objective, Jacobs/Brent explores gothic themes familiar to Christian women, such as sin, guilt, redemption, and the struggle between good and evil. She directly addresses her audience, “O, virtuous reader,” frequently cites familiar biblical passages, and quotes Shakespeare as well as other notable authors. This not only establishes that she is well read and the importance of spirituality in her life, it also helps her bridge the racial divide and build a connection with her audience.

Although Jacobs/Brent has a relatively peaceful childhood, she is born into slavery and unaware of her circumstances. The dehumanizing reality of her existence becomes painfully apparent when she is *given* to another after her mistress dies, and her five aunts and uncles, despite years of service, are sold on the auction block. She realizes she is nothing more than property, stripped of her freedom and subjected to the whims of her owners. As Jacobs/ Brent laments, “these God-breathing machines are no more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend” (11). According to their masters, and the law, they are not persons, but rather, commodities that can be sold individually or collectively regardless of their relationship to one another. As she explains, “they had no right to any family ties of their own” (34). In this way the enslaved experiences loss of kinship, connection to future or past generations, and community. Modern critics describe this as social or living death, a ghoulish metaphor for the condition of slavery.¹⁸ Exploring the concept of social death is meant to prompt white female readers to reflect on the intersections of gender and power dynamics. When they married, they experienced a degree of civil death through coverture, but a degree of powerlessness very different from that of the enslaved Black woman.

¹⁸ See Castronovo, Russ. *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Duke UP, 2001; Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford UP, 1997; and Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Harvard UP, 1982.

While both coverture and slavery restrained a women's legal status, rights, and freedom of movement, the limitations faced by white women did not equate to the complete dehumanization and loss of personhood endured by enslaved Black women. Social death is dependent on racism and Othering, concepts that Achille Mbembe posits have always been present in Western thought and linked to the politics of death. The very structure of the plantation system, "one of the first experiments of the biopolitical experiment," separated enslaved people from home, family and community and this, along with total domination, generally resulted in violence and "death-in-life" (Mbembe 21). *Incidents* provides a first-hand perspective of this insidious violence, although the narrator admits, "the degradation, the wrongs, the vice that grow out of slavery are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe" (26). Death-in-life functions as a gothic trope, a liminal state, where the individual is trapped in a state of living death, neither fully alive nor dead. Trapped in an oppressive, nightmarish situation, Jacobs'/Brent's aim is to enlighten readers and underscore the effect of slavery on the values female readers hold so dear –chastity, marriage, and family. She must also convince white women that her status as an embodied piece of property, does not translate to submissive availability nor a willingness for sexual reproduction. This is a difficult case to make, while some white female readers might understand the notion of patriarchal control, they did not share the same depth of dehumanization faced by enslaved individuals, who were deliberately stripped of their humanity and physical autonomy.

Incidents significance lies in its exposure of the enslaved Black woman's lack of agency., their vulnerability and sexual exploitation. The reader discovers it is not her new young owner Linda must fear, but the child's father, Dr. Flint. The *good* doctor takes a sexual, predatory interest in his daughter's property and proceeds to make Jacobs'/ Brent's life a living hell. His

strategy is to ensconce her in a small cabin where she will be isolated, away from the prying eyes of his wife, and completely under his control. Underscoring Jacobs’/ Brent’s resistance to his domination, she vows, “before my Maker that I would never enter it [the cabin]. I had rather toil on the plantation from dawn till dark; I had rather live and die in jail, than drag on, from day to day, through such a living death” (47). Jacobs’/Brents not only lacks control over her body but also legal recourse. Hoping to anger the doctor and encourage her sale, because “he never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself and his wife,” she becomes pregnant with a white slave-owning neighbor’s child – Mr. Sands (49). She believes this will afford her a form agency, albeit a very limited measure. Although Jacobs/ Brent feels “there is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that what he gains by kindness and attachment” (48), there are not any legal protections or laws that will ensure the success of her plan.

The Virginia Slave Act of 1662 stipulated that the child follows the condition or the status of the mother rather than the father (19). Jacobs/ Brent wryly notes this ensures, “that licentiousness shall not interfere with avarice,” for her offspring will remain the property of Dr. Flint (66). As Goodell emphasizes in his treatise, this was commonly seen as just one of the advantages of owning female slaves. Proslavery advocates viewed them as “breeders,” similar to brood mares, capable of increasing their slave *stock*. Enslaved people were considered economically sound investments that could be bought, traded, inherited, hired out and raised for

¹⁹ *The Virginia Act* states: “Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a negro woman shall be slave or free, Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother” (Hening 170). In his compilation of Virginia’s statutes, editor William Henig added the Latin phrase “Partus Sequitur Ventrem,” which literally translates, *the child follows the womb*. Henig borrowed from Thomas Jefferson’s private collection of law books to complete his project.

market (82-84). Although many resisted their sexual exploitation,²⁰ those who did bear children realized the bond with their offspring, one of the most fundamental and sacred connections, was tenuous and frequently severed by the institution of slavery. After the birth of her daughter, Jacobs/Brent laments, “[s]lavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own” (66). Natal alienation, the idea of being forcibly separated from one's children is a deeply emotional and universally relatable concern. Regardless of their race, Jacobs/Brent hoped her readers would empathize with the profound pain and anguish that would result from such a separation.

Enslaved mothers were rarely afforded the opportunities espoused by the cult of true womanhood such as children, familial care and moral influence, nevertheless, it was something they desired. By emphasizing their shared desire for love, nurturing, and familial connections, Jacobs/Brent aimed to bridge the gap between her hopes and values and that of white women. When she realizes Dr. Flint will never part with her, and most likely will either sell or separate her from her children, she demonstrates the lengths a Black mother will go to in order to stay close to her children. The doctor unknowingly sells her children to Mr. Sands, who allows them to remain with their grandmother. Desperate to stay near her children, Jacobs/Brent transforms her grandmother's attic into a self-imposed prison, defying the burial trope by using it as a means of both escape and proximity. In the gothic tradition, burial often symbolizes entrapment or

²⁰ Enslaved women were aware that their ability to bear children and increase the slave population was highly valued. Many relied on their knowledge of herbs avoid pregnancy or induced abortions. Some resorted to other measures of resistance, including infanticide, the most famous case being Margaret Gardner. See: Jennings, Thelma. “‘Us Colored Women Had to Go Through a Plenty’: Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women,” *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1990, pp. 45–74; Perrin, Liese M. “Resisting Reproduction: Reconsidering Slave Contraception in the Old South,” *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2001, pp. 255–74; West, Emily and Erin Shearer. “Fertility Control, Shared Nurturing, and Dual Exploitation: The Lives of Enslaved Mothers in the Antebellum United States.” *Women’s History Review*, vol. 27, no. 6, 2018, pp. 1006-1020.

death, but in this narrative, the act of burial takes on a subversive and transformative meaning. It becomes a strategic move, a form of concealment and preservation, enabling the heroine to elude her oppressors and assert her autonomy. It symbolizes Jacobs'/Brent's rejection of the oppressive systems that seek to control and dictate her life choices.

Gothic literature often features female heroines locked away to preserve their chastity. but Jacobs/Brent hides away in the attic garret to preserve self-determination and her maternal rights. Her description of the space, "nine feet long and seven wide," where she remains "in a cramped position day after day without one gleam of light" and her experience of claustrophobia is intended to provoke fear and discomfort in white readers, while also providing a powerful commentary on the institution of slavery (96). Jacobs' short, somewhat breathy sentences lend an additional sense of distress to a stifling atmosphere that is crawling with rats and mice. A place of isolation, entombment and darkness, the wooden garret is a ghostly reminder of slave ship holds where Africans were confined enroute to the American colonies.²¹ In fact, Jacobs/Brent eerily remarks, she could not wait to stand erect, breath fresh air and "feel the earth under my feet again" (100). What is haunting Jacob's here is past violence uncannily intervening in the present. Theorists posit trauma is inherited generationally through the body.²² Although Jacobs was born on the plantation, her body carries the memory of being at sea, the feeling of being unmoored and experiences a loss of time. The attic is uncanny or unheimlich, it *appears*

²¹ The scene would also be suggestive for abolitionists, who were very familiar with the conditions on slave ships. In addition to Olaudah Equiano's detailed description of a slave ship in his autobiography, the most famous and reproduced image, the *Brookes*, was widely distributed in the U.S. Scholar Marcus Wood argues the image, which featured the interior layout "in cross-section, front view and side view, and a series of both slave decks, the manner in which slaves could be legally packed," quickly made its way into 18th century East coast print culture. It was reprinted as early as 1789, in subsequent abolition pamphlets and *Uncle Tom's Cabin Almanac* (1852). See: Woods, Marcus. *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery 1780-1865*. Manchester UP, 2000, pp. 16-34.

²² See: Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia UP, 2012; Leary, Joy DeGruy. *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring injury and Healing*. Uptone Press, 2005.

familiar but it is “the opposite of ‘heimlich’ [‘homely’], the opposite of what is familiar,” and the sensation this produces “is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar” (Freud 124). What is additionally strange about this space is its location. Jacobs’/Brent’s little cell is within the *home* where she can see and hear her children, but she remains alienated, voiceless, and under constant threat of discovery.

The gothic milieu challenges reader’s expectations of the domestic realm and the treatment of human beings within it. The space that affords Jacobs/ Brent freedom from the doctor’s unwanted sexual abuse, simultaneously functions as a space of psychological and physical captivity that affects her wellbeing. The garret becomes exactly what Fred Botting describes as gothic because it conjoins “ideas of home and prison, protection and fear,” and a space “never secure or free from shadows, disorientation, and danger” (4). She is uncannily imprisoned both within and outside the traditional domestic sphere. Significantly, her son and daughter are unaware of her proximity and deprived of her maternal affection. Although she eventually escapes, the seven long years in captivity do not allow her to partake in Christmas festivities, birthday celebrations, a relative’s funeral, or the day-to-day activities of family life. This situation, what she terms a “living grave,” is eerily familiar to the “living death,” she feared she would experience in Dr. Flint’s secluded cabin (122, 47). However, the space, precisely because it is gothic, is also fundamentally ambiguous.

The attic offers Jacobs/Brent a temporary respite from the constant surveillance of Dr. Flint and the space to maintain a sense of freedom. Although she describes the garret as a tomb, she also calls it her den, a “loophole of retreat” with a small knothole that provides access to the outside world (95). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “loophole” is derived from the Middle English word *loupe* and refers to an opening or slit in a castle wall that is meant to let in

light or provide a means for defense. Jacobs' place of confinement is nothing like a castle (although those settings figure prominently in English Gothic literature), but it does allow her to view the comings and goings of Dr. Flint. Now the surveillant, she has reversed the power dynamic. Interestingly, the garret resembles the more modern definition of a loophole: "an ambiguity or omission," usually in a rule or law, that can be taken advantage of or exploited in order to evade its effect (OED). The garret affords a method of escape, a way to avoid or circumvent the Fugitive Slave Law²³ and the plantation master.

Describing her first impressions of the garret, Jacobs'/ Brent's narration takes a surprising turn. She offers a bittersweet explanation for her exile that rhetorically brings the reader *and* the violence of daily enslaved life into the garret with her. Using a lyrical, repetitive, but disembodied narration, the author interrupts her story to challenge any notion that slavery was benign or beneficial for enslaved people: "I was never cruelly overworked; I was never lacerated with the whip from head to foot; I was never so beaten and bruised that I could not turn from one side to another; I never had my heel-strings cut to prevent me from running away; I was never chained to a log and forced to drag it about, while I toiled in the fields from morning till night; I was never branded with hot iron, or torn by blood hounds" (96). While Jacobs/ Brent *never* experiences these forms of violence, her litany of offenses serves as testimony for the abuse that others have endured. She additionally devotes an entire chapter to graphically recording the abhorrent, ghastly acts of brutally inflicted on neighboring plantations. In one case, an enslaved man is entombed within a cotton gin and left to die a slow death. Murder is so

²³ The Fugitive Slave Law originated in a clause found in the fourth Article of the Constitution which stated that no person who escaped to a free state was released from labor or service. Spurred by anti-slavery sentiment in the North, subsequent laws were established in 1793 and 1850 that strengthened the master's reach. Those found harboring runaways were subject to fines and imprisonment.

common on another plantation the enslaved fear nightfall and the ghosts that haunt it (101). In this way, both the author and her readers bear witness to the cruelty of slavery.

Jacobs'/ Brent's retreat to the garret is an act of resistance "designed to protect her body and her children's future bodies –from rape, violence, auctions, coffles, and labor that is analogous to a 'slow death'" (McKittrick 45). Her decision to flee and hide was a familiar tactic of survival. Highlighting the prevalence of escape and hiding as survival strategies, Jacobs' aims to not only generate empathy and understanding from her audience but also to undermine the notion that enslaved individuals were passive or content with their circumstances. She thus introduces the reader to Fanny, an enslaved friend, and correspondingly, an additional gothic element. Fanny and her four children were sold at auction to different masters, but she escapes and is hiding nearby in her mother's home. The irony of the situation is not lost on Jacobs/Brent who laments the two "remained many weeks within call of each other; but she [Fanny] was unconscious of the fact" (124). Although the similarity in their predicament might be a mere coincidence, the doubling of their situation and their proximity haunts the narrative. The introduction of a *doppelgänger* here emphasizes the inescapable desire for freedom was commonplace, Jacobs was not a lone escapee, both women experience similar inner-psychological conflicts and solutions that result in alone-ness.

What is specifically gothic here is the collapsing and reflecting of two Black enslaved mothers, a blurring between self and other, their fragmentation, and psychological turmoil. Fanny's function as a mirror and haunting presence is given further weight when she assumes Linda's name on a ship that will ferry her to freedom. When Jacobs/Brent flees on the same boat, the captain is surprised to encounter another enslaved woman with the same name. Fanny, for her part, "started as if she'd seen a spectre," exclaiming, "Linda, can this be you? or is it your

ghost?" (130). Not surprisingly, Fanny is disturbed when confronted by her double and assumed persona, but her description of Linda suggests she might also be unsettled by her deteriorated condition. Jacobs/Brent is a pale reflection, a shadow of her former self, as imprisonment has left her scarred and physically disabled for life.

The physical and psychological scars left on her body and other enslaved individuals are visible reminders of the immense cruelty of slavery. Ironically, cruelty is usually associated with savagery, and humanity with civilization and Christian morality. But Flint, a highly educated and purported Christian gentlemen, has no qualms executing, whipping or letting his bloodhounds tear his workers to shreds (44). Underscoring his inhumane, beastly behavior, she further observes, "no animal ever watched its prey more than he watched me" (37). In a gothic twist, the enslaved protagonist is portrayed as human with complexities, emotions, and an unyielding spirit. She would rather entomb herself in an attic than succumb to moral depravity. Meanwhile, the white male, traditionally depicted as the epitome of dominance and superiority, is hauntingly transformed into an animal-like figure, embodying the primal instincts and savagery that lurk beneath the veneer of civilization. This juxtaposition exposes the grotesque nature of power imbalances and societal constructs, revealing the monstrosity that can reside within those who wield authority. By subverting expectations and employing gothic imagery, Jacobs/Brent unveils the dark underbelly of oppressive systems, provoking unsettling introspection and challenging the accepted norms of society.

Jacobs/Brent assertion that "cruelty is contagious in uncivilized societies" highlights a troubling aspect of the institution of slavery (42). Within the hidden depths of slavery, plantation mistresses, who were entrusted with the responsibility of embodying white femininity and virtue, played a disconcerting role. They not only benefited from the oppressive institution, they were

often complicit in the physical and psychological abuse of enslaved individuals. In *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*, historian Stephanie Jones-Rogers reveals that enslavers often gifted enslaved people, particularly females, to daughters on their birthdays, at Christmas, and in wills to increase their marriage prospects (2).²⁴ This was Jacobs’/ Brent’s fate, for at the age of twelve, she was “bequeathed” to the five-year-old daughter of her dead mistresses’ sister –Dr. Flint’s wife. Young masters and mistresses observed what transpired on the plantation and looked to their parents for guidance in their role as slaveowner. In essence, they were given lessons or *trained* in slave discipline, management, and punishment. Due to Emily’s age, Jacob’s/ Brent’s direction naturally falls to Mrs. Flint, a vindictive woman who “spit in all of the kettles and pans” to prevent the kitchen slaves from eating leftovers and sends Linda on errands barefoot in the snow (14,19). As Jacobs/ Brent ironically notes, similar to other plantation mistresses, Mrs. Flint “was totally deficient in energy. She had not the strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were so strong she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped until blood trickled from every stroke of the lash” (14). This testimony disrupts the image of the benevolent southern woman who is unaware and uninvolved in the darker side of slavery. Quite the reverse, plantation mistresses were often revealed to be unsympathetic, green-eyed monsters.²⁵

Many plantation wives were jealous of their husband’s sexual relationships with enslaved women and the resulting children they bore. Jacobs appears to sympathize with their plight and the disappointments they must bear exclaiming, “The poor girls . . . The young wife soon learns

²⁴ Jones Rodgers offers a new perspective on Southern women and their relationship to slavery. Although many believe these women opposed abolition because their consciousness and very being had been informed by white patriarchy and gentility, she argues they were instead invested, quite literally, in the peculiar institution of slavery. By mining historical documents and narratives, she illustrates that, “[s]lave- owning women not only witnessed the most brutal features of slavery, they took part in them, profited from them and defended them” (ix).

²⁵ Shakespeare is often credited with personifying jealousy. In *Othello*, Iago warns it is the “green eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on.”

that the husband in whose hands she has placed her happiness pays no regard to his marriage vows. Children of every shade of complexion play with her own fair babies, and too well she knows that they are born unto him of his own household” (33). But her sympathy is misplaced when it is revealed the doctor’s wife plays an active role in perpetuating sexual violence. Instead of counseling the young enslaved women about the doctor’s sexual proclivities, which she is well aware of, or shielding them from his advances, they become “objects of her constant suspicions and malevolence” (29). In Jacobs’/ Brent’s case, Dr. Flint has forbidden that she be physically punished, not because he is concerned for her welfare, but more likely, that his mistress (property) not be marred or incapacitated. As a result, Mrs. Flint embarks on a campaign of psychological warfare. Hypocritically, and this again is meant to resonate with Jacob’s Christian readers, the doctor’s wife employs the Bible as a weapon to extract an oath of innocence and information from Linda. She also confines the young woman to her bedchambers and subjects her to nightly interrogations –whispering ghostly, ghastly suggestions in her ear, hoping to *catch her out* (31). Brent is a prisoner, subject to Mrs. Flint’s torture, but both women are haunted by the actions of her husband.

Enslaved women who were fortunate enough to escape the burden of sexual suspicion still faced the tyranny of their mistresses. Nancy, Jacobs’/Brent’s maternal aunt and the twin or double of her dead mother, is slowly worked to death by Mrs. Flint. In fact, she continually miscarries because she is required to sleep on the floor outside her mistress’s door in order to care for the latter and her babies. When Aunt Nancy dies, Mrs. Flint proposes she be buried in the white familial burial grounds. This illustrates the lengths Southern women went to in their attempt to maintain decorum, gentility and the façade of a benevolent labor system. As Jacobs/Brent sardonically points out, this was also because Mrs. Flint was “so long *used to*”

having Aunt Nancy lying nearby while she slept (123). In other words, the threat of moral depravity and contagion was not limited to men, but all who supported and benefited in some measure from the institution of slavery.

Lest the reader think Mrs. Flint is the exception, Jacob's life story deftly exposes cruelty and animalistic behavior, symptoms of racism, in other enslaver women. For example, Dr. Flint's young daughter-in-law, recommends that elderly enslaved persons who are unable to work for their weekly food allowance be fed grass, rather than meat (79). And Emily Flint, who was kind to Jacobs/ Brent when they were both young (although the author wonders if this was her mistress' true feelings) schemes to recoup her property after she marries. According to Jones-Rodgers, female enslavers frequently utilized the legal system to retain ownership and perhaps a bit of economic agency in their patriarchal marriage. Ironically, for these white women, "slavery was their freedom," (xvii). This provides a deeper insight into a letter sent by Emily Flint, now Mrs. Dodge, which reminds Jacobs/ Brent, that she "has always been attached to her" (152). While an emotional attachment might once have been possible, it now seems doubtful. More likely, she is spinning a sentimental story that will entrap Jacobs/Brent. As the author remarks, Mrs. Dodge's machinations are akin to a spider luring a fly into her web, a fitting description of the sinister and often ingrained nature of female slaveowners.

Incidents' conclusion limns what is atypical in a captivity or gothic narrative, for it ends with transformation, not in the conventional way through marriage, but by sale –Jacobs/Brent is bought by a sympathetic Northerner who frees her. While the author states she would gladly erase the memory of her enslaved years, her narrative reveals she has neither forgiven nor forgotten those who caused her physical and psychological injury. Importantly though, Jacobs' nightmare has ended, she has escaped the predatory monsters and the gothic depravity of slavery.

In this sense, her narrative provides a satisfied ending, but it also gives her readers much to think about. Principally, the racist beliefs that undergird the United States' flawed ideology and "the specters that rise from its shore" (151). Paradoxically, cruelty and animal like behavior are usually associated with savagery and humanity with civilization and Christian morality. But in this case, it is the white Christian masters and mistresses who behave inhumane. Readers are meant to experience concern and fear that racism, like a sickness, will infect the U.S.'s democratic and moral principles.

Our Nig

While Jacobs' life story aims to end slavery in the South, Harriet E. (Hattie) Wilson's goal was for abolitionists to take stock and clean their own house. *Our Nig* reveals the North is inherently uncanny space—a place of purported freedom, but where African Americans do not indiscriminately feel at home, nor free from slavery. Abandoned at the age of six by her destitute mother, Wilson's narrative chronicles the years she works in New England as a "free" Black and indentured servant for the Bellmont household. Her fictionalized life story, related through the character Frado ("Our Nig" to family members), exposes the horrors of racialized labor. Despite experiencing years of violent abuse, Frado remains resilient, determined to avoid charity and support herself. Scholars have focused on the sentimental conventions within Wilson's narrative and her not-so-subtle critique of the cult of true womanhood and capitalism—significantly, the relationship between slavery, indentured servitude, and the U.S. economy.²⁶ Elizabeth West

²⁶ For further critical analysis see; Davis, Cynthia J. "Speaking the Body's Pain: Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*." *African American Review*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1993, pp. 391–404; Ernest, John. "Economies of Identity: Harriet E. Wilson's *Nig*." *PMLA*, vol. 109, no. 3, 1994, pp. 424–38; Piep, Karsten H. "Nothing New Under the Sun: Postsentimental Conflict in Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*." *Colloquy*, vol. 11, 2006, pp. 178-194; White, Barbara A. "'Our Nig' and the She-Devil: New Information about Harriet Wilson and the 'Bellmont' Family." *American Literature*, vol. 65, no. 1, 1993, pp. 19–52.

further contends the text is an example of a conversion narrative, whereas Julia Stern, argues that Wilson employs a “tapestry” of genres to counter the intersectional representation of motherhood, race and class in Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (448). While Stern skillfully identifies and explores many of the gothic undertones in *Our Nig*, her analysis (written in 1995) does not have the benefit of recent scholarship by historians P. Gabrielle Forman and Reginald H. Pitts. They substantiated the narrative is based on Wilson’s experiences and uncovered evidence that reveals she lived to the age of 75, refuting early assumptions that she died shortly after the story’s publication. Foreman and Pitts additionally documented Wilson’s many entrepreneurial endeavors, including her work as a Black medium, trance speaker and promoter of the Spiritualist movement—a movement for addressing societal concerns. This new information suggests that it is not important that Wilson’s narrative has been “authenticated,” but rather, her aim and how she chose to craft her life story.

Scholars have long been puzzled by Wilson’s narrative and her declaration that it was a financial “experiment” meant to “aid me in maintaining myself and child without extinguishing this feeble life” (3). If this were the case, why did she pen a story that risked offending potential anti-slavery supporters? Her preface makes clear that she realizes the captivity and abuse she describes is bound to draw unfavorable comparisons:

I would not from these motives even palliate slavery at the South, by disclosures of its appurtenances North. My mistress was wholly imbued with *southern* principles. I do not pretend to divulge every transaction in my own life, which the unprejudiced would declare unfavorable in comparison with treatment of legal bondmen; I have purposely omitted what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home. (3)

While this might be read as a means of placating naysayers or abolitionist “friends” in the North, I suggest her goal is the opposite. Wilson was a savvy writer. Her sly innuendos, extensive inclusion of poetic and religious epigraphs, demonstrate she was erudite and targeting a specific

audience. She appeals to “colored brethren” for patronage, but there is no doubt she is also hoping to disturb and educate white readers – readers who have the power to champion reform (3). I maintain that Wilson, recognizing the horror of her indentured servitude, uses it to unsettle the reader and challenge their political ideals. As one of her supporters observes, “truth is stranger than fiction;” I would add that it can also be scarier (73). The disturbingly dark and subverted gothic themes in *Our Nig* – the haunted home, captivity and abject, bestial violence inflicted on Wilson’s body – are a scathing commentary on racism in the “free” North and the exploitation of African Americans within the idealized domestic sphere. Wilson’s narrative, as its numerous biblical references make clear, is meant to encourage the religious reader to practice what they preach.²⁷ It also seeks to advance labor reform and underscore the importance of raising children in a nurturing, spiritual environment. And perhaps, an environment that does not adhere to orthodox religious views, but a more “enlightened” and inclusive ideology.

Wilson’s “experiment” with authorship is additionally an example of her ability to capitalize on popular fashions and movements for financial gain. As Pitts and Foreman note, she was involved in various business enterprises, including sewing straw hats, marketing hair tonics, and working as a Spiritualist lecturer. Spiritualism swept through the United States during the 1840s and 50s when traditional religion and its purported truths were questioned. The movement embraced the supernatural, phantasmagorical, and rejected a religious hierarchy that guarded the gates to heaven – a restriction the author grapples with in *Our Nig*. Her later work as a clairvoyant might have appealed to Wilson because it was entertaining and profitable, but I contend it underscores her desire to locate venues to *voice* her concerns. Her gothic life story was a similar *medium* for articulating the nation’s political and social ills.

²⁷ Matthew 23:3: “So do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.”

Ambiguity, Boundaries and Horror in *Our Nig*

According to Charles Crow, “the gothic is a literature of fear, ambiguity, and transgression. It is sited in a twilight borderland between familiar and strange and it mixes up good and evil ... it almost always concerns a troubled, irregular, in some ways *unsuitable* family or substitute family” (Fear 129). In *Our Nig* the boundaries between home/hell, servant/slave, mistress/monster, and human/animal are blurred, crossed and violated. Wilson contextualizes her life story with gothicism to create that uncanny feeling that things are not as they seem, which simultaneously unsettles and stimulates the reader’s understanding of her situation. The title page of Wilson’s gothic life story is a preamble of the ambiguity and wry, satirical style that permeates her narrative (see fig. 2).

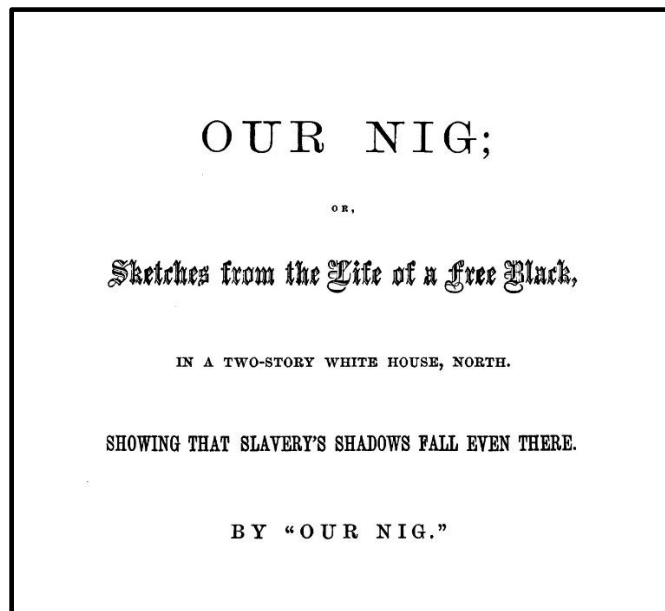


Fig. 2. Title Page: *Our Nig*

In traditional slave narratives, the title page offers clues about authorship, tone and purpose. Titling her narrative “Our Nig,” then claiming ownership of her story without self-naming, but with the racial slur “Our Nig,” Wilson blurs the dichotomies of other/self and possession/owner.

This imparts a sense of uncertainty and opens her narrative to multiple interpretations. The subtitle is equally ambiguous, “free” is linked with “slavery,” whereas “White House” conjures up competing and uncanny, but architecturally similar images –the nation’s Northern home, America’s symbol of democracy versus a Southern slave plantation. Similarly, “Two-Story” might represent two levels, a double narrative or the divided visions within the country. Doubt that things are not as they seem, ironically, neither black nor white, creates room for complexity and an opportunity for satirical critique.

Wilson’s revisionist text challenges the narrative that the North was an unequivocally safe home for free and self-emancipated Black people. Indeed, the house in *Our Nig* is not a haven, but rather a space where the contrast between hearth and hell is obscured. Despite her “free” status, Frado is held captive in a rural setting, the only servant in the family, geographically and spatially isolated from other children and Black individuals. Black community existed in New England, but Wilson affirms that “people of color were rare there” (70). Echoing Jacobs’ spatial captivity, Frado is sequestered in a tomb-like “chamber over the kitchen, the roof slanting nearly to the floor, so that the bed could stand only in the middle of the room” (17). When Mrs. Belmont’s son remarks the “child” will soon be too large for her quarters, Mrs. Belmont lets it be known these are not temporary quarters, but the room Frado will inhabit until she “outgrows” the house. In other words, until she is no longer useful or has satisfied the terms of her indentured servitude (17).

The idea that Frado will outgrow the house because she no longer *fits* within the space, not because the space negatively affects her quality of life, underscores her racially objectified and spectral subjectivity within the home. As historian Daniel E. Sutherland points out, servants were *in* the home but not *of* it, occupying a position tied to the working of the house itself (34).

They were spatially regulated to the margins of the home, such as the attics, basements, and behind closed doors. Servants are a spectral presence haunting the working areas of the home. The gothic genre often explores themes of confinement, oppression, and hidden secrets, the treatment of servants in this manner embodies these elements. Measures, often silent and symbolic, were instituted to keep servants in their “place” and assure they were “never mistaken for a family member” (29). Frado was always to remain out of sight, in the kitchen or above it, and was forbidden to enter the parlor (25). Put simply, they occupied a space with the family, but like ghosts, were considered invisible and immaterial. The status of an indentured child was even more ambiguous. According to Faye Dudden, “orphaned children were commonly bound,” but distinct from servants, they were meant to be “taken charge of.” Unlike Frado, they entered service about the age of ten or twelve, received training and did not assume full responsibility for their duties until they were fifteen. Given only room and board, they provided “cheap effective service,” nevertheless, they were to be considered “objects of tutelage and charity . . . a part of the family” (20-21). Orphaned children were a common trope in gothic literature, but *Our Nig* underscores the extreme vulnerability of a Black orphaned female child and their lack of legal protection. Once it was “certain that Frado was to become a permanent member of the family,” Wilson satirically remarks, “her labors were multiplied; she was quite indispensable, although but seven years old” (18). Abandoned and not formally indentured, the Belmont’s are given license to further abuse the child and ignore the boundary between adoptive child and servant by focusing on her race.

Significantly, *Our Nig* documents the crucial role racial identity played in the perception of the ideal domestic servant and the work they were required to perform. As Enobong Hannah Branch and Melissa E. Wooten point out, it became increasingly difficult during the nineteenth-

century to secure household help. As a result, the labor force transitioned from the increasingly unavailable white neighbor's daughter, a "helper," to the hired, and racially subordinate, domestic servant (169). Black domestic workers were prized because they were perceived as *naturally* suited for the work and their social disparity "facilitated exploitation . . . [they] did not help the woman of the house; they 'served' her" (186). Mrs. Belmont acknowledges her trouble securing and retaining reliable help, although there is cause to believe that might be due to her unrealistic expectations rather than a shortage of available labor. When her daughter Mary complains about having Frado in the house, her mother responds, that she does not care about her color, in fact she would be happy with a dozen Black workers. "If I could make her do my work in a few years, I would keep her. I have so much trouble with girls I hire, I am almost persuaded if I have one to train up in my way from a child, I shall be able to keep them awhile. I am tired of changing every few months." (16). Frado is ripe for exploitation. An indentured Black child, she can be trained without the fear of leaving and overworked as Mrs. Belmont's enslaved worker.

Wilson troubles the image of the ideal Northern home and its *housekeepers*, revealing the Belmont's genteel, New England house is a façade hiding a monstrous secret –morally deficient and tyrannical women. Mrs. Belmont and her daughter Mary, similar to Jacobs' plantation mistress and her offspring, outwardly espouse the virtues of piety and kindness but use violence and the threat of abuse to rule the domestic space. Like Southern slave-owning women, Mrs. Belmont imagines Frado is her property and relishes the power she holds over the child. She "felt that her time and person belonged solely to her. She [Frado] was under her in every sense of the word" (24). Frado's "tutelage" consisted of an example of how work "was *always* to be done, and in no other way; any departure from this rule to be punished by a whipping" (17). This not only ignores the underlying charity meant to undergird indentured labor, it is also contrary to the

domestic philosophy of the era. The popular treatise by Catherine Beecher (sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe) argued, “there is no point, where the women of this Country need more wisdom, patience, principle, and self-control, than in relation to those whom they employ in domestic service” (205). While the Belmont ladies hide their contrary unwomanly comportment behind closed doors, the reader, is privy to their shocking, sadistic behavior. As Frado notes, it was “impossible to give an impression of the manifest enjoyment of Mrs. B.” in handing out punishment. “It was her favorite exercise to enter the [kitchen] apartment noisily, vociferate orders, give a few sudden blows to quicken Nig's pace, then return to the sitting room with SUCH a satisfied expression, congratulating herself upon her thorough house-keeping qualities” (37). Both women have an unstable, concealed and perhaps true self, whose fury is frequently unleashed on Frado.

Our Nig, similar to *Incidents*, upends colonial rhetoric that associates the white individual with civilized behavior and the Black body with savagery by exposing the darkness within Mrs. Belmont and her daughter Mary. As Wilson points out, the women exude the moral principles and behavior more commonly associated with Southern slave-owning mistresses who mete out excessive physical discipline and revel in its use. On more than one occasion, Mrs. Belmont delivers blows so forcible that Frado is thrown to the ground, and to ensure the child's cries are not overheard, uses a wooden block to gag her (25, 46, 52). This form of restraint is reminiscent of the iron bits used to control the enslaved and the scolds bridle meant to silence troublesome women. Frado is innocently troublesome because she is the keeper of household secrets and “Mrs. B” employs the wood wedge to “cure her of tale-bearing” (52). Paradoxically propping open Frado's mouth to shut her up, the Belmont women strive to maintain the façade of gentility. But *Our Nig* removes the wooden wedge, airing the dirty laundry, hidden secrets and the

excitement the tormentors experience in their acts “unrestrained malice” (46). The women’s inability to control their other monstrous *self* urges the reader to question who is uncivilized, inhumane here and what is the root cause of their behavior?

The carefully crafted protagonist’s moniker has posed that question from the onset. Frado, Fido, what is in a name? In this case, a satirical commentary on racial dehumanization and what this discrimination suggests about one’s nature. Frado, short for Alfrado, is an unusual female name, but nonetheless, human, whereas Fido is commonly associated with the family canine.²⁸ Wilson collapses the diametrically opposed but similarly spelled names to critique racist ideology that figures the Black body as more animal than human, and thus, considers it permissible to treat and control it as such. Even Jack, who has won Frado’s affection for intervening and contesting his mother’s brutish behavior, unwittingly reinforces an allegorical association by treating Frado like a *pet*, a “colored protégé,” and presenting her with a dog named Fido, a “friend” that paradoxically enjoys creature comforts foreign to the child. Wilson further obscures the boundaries between the two, stating “Fido was the entire confidant of Frado. She told him her griefs as though he were human; and he sat so still, and listened so attentively, she really believed he knew her sorrows” (24). While this is further evidence of Frado’s isolation, it pointedly underscores that she considers the dog more humane than some who surround her. Indeed, when Frado is ordered to eat off a plate already used by Mrs. Bellmont, she first has Fido lick it clean (39). The tragedy of her situation is not lost on the nine-year-old child, or perhaps, the adult Wilson, who insinuates those who withhold compassion and care to children are the real animals.

²⁸ Wilson most likely was not aware that Fido is from the Latin word *fidus*, which means to trust. Nevertheless, her use of the name and its association with a faithful, trustworthy canine companion is a pointed commentary on who or what is reliable in Frado’s life.

This is not to insinuate that all in the household were cruel. The Belmont sons, Jack and James, genuinely care about Frado, but they are frequently gone and ineffectual in overturning their mother's authority. Mr. Belmont, who "seldom decided controversies at home" (18) is kind, but unwittingly complicit in her abuse. Reinforcing his wife's depiction of a "she-devil," he admits to his sister that if he tried to usurp her rule his life would be "hell" (25). When a "tempest," or "storm" was brewing, encoded language frequently deployed to describe his wife's outbursts, he would absent himself from the fray –usually to the barn, proving again that the company of animals was preferable to Mrs. Belmont. This undermines a typical gothic plot, which culminates with a male hero riding to the rescue. Jane, the other daughter, means well but she does not have the mental fortitude to battle her mother, nor does Aunt Abby, Mr. Belmont's widowed sister. The latter does however provide a temporary sanctuary, a shoulder to cry on, and "spiritual conditioning" through the Bible.

The gothic is typically marked by a deficit or overt focus on religion. Similar to the heroine in a traditional gothic story, Frado seeks solace for her plight from outside sources. Her interest in the Bible and her near conversion, the result of Aunt Abby's instruction, exposes the young girl's constant desire to locate a belief or ideology that will help her make sense of her abuse and a world of pain that she has linked to color. Here Wilson complicates the gothic mode that traditionally associates evil with darkness and goodness with whiteness. Frado struggles to understand how she *fits* into God's great plan, and in a discussion with James, questions his benevolence. In other words, why would God make her a color that would condemn her to a life of abuse:

"Who made your mother?"

"God."

"Did the same God that made her make me?"

"Yes."

“Well, then, I don't like him.”

“Why not?”

“Because he made her white, and me black. Why didn't he make us both white?” (28-29)

Frado believes her predicament, abandonment by her mother and her treatment by Mrs. Belmont (both white women), is solely related to skin color. The family matriarch uses racial difference to justify her mistreatment, and she does everything in her power to ensure the young girl's racial identity is not ambiguous. When Frado is sent out to do field chores, “she was never permitted to shield her skin from the sun.” Mrs. Belmont's concern is that Frado is “not many shades darker than Mary. What a calamity it would be,” Wilson wryly points out, “to hear the contrast spoken of,” or more importantly, the lack of difference between daughter and a black servant (22).

Again, Wilson draws a parallel between her service in the Belmont household and slavery in the South, where white mistresses fear a family resemblance between their offspring and enslaved children (Foreman and Pitts 96). Racial ambiguity destabilized the constructed self and identity of U.S. women, including Mrs. Belmont, who depended on whiteness for their privileged position of power.

Wilson's story also prods readers to consider whether an all-knowing God was also a colorblind, all-loving God. Were religious opportunities and the possibility of an afterlife available to all? Frado becomes “a believer in a future existence—one of happiness or misery,” but she wonders, “*is there a heaven for the black?*” (47). Her uncertainty articulates the question posed by many marginalized worshipers of orthodox religion – who had the right to heaven? – and it also foreshadows the transformation of religious ideology during the nineteenth century. Mrs. Belmont, similar to others who believed in a hierarchal God, “did not feel responsible for encouraging Frado's spirituality because she “hardly believed she had a soul” (48). Frado is told it would “do no good for her to attempt prayer; prayer was for whites, not for blacks. If she

minded her mistress, and did what she commanded, it was all that was required of her” (52). Mrs. Belmont’s real concern is that the child will want to attend church, which will not only interfere with her work, but also give her ideas about her station in life.²⁹ Race and discrimination compound Frado’s doubt about how one earns admission to heaven. She cannot reconcile Mrs. Belmont’s white skin with her black heart. Perhaps this is why Frado never converts. The comfort she takes in religious meetings and the Bible do not offset the abuse she receives at the hands of a professed Christian who more closely resembles a “she-devil” (14). Her inability to reconcile religious teachings with practiced hypocrisy portends not only her interest, but also a growing desire within the nation to locate an alternate more inclusive ideology, and one that I demonstrate possesses gothic sensibilities.

In addition to being influenced by popular literary conventions, *Our Nig* is shaped by religious transformation within the U.S. and the birth of the Spiritualist movement –a movement for political and social change that was popular with abolitionists, suffragettes, and temperance activists. In her seminal study on the nineteenth-century phenomena, Bridget Bennet suggests we read the culture of the era “as a series of responses to the intervention of the past on the present,” which occurred or surfaced during “moments of trauma or transformation, exposing an inadequate process of mourning that Freudians theorize using the concept of the return of the repressed” (4). Spiritualist ideology is therefore uncannily similar to the gothic, both function as practices for addressing personal and cultural hauntings. Bennet further describes Spiritualism as a syncretistic mode of survival, “a cultural and political commingling that resulted from the

²⁹ In reality, the church was an additional space of discrimination. According to historian Richard J. Boles, many New England churches passively promoted discrimination by separating white and Black parishioners, thus giving “moral sanction to segregation in other aspects of society” (203). Boles, Richard J. *Dividing the Faith: The Rise of Segregated Churches in the Early American North*. NYU Press, 2020.

processes of colonial settlement and their continuation which included removals and slavery” (3). In a similar fashion, *Our Nig*’s commingling of genres is a syncretic product of survival resulting from the continued violence inflicted on her young captive body.

Wilson’s gothic narrative mirrors Spiritualist practices. Materializing after the author’s transformation (from tormented child to entrepreneurial tormentor), she *voices* past traumas, reconciles her inadequate mourning for her mother and draws critical attention to unaddressed wrongs. Wilson and her readers, relive the trauma of her childhood abuse –abuse that is simultaneously real but also fantastic³⁰ because it takes place in the North, within the domestic realm and is inflicted by a white woman related to famous abolitionists.³¹ *Our Nig* also reveals Wilson’s interest in communing with the departed and channeling their afterlife stories. In the narratives first two chapters, the author literally speaks for her dead parents in order to reclaim her story and reconcile her abandonment. She portrays her white mother Mag Smith as women with a” loving, trusting heart,” and suggests her actions be overlooked because she was “deprived of parental guardianship, far removed from relatives, she was left to guide her tiny boat over life’s surges alone and inexperienced” (5). Wilson (re)writes her mother’s actions, figuring her Mag’s behavior and subsequent disposal of her child as a necessity. One wonders how she knows these particulars. In her conclusion, she relates that both Mr. and Mrs. Belmont had “past into another world,” notably omitting any mention of heaven where other family members rest. In her final sentence she acknowledges she may have passed from their thoughts,

³⁰ Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic as a narrative genre that hovers between the realms of the supernatural and the natural, creating a sense of ambiguity, uncertainty and a fear of the unknown which aligns with the gothic genre. Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Cornell UP, 1975.

³¹ The Belmont family (in reality the Haywards) were related to the Hutchinson Family Singers, famous vocalists who championed abolitionist and temperance causes. They toured England with Frederick Douglass in 1845 and he wrote in the introduction to their two-volume autobiography that they “were not merely a family of singers and sentimental reformers; they were actuated and guided by high moral principal” (xvii). See: Hutchinson, John W. and Mann, Charles E. Mann. *Story of the Hutchinsons (Tribe of Jesse)*. Lee and Shepard, 1896, vol. 1.

“as Joseph from the butler’s, but she will never cease to track them from mortal vision” (72).

Aligning herself with enslaved prophet and dream interpreter Joseph, and the Bellmonts with the “butler,” Wilson reverses the position of servant and overseer. Like Harriet Jacobs, Wilson has escaped the Foucauldian surveillance of her masters, but they have not eluded hers. Her narrative exposes their actions and it is implied she will continue to monitor or haunt them in the afterworld. Wilson’s subsequent work as healing medium, again bifurcating self and other, provided spiritual community and an opportunity for her to help others process their trauma. Put differently, she transitions from a life writer to an “after-life” gothic life teller.

Conclusion: Cultural Work

Jacobs and Wilson underscore the power of the gothic genre, especially when combined with the *real*, for unveiling societal ills and haunting back. Their narratives generate a sense of fear and empathy for the enslaved, but in particular, they shed light on the complex forms of discrimination faced by Black women and children. These include forced labor, family separations, lack of community or belonging, sexual exploitation, and denial of their autonomy. In doing so, the narrators challenge notions of racial superiority that figure slavery as benign. They disrupt the idealized image of white male as the civilized protector, his wife as a nurturing mother, and the home as a place of safety or comfort. This underscores the importance of life stories for relating specific struggles and identifying oppressive power structures. I see slave narratives that incorporate the gothic as performing important cultural work, as literary scholar Jane Tompkins argues, for “expressing and *shaping* the social context that produced them” (200; my emphasis). They are not only historical artifacts but also powerful vehicles for social change in the ongoing pursuit of justice and equality

Black authors employ the gothic in their life writing to disrupt prevailing attitudes regarding race, gender and slavery with the additional aim of impacting political policy. Both narrators are advocating for abolition, but they also highlight the lack of legal protection for enslaved *and* free Black female laborers. *Incidents* highlights legal doctrine that sanctions and promotes the reproductive exploitation of enslaved women as a means of increasing the slaveholders labor force. *Our Nig* advances labor laws for indentured Black workers, childhood education and reform *within* the anti-slavery movement. Wilson reveals the fragility of the Black survival in the North, where they were “watched by kidnappers, [and] maltreated by professed abolitionists, who didn't want slaves at the South, nor niggers in their own houses . . . to lodge one; to eat with one; to admit one through the front door; to sit next one; awful!” (71) In other words, free Black people not only feared traffickers hoping to profit on new laws that sanctioned an internal slave trade, but also duplicitous abolitionists. This supports Jacobs claim that racism was contagious, a poisonous snake and those that perpetuated it a “plague” (18).

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CHAPTER TWO

Staging Survivance: Sara Winnemucca's *Life Among the Piutes* and Public Performance

I have not contended for Democrat, Republican, Protestant or Baptist for an agent I have worked for freedom, I have laboured to give my race a voice in the affairs of the nation.
—Sarah Winnemucca (*Newspaper Warrior* 252)

Native storiers create, at their best, a singular sense of presence by natural reason, customary words, perceptive tropes, observant irony, and imagic scenes. That aural sense of presence is the premise of a distinctive aesthetics of survivance –Gerald Vizenor (*Native Liberty* 1)

Indigenous Life-Telling and Performance –Native and Narrative Activism

During the 19th century adventure-seeking readers were enthralled with stories that romanticized the frontier and the Indigenous people of North America. Especially popular, were James Fennimore Cooper's *Leather Stocking Tales*, Beadle's dime store novels, and sensational, serialized stories that reinforced the noble savage and white hero archetype. This literature exemplified "manifest manners of domination," what Indigenous scholar Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) defines as "notions and misnomers that are read as the authentic and sustained as representations of Native American Indians" (*Manifest* 4-6). In addition to inventing the Indian, these entertaining stories assuaged the young nation's guilt for its colonizing project. Fictional stories were often supplemented with purportedly true-life stories, written by Indigenous authors whose exciting exploits were recorded, but nonetheless, regulated to the past. While most readers did not question the authorship of these texts, there is a distinction between "autobiographies written by Indians" and "Indian autobiographies" (Krupat 3). The latter "as told to" narratives were most often penned by an amanuensis for ethnographic purposes, and while they were billed as collaborative works, differing goals and positions of power were at play. As scholars assert, they frequently aided a white anthropological, Christianizing, or capitalist agenda (Brumble,

Bloodworth, Krupat). Moreover, it is difficult to authenticate the authorial voice, for the white author had control over editing and the Indigenous narrator may have guarded their “I” to maintain a semblance of agency.

This is not to suggest that Native Americans did not value life histories nor their importance for preserving cultural traditions. Indigenous peoples have a long history of multimodal life expression, including pictographs, wampum belts, birchbark scrolls, totem poles, and oral storytelling.³² These cultural texts demonstrate the various ways “Native peoples embody their stories” (Justice 23). The Western concept of autobiography, however, is foreign to Native peoples because they do not value the *auto*, egocentric self above community. Indeed, Indigenous people do not privilege human life over their other relations –animals, nature and the land. Native American life stories have traditionally focused on recording history, customs, beliefs, and after European contact, writing against white hegemony and erasure. Non-fiction texts became important tools for negotiating power and space. According to Robert Warrior (Osage), Native Americans historically used autobiographies and non-fiction texts –petitions, newspaper articles and treaties –to “respond to the political situations they found themselves embroiled in” (xvii). In the early nineteenth-century, most Indigenous authors were Christianized men, but by midcentury, increasing pressure from the U.S. government and continued land appropriation highlighted the importance of literacy for political versus religious agency (Warrior xvii). A number of tribal newspapers, including the bilingual *Cherokee Phoenix* (1828), *The Dakota Friend* (1850), and *The Cheyenne Transporter* (1879) distributed vital

³² In *Sending My Hear Back Across the Years*, Hertha D. Wong explores different oral and artistic forms of Native American self and communal expression. A thorough analysis is done regarding pictography (painted and drawn) including quillwork, coup tales, vision quests and creation stories. As Daniel Heath Justice points out, these “texts” are often dismissed because they do not fit the Eurocentric concept of literature or life-telling. However, wampum belts can be “read as political documents” that “physically embody and articulate the relationships and rights and responsibilities between peoples” (23).

information to tribal communities. Nontribal newspapers that were owned and edited by Native Americans provided an unregulated and sometimes-competing view that informed both Native and white audiences.³³ Literary magazines, including Jane Johnston Schoolcraft's *Muzziniegun* (1826), recorded essays, tribal lore and legends.³⁴ And importantly, a number of collaborative and self-published autobiographies challenged representations of Native Americans while advocating for tribal sovereignty.

Many of the published autobiographies have been analyzed, but as scholarship has evolved, calls have been made to broaden the canon and the very definition of the genre by including non-written life narrations. In her 1973 book, *Plains Indian Autobiographies*, Lynne Woods O'Brien first broached the topic of interrogating non-literate modes of life-telling. H. David Brumble's *American Indian Autobiography* (1988) expanded on this notion by advocating for an analysis of "preliterate" indigenous narratives (10). The problem with O'Brien's and Brumble's argument is it not only privileges English literacy, but also presumes written communication is superior to oral expression and performance. In her seminal monograph, *Sending My Hear Back Across the Years* (1994), Hertha D. Sweet Wong foreshadows Smith and Watson's life writing model by examining artistic forms of pre-contact Indigenous production and collaborative autobiographies. For analysis purposes, she divides the latter between those that were drawn, spoken and written before the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890) and those that were produced after. As Wong points out, this date marks the "closing of the frontier,"

³³ Over 50 Native American newspapers were published during the nineteenth century. See: Littlefield, Daniel F. Jr., and James W. Parins. *American Indian and Alaskan Native Newspapers and Periodicals. I. 1826-1924*. Greenwood Press, 1984.

separating those authors with “more experience of prereservation life and those with primary experience of reservation life” (8).

While Wong’s comprehensive analysis includes nineteenth-century Native American autobiographies, noticeably missing are newspaper submissions and *staged* modes of narration—in particular, the numerous, popular talks delivered by Indigenous lecturers across the U.S. This is surprising, for a number of scholars have noted the connection between Indigenous ceremonial rituals and costumed life-telling. As Krupat points out, “tribal people were oral people who represented personal experience performatively and dramatically to an audience” (3). As a result, their autobiographies incorporate dramatic, staged, and performative modes of narration. Also absent from Wong’s discussion are female authors, which is significant, for unlike their 19th-century Western counterparts, Indigenous women were generally valued in their communities for their leadership and warrior abilities.

This chapter fills the void with an analysis of Sarah Winnemucca’s (Paiute) life-telling narrations. I argue for reading her performances, the lectures that informed her autobiography and those given post *Life* publication, as additional examples of Native American life stories. Narrating self or community identity is a performative act, and as scholars point out, during the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, print and oral production overlapped. Oral performance played a significant role in creating counter-publics, a *space* for those generally excluded from the public sphere (Gustafson, Warner, Felski). My aim is to explore how Winnemucca wielded language and representation to enter and challenge hegemonic discourses. In studying oral life-telling as performance I’m engaging with scholar Warren Cariou’s argument that “vocal performance offers many advantages and tools that text lacks, and it also fits particularly well with the Indigenous values of community engagement, attachment to the land, and connection to

ceremony” (315). My analysis reveals that Winnemucca’s speeches functioned as tools of resistance and social change –and not only against the dominant culture, but also among her own community.

In this chapter, and the following on Zitkala-Ša, Vizenor’s concept of survivance (survival and resistance) as a means for countering stories of “dominance” and the “absence of the tribal real” serves as a theoretical foundation for my analysis (*Manifest* 4). As Vizenor argues, “Indian,” like race, was a social construct, “an occidental invention that became a bankable simulation; the word has no referent of in tribal languages or cultures” (*Manifest* 11). In other words, the Indigenous person in the U.S. imagination, the historical master narrative and the literature of dominance was a simulation, a stereotypical and empty representation. In contrast, the “postindian warrior is the absence of the invention,” one who “ousts inventions with humor, new stories,” and the active public presence of the real (12). A postindian warrior, Winnemucca successfully employed simulation and inherent traditional modes of communication to present tribal realities and challenge government policies.

Life Stories as Survivance and Negotiation of Space

Similar to autobiography, the Western construct of space does not equate to Native American’s sense of land and place. As a number of Native American scholars argue, land and place are embedded in Indigenous life and being, not separate from self, but a source of identity.³⁵ In addition to providing physical and spiritual sustenance, the environment holds symbolic cultural significance. Land is not something to be conquered or a commodity available

³⁵ See Paula Gunn Allen, “Iyani: It Goes This Way,” *The Remembered Earth*, New Mexico UP, 1981, pp. 191-192; Simon Ortiz, “Introduction,” *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing*. U of Arizona 9, 1998, pp xii-xiii; Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, Fulcrum, 2003; Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie, “Land and Identity.” *Native American Studies*, Edinburgh UP, 2005, pp 21; and Winona La Duke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Haymarket Books, 2016, pp 2.

for individual ownership, instead, it is considered a community relation, a source of knowledge and a tool integral to Indigenous education (Simpson, Justice, Gunn Allen). However, as Indigenous peoples were compelled to migrate westward and constrained by U.S. government-imposed borders, they soon realized the necessity of advocating and bargaining for their rightful territorial presence. It's not surprising then that literacy and language became necessary tools for Native Americans to establish space and place. Stories and collective identity are inherently tied to place. Recounting their memories in the invaders native tongue provided a means for challenging spatial erasure, and notably, their position as domestic, dependent subjects of the United States.

Prominent in early American literature and non-fiction texts is the paternalistic belief that the great white “father or “grandfather” must watch over/surveil, and guide/rule their Indigenous children. This flawed ideology became law in 1831, when the Supreme Court ruled in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* that the position of Indigenous peoples in “[t]heir relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian. They look to our government for protection; rely upon its kindness and its power; appeal to it for relief to their wants; and address the president as their great father.”³⁶ Beth Piatote (Nez Perce) notes that with “this ruling, the same domestic and familial metaphors that rationalize the order of the settler state serve as the legal and material structure of political relation” (5). In other words, this legislation eliminated any threat to U.S. authority because Indigenous people were no longer perceived as autonomous, but rather, as dependent subjects who could be regulated and controlled by federal jurisdiction. The promotion of cultural assimilation, another means of denying sovereignty, extended the ideology of

³⁶ Marshall, John and Supreme Court of the United States. *U.S. Reports: Cherokee Nation vs. the State of Georgia, The*, 30, U.S. 5 Pet. 17, 1831.

nationalized domesticity to the Native American familial space, particularly in terms of education, gender roles.

Patriarchal, settler state supervision also carried over to the production and publication of texts. In addition to the problems noted with “ventriloquist” narratives, publication of texts written by Native Americans faced challenges, including the frequent need for white endorsement and a lack of control in other areas of production and distribution. Publication too is a performative event with numerous actors. As Matt Cohen observes, authors may have control of the narrative but there are always “a series of producers, each of whose power can predominate over reception or deployment at different moments in the production, circulation, and consumption process” of the text (15). Publishers and editors were reluctant to print stories that countered the dominant national narrative and the effect this might have on their establishment’s bottom line. Indigenous authors were seen as a political and financial liability. Self-publishing was a solution, albeit costly, for it too was often dependent on white funding and support. As a result, Indigenous writers frequently turned to American journals and newspapers to relay their life stories and experiences.

Periodicals were full of stories about Native Americans in the 1800s, but most were written by either white anthropologists, authors crafting sensational or sentimental short stories, or sympathetic reformers. A few literary journals, such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harpers*, included stories by Native American authors, but those were few and far between. Newspapers, on the other hand, played a key role in both furthering and revising settler colonials’ opinion of Indigenous people. Sensational headlines aimed at increasing viewership often focused on portraying Native Americans as savage and violent. According to John M. Coward, “[v]iolent encounters between evil Indians and innocent whites made compelling, page one stories;

peaceful relations and gentle Indians did not. Moreover, Indian-white conflicts could easily be reduced to a standard set of sensational ‘facts,’ ready-made for telegraphic transmission to every AP newspaper” (Coward 233). On the other hand, there were sympathetic reporters and editors who encouraged readers to consider both sides of the dominant narrative. Occasionally, they reprinted editorials taken from tribal or Native American newspapers and published interviews of Native peoples. Although these interviews were typically written by white reporters, it did give Indigenous people an opportunity to represent themselves and their community in print (Coward, 223, 231). One editor in particular, Thomas H. Tibbles, used the *Omaha Daily Herald* to intervene in the removal of the Poncas from Fort Omaha to Indian Territory. His story was picked up by large city newspapers in the Midwest and along the East coast, which amplified the debate on government abuse and Indigenous removal, making it “a cause célèbre among American social reformers” (Coward 197). Hoping to improve Indigenous representation, Tibbles then launched a lecture tour with Poncas Chief Standing Bear, Susette LaFlesche, and other speakers who rallied against U.S. expansion and removal. Newspapers further helped the cause by recapping the lecture events and reporting on their reception. Elias Boudinot used the lecture circuit to raise funds for his newspaper and then to explain the Cherokee position. This illustrates a link between the publication sphere and public lecture space. Importantly, it demonstrates that Native Americans used both, and often in tandem, as modes of cultural production and resistance.

Public lectures were a significant cultural institution during the 19th century.³⁷ Many were sponsored by the Lyceum and Chatauqua movements, which espoused ideals that aimed to

³⁷ Donald M. Scott, in “The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” argues the lecture circuit “not only expressed a national culture; it was one of the central institutions within and by which the public had its existence” (808-9).

develop an educated and civic-minded public. Other actors also took to the stage, including professional speakers, activists and authors who wanted to promote their works. These latter lectures became “an event, offering audiences a chance to see the ‘real thing,’ ‘the genuine article,’ the original, authentic source” (Adams 11). This was complicated when the author in question was a Native American who hoped to intervene in the audiences’ perception of their individual and collective identity. A rhetorical strategy was to give the audience a measure of what they wanted, what they imagined. The popularity of *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* show, which began in 1883, demonstrates this was the romance of the wild free-spirited savage or the defeated, vanishing Indian –roles that defined America’s character. As Philip Deloria (Sioux) argues, “[s]avage Indians served Americans as oppositional figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national Self. Coded as freedom, however, wild Indianness proved equally attractive,” setting up a situation of “simultaneous desire and repulsion” (3). Conversely, the stage provided Native American actors and speakers a space for self-representation and agency. And generally, wearing a costume increased both entertainment value and access to audience.

Early in the century, access to the stage was primarily limited to white middle-class men, but as social activism grew, speakers outside that realm increasingly argued for the right to represent themselves and their collective identities. Women presented talks that advocated for important cultural causes such as abolition, temperance and suffrage. Amanda Adams notes that marginalized authors who had trouble being acknowledged in print culture, “also lectured, although their presence became occasions for “objectification of the speaker” who was vulnerable and “stood in complex relation to their audiences” (12). This was certainly the case for Native American women who were both contesting U.S. history and patriarchal assumptions regarding their gendered role. Oratory skills, however, are inherently part of Native American

life. In *Eloquence is Power: Oratory Performance in Early America*, Sandra M. Gustafson notes that Indigenous peoples “had highly elaborated traditions of spoken eloquence that played central roles in religious life, government, and diplomacy, and they adapted these traditions to the new world of European colonialism” (xiv). Treaties, for example, were oratory performances, and so much so, they were often published in play format. By the mid-19th century a number of Native American speakers, including Winnemucca, gave lectures that rallied against U.S. expansion and government policy. An analysis of her lectures not only reveals a complex choreography of acquiescence and resistance, but also the efficacy of life-telling performance as cultural activism.

Winnemucca and the Paiutes

The Northern Paiutes lived in the Great Basin area of what is now northern Nevada, Idaho, and southeastern Oregon, but settlers and resource depletion upended their way of life, threatening their independence and very existence. As Sarah Winnemucca notes in her autobiography, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims (Life)*, when the white men came, “[t]hey came like a lion, yes, like a roaring lion and have continued so ever since” (5). *Life* details the depredation and violence wrought by non-Native Western migration, an expansion that was further fueled by the California Gold Rush in 1848 and a Nevada silver strike in 1859. The increased influx of miners and emigrants traveling along the Oregon, Mormon, and California Trails brought cholera, which had a devastating consequence on Indigenous communities. According to historian Sally Zanjani, the epidemic may have reduced as much as half of their number (43). Winnemucca’s early interactions with this white invasion profoundly impacted her future. A defining moment in her young life was being “buried alive” by her mother, who feared Winnemucca would be captured by settlers. Cautioned to remain silent or she’d be devoured—reports of the Donner Party and cannibalism had recently spread through

Native villages –the hidden child was left behind while her family fled. This desperate act of survival left an indelible mark on Winnemucca, who ironically became one of the most visible, outspoken critics of U.S. federal Indigenous policy and an advocate for Paiute rights.

Born in 1844, near Humboldt Lake, Nevada, Winnemucca (her Paiute name was Thocmetony, “Shell Flower”) was the maternal granddaughter of “Captain” Truckee, the self-appointed leader of the Northern Paiutes. A guide and soldier who fought with Gen. John C. Frémont, Truckee’s wish was to remain on friendly terms with the white settlers, who according to her grandfather, were the long-lost “white brothers” of the Indigenous nation. In her autobiography, Winnemucca recounts her grandfather’s tale of four children, two Indigenous and two white who were banished by their parents to separate ends of the earth because of their constant fighting. Truckee believed “the nation that sprung from the white children” would eventually send emissaries to “heal all the old trouble” and extracted the promise from his people that they’d welcome and any settlers they encountered (5). One of his prize possessions was a “rag friend,” a piece of paper that attested to his service with Frémont during the Mexican war. Truckee believed it could “talk” to his white brothers, ensure his loyalty and protect his peoples (19, 25). Winnemucca adopted her grandfather’s desire for peaceful coexistence, which along with justice, became underlying themes in her lectures, letters, and in *Life*.

In her autobiography, Winnemucca shares that she often traveled with her grandfather, living for a year with an army family when she was thirteen and attending a convent school in California when she was sixteen. These experiences brought her in close contact to different white and Native communities. She became a cultural mediator, fluent in English, Spanish, Paiute, and two other Indigenous dialects. This ability to converse in multiple languages, helped her acquire work as a translator for the U.S. government. Winnemucca later traveled to

Washington to petition politicians, including the President, and entertained white audiences across America with lectures that denounced corrupt reservation agents and advocated for land rights. These lectures were eventually compiled into her self-published autobiography, the first by a female Native American writer.

Winnemucca's lectures are life-telling stories that *perform* important cultural and political work. Utilizing her skills as an interpreter and translator, she transmitted the history of the Paiutes, settler colonial invasion and corruption. She challenged perceptions regarding Native Americans, which provided a white audience an opportunity for self-reflection and examination regarding their role in the conflict. Additionally, she offered solutions by way of new government policies and the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty. While Winnemucca spoke without notes or a script, regional newspaper reports regarding her delivery, the content and reception of her message, including personal attacks on her character, demonstrate her tenacity and the rhetorical strategies she employed to intervene in U.S. Indigenous policy.

Analyzing these materials provides a nuanced understanding of the ways she used both oral performance and text as political activism. As Carpenter and Soricsio point out, Winnemucca “did not spontaneously enter print in 1883 when *Life* was published, she had honed her rhetorical style based on thirteen years of sustained media contact and several intensive lecture series. Nor was *Life* her first published work. In 1870 she wrote to Major Henry Douglass, the Nevada Superintendent of Indian Affairs, criticizing the reservation system and their treatment of the Paiutes. Impressed with her plea, the major forwarded the letter to the commissioner of Indian Affairs. It was also reprinted in Helen Hunt Jackson's book, *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) and a number of newspapers (Canfield 60-61). Like her grandfather,

Winnemucca understood the power of print, but she also realized performance was an entertaining and influential tool.

Performance on the Stage: Lectures as Life-Telling Activism

Winnemucca first appeared on the stage in 1864 with her father and sister Elma (Lattice) in Virginia City, in a performance meant to raise funds and make it known that the Paiutes would not take up arms against “the palefaces” (Canfield 37). By this time, white encroachment had negatively impacted the limited water resources, food supplies, and grazing land in Nevada, increasing tensions between the settlers and Paiutes. The “Williams Station Massacre,” an attack against white brothers who had abducted and abused two missing Paiute children, led to the formation of an armed white militia and the Pyramid Lake Battles. The reservation was further reduced in size following the Paiute defeat. The Winnemucca’s staged performance was thus a calculated move to provide aid and establish political position. A subsequent visit to San Francisco a month later, along with the costumed parades that proceeded both events, underscore the Winnemuccas’ awareness of the Paiute’s entertainment value and how it might be used to their advantage. Advertised as a “unique attraction” and “romantic entertainment,” Canfield notes the second performance “bore little relationship to the true life of the Paiutes, but it did fulfill the public’s notion of a good stage show, such as they might expect from a stage troupe” (19).³⁸ The *San Francisco Daily California Alta* listed the “tableaux of vivants” or historical depictions represented in the program: “‘The Indian Camp,’ ‘The Message of War,’ ‘The War Council,’ ‘The War Dance,’ ‘The Capture of a Bannock Spy,’ ‘Scalping the Prisoner,’ ‘Grand Scalp Dance,’ ‘Scalping of an Emigrant Girl by a Bannock Scout,’ ‘The Wounded Warrior,’ ‘The

³⁸ In fact, the performance was advertised in the “Amusements” column of the *San Francisco Daily Alta California*, below The Opera House’s upcoming schedule, which included British actors in a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* and *King John*, and above an announcement for a well-known Australian comedian (see Fig.1).

Coyote Dance,’ and a series of five tableau representing Pocahontas saving the life of Captain John Smith” (NW 37). The inclusion of the later scenes, which certainly had little to do with Paiute life, can be read as simply satisfying audience expectations with a familiar story and a stereotypical character, the romantic, noble savage, but it is also an example of the complicated choreography required when the goal was to both entertain and inform.

Parallel to 19th-century white women’s use of the genre, Native Americans employed tableaux to perform *self* and resist patriarchal control, but they were limited by the audience’s simultaneous desire for realism and thirst for sensationalism.³⁹ Tableaux vivants, “living pictures,” incorporated scenery, props, and carefully posed, costumed participants to recreate either artwork (paintings and sculpture), a scene from a fictionalized story, or a moment in history. These “vehicles of affect, aspiration, and sensorial engagement,” were quite popular among white women who staged private performances to entertain friends and family (Fisher 28). While this theater allowed them to employ “techniques of existence and an aesthetics of becoming,” “on the precipice of movement,” they were nonetheless objectified, their portrayals “restricted to the ‘embodiment’” of moral and patriarchal ideals (Fisher 28). When white women moved their performances to the public sphere, they were afforded a measure of agency and liberation. The same held true for Native American men and women, although the historical scenes they posed were not taken from works of art or books, but rather, lived-experiences. In

³⁹ Tableaux vivants portraying Native Americans were equally popular in England and Europe. George Catlin, an American ethnographer, traveler and accomplished artist of Plains Indians lectured in the United States with his gallery of touring art work. He travelled to the UK and Europe in 1844, and in an effort to increase attendance, hired a dozen Ojibwa and fourteen Iowa to create living pictures alongside his glided paintings. While he was in Paris, he was commissioned by King Louis Philippe to paint a number of paintings including the *Scalp Dance*, which was recreated in the Winnemucca’s tableaux. For more on Catlin, see Stephanie Pratt, “Objects, Performance and Ethnographic Spectacle: George Catlin in Europe,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2013, pp 275-282; Jessica L. Horton, “Ojibwa *Tableaux Vivants*: George Catlin, Robert Houle, and Transcultural Materialism,” *Art History*, vol. 39, 2016, pp 124-151.

other words, Indigenous people countered the *simulations* recorded in sensationalized literature and embedded within the white imagination with the *real*.

By actively participating in life-telling visual displays, Indigenous communities could present themselves on their own terms and challenge the misconceptions and stereotypes perpetuated by non-Native individuals. According to the *San Francisco Daily Alta*, the Winnemuccas' program began with "a parlor scene, with the whole of the aboriginal family arranged in the following order: The centre group was composed of Winnemucca, high old Chief of the Pi-Utes, with his two daughters, Lo-me-to-na, or the Shell Flower, and Te-woo-to-na, or the Lattice Flower, seated in state on a sofa" and on either side of the sofa, stood "eight braves" (NW 35). A white man (dressed in black) then delivered a life-telling lecture about the Paiutes, which we can surmise was either written or informed by Sarah Winnemucca and others within her community. This introduction cleverly inverts the usual power dynamic of Indigenous representation. The formal attire of the lecturer, perhaps by Indigenous direction, lends an atmosphere of seriousness, professionalism, and respect to his demeanor. Having a white man deliver the speech might also impart a certain level of credibility or legitimacy to the white audience, but ironically, this knowledge can only be attained with Paiute input. In a turnabout, the lecturer serves as a mouthpiece or voice for Winnemucca's people.

After a brief intermission, the Paiute then dramatized and reinforced their life-telling history, carefully selecting the scenes, costumes, and narratives they wanted to depict. The tableaux the Winnemucca family chose to portray reveals a desire to counterpose (to some extent) their perceived political identity. The trajectory of the "sketches," begins with what we can assume is a peaceful scene, "The Indian Camp." Perhaps this was meant to depict life pre-contact, but significantly, it involved a number of participants in a familial and communal

setting. This scene is replaced by one of war, whether this is due to the William Station affair or a previous battle is unknown, but the subsequent pictures rhetorically *position* the Paiutes distant or apart from the violent Bannocks. The scalp and coyote dance, important cultural ceremonies, nevertheless reward the audience's desire for wild entertainment. Indeed, the *Daily Alta* reporter asserted that of the different tableau, "the Coyote was the best, and was decidedly the favorite with the youngsters, especially when the 'Flower' (the one that most resembles Menken) got a back fall [sic] by pulling too hard on the tail of the Coyote" (NW 37).⁴⁰ As this critique suggests, the newspaper review mocked both the performers and their program:

The old Chief was dressed in a suit of what might have been brown cloth, or well-worn buckskin, with some odd kind of stage sword-belt, studded with tin buttons, thrown over his shoulder, and a head-dress more nearly resembling an enormous mop than anything else we can compare it to — in fact, he would have created quite a sensation in a torch light procession of Broom Rangers. The young ladies, or "squaws," so to speak in the vernacular, were attired in yellow buckskin hunting shirts and leggings of the time-honored stage style, the only difference in their "get up" being in the height of the rainbow-hued feathers of their à la Montezuma head-gear. The dress, although not at all resembling what they wear "at home," from our own experience in the desert, was well calculated to display their native charms and graces to the best advantage. To the right and left, ranged four deep, with their arms at rest upon tables placed there for that purpose, were the eight "braves," who, according to the big posters, for small programmes [sic] were not furnished, rejoiced in the following elegant and euphonious names: Too-poo-we, or Natchez; Song-a-wee, or Martin the Bird; Nee-won-nat-see, the Snow Cloud; Pooat-sai, the Doctor; Poo-e-quat-see, Foliage of the Forest; Pass-e-you, White Water; O-a-wa-quatsee, Sun and Moon, and Too-near-nee, the Black Devil. NW 35

In addition to ridiculing their names and clothing, the reporter disparaged the Chief's speech, suggesting it sounded to his ears as, "Rub-a-dub dub!, Ho-dad-dy, hi-dad-dy; wo-hup, gee-haw. Fetch-water, fetch-water, Manayunk," but snidely allowed that audiences should be humored and occasionally, enjoy the novelty of "aboriginal entertainment" (NW 37). While the Winnemucca's actively shaped the message they intended to convey, the editorial response reveals the persisting

⁴⁰ Perhaps a reference to Adah Isaacs Menken, a famous actress at the time.

cultural simplification, perpetuation of stereotypes, and deep-rooted misunderstandings of Indigenous peoples within white society.

Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge the detrimental impact of the derogatory editorial not only on those who witnessed the performance but also on those who did not, as it perpetuates misinformation, reinforces negative stereotypes, deepens existing biases. After reading the account, a sympathetic white woman who knew the Winnemuccas decided to visit the family and discover why the Chief was using “the white man’s way to show himself” (Canfield 40). Enlightened about the true condition of the Paiutes, the woman wrote an anonymous letter to the editor, beseeching the public “to rescue the Chief, his daughters and native attenders from the present degrading exhibitions, and provide for their immediate wants. Afterwards such contributions in provisions and blankets should be furnished to his people over the mountains as may seem expedient to the enlightened charity of this community” (Canfield 40). Although the success of this impassioned appeal isn’t known, it must have made an impression on Winnemucca regarding the power of the press and its ability to shape public perception. It was imperative for the Paiute to capitalize on the audience's appreciation for lively performance and instead of merely acting out scenes, center Indigenous voice and perspectives. Performance in tandem with favorable press would help them achieve their goal of reaching and educating a wider white audience.

Tableaux vivants implied the existence of Native Americans was frozen time, or at the very least, that their movement was limited. In contrast, Winnemucca’s lectures were dramatic and sometimes humorous theater, meant to inform and prompt action. In the fifteen years between her family’s tableaux performance and her first solo lecture, the living conditions of the Paiutes and their trust in government officials had drastically deteriorated. White settlers

squatted on the more fertile tracts reserved for Indigenous peoples and railroad companies appropriated other sections of land. Christian agents frequently lined their pockets by illegally leasing land to cattle ranchers and selling goods meant for those “in their charge.” Despite a promising beginning with military Indian agent Samuel Parrish, mismanagement and thievery by subsequent Methodist agents prompted most Paiutes to escape or flee the Malheur reservation. Fort life provided both safety and sustenance but the Paiutes quickly realized the military had no jurisdiction or sway over the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Pleas made to commanding officers and senators were frequently thwarted by slanderous agent reports and land holder petitions. The few promises that were made, were never upheld. Despite Paiute allegiance during the Bannock War, many were captured and held as prisoners at the Yakima reservation.

In November of 1879, Winnemucca, accompanied by her father, brother Natchez, and cousin Jerry, arrived in San Francisco. They were on their way to Washington, D.C. to petition the Secretary of State and President Hayes. She was greeted as a celebrity, for news of her heroics during the Bannock War had reached the city’s denizens. Hoping to capitalize on her reception, she remarked to a reporter, “I have just been thinking how it would do for me to lecture upon the Bannock War. I might get the *California Theater* and perhaps I could make my expenses. You see people don’t know much about Indians any way, and I know lots of things that people would like to hear. . . I would be the first Indian woman that ever spoke before white people,” continued Sarah, “and they don’t know what the Indians have got to stand sometimes” (NW 85).⁴¹ This illustrates Winnemucca’s recognition of both the entertainment and political value of life-telling performance, as well as white audience’s fascination with Indigenous peoples. Encouraged by her family, she gave a number of “recitals” detailing the Paiute’s role in

⁴¹ Susette LaFlesche (Ponca) began lecturing to white audiences on East Coast in 1880, but Winnemucca was the first Native American to lecture in the West.

the 1860 massacre and their mistreatment by Indian agents⁴² (NW 92). Winnemucca's goal was to move her audiences to feel, think and advocate for change. Although her lectures abandoned static performance, they did employ some of the theater that made the tableaux popular and entertaining.

An autobiographical book depends on an enticing cover and an engaging text to draw in readers. Winnemucca's life-telling lectures also relied on a captivating presentation and substance. What she wore, her language, and the noticeable adjustment of her message based on reception (via audience and newspaper reviews) reveals that Winnemucca understood the importance of appearance, performance, and the role she was expected to play. This naturally differed based on geographical locale, audience gender, and class. During lectures this meant wearing a costume that satisfied her white audience's expectations. While she was comfortable in both Western and Paiute clothing, Winnemucca was known to dress simply amongst her Indigenous community showing little regard for regalia or finery. However, in her first solo stage appearances, and later at the bidding of her East coast benefactresses, she donned a costume that capitalized on the Pocahontas "Indian Princess" narrative and her role as the daughter of a chieftain (see fig 1).⁴³ Her costume, including the fringed buckskin dress, beaded belt, elaborately embroidered bag and crown, was not Paiute. True, her moccasins were traditional, but she wears stockings instead of leggings and while Paiute women wore their hair both in

⁴² Paiutes were increasingly drawn into violent conflicts with settler colonialists due to white encroachment and the depletion of necessary resources. Numanga, the leader of the Paiutes at Pyramid Lake and Sarah Winnemucca's cousin, wanted to avoid war. Despite his efforts, two battles took place in May of 1860, resulting in the death of twenty-five Indigenous men, but the fatalities among the white militia were more than three times that number. For more information see: Michno, Gregory. *Encyclopedia of Indian Wars: Western Battles and Skirmishes, 1850-1890*. Mountain Press Pub. Co., 2003.

⁴³ The Indian Princess trope was familiar to many and perpetuated in Ann Steven's popular dime novels, *Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter* (1860); *Mahaska: The Indian Princess* (1863) and *The Indian Queen* (1864.)

braids and loose, she capitalizes on white audience's fascination with Indigenous women's beauty, their long flowing hair and exotic dress (Clemmons 41-43). Put differently, the

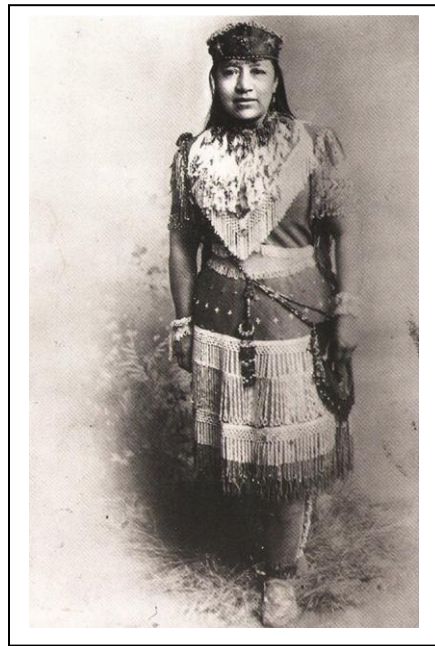


Fig. 3. “Princess Winnemucca” in costume on the lecture circuit (1883).
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (NPG.82.137)

representation of Indigenous women found in popular journals and novels. Her appearance was well received by audiences, and often played up in the local newspapers. Remarking on the “novelty” of her attire, *The San Francisco Chronical* reported: “The Princess wore a short buckskin dress, the skirt bordered with fringe and embroidery, short sleeves, disclosing beautifully-rounded brown arms, and scarlet leggings, with trimmings of fringe. On her head she wore a proud head-dress of eagle’s feathers, set in a scarlet crown, contrasting well with her flowing black locks” (NW 95). Another paper noted that the costume was calculated, to “impart romance to her situation,” while simultaneously offering import to her speech (NW 181). Ironically, Winnemucca was faulted for wearing the very simulation and performance of “Indianness” the West has constructed.

Interestingly, when Winnemucca would lecture in the West, away from a more benevolent or entertainment-seeking audience, newspapers argued the costume was contrived. Reporters close to home, particularly those who were unsympathetic to Native American appeals for clothing, supplies, and federal recognition, reacted negatively to her popular reception in the East, suggesting New Englanders had been duped by a fictional character. The Nevada *Silver State*, which often addressed her as “Princess Sallie,” a sobriquet for Sarah, frequently critiqued her costume and regal persona. In 1873 it reported, “Her Serene Highness, Sarah Winnemucca, Queen of the Piutes, is at present holding Court at Oreana. She has a suite of rooms at the Torrey House, and many ardent pale face admirers pay her homage” (NW 55). Commenting on her lecture costume a decade later, the newspaper speculated that a naïve Boston audience might:

suppose this to be the every-day dress of the ladies of her tribe in their native wilds. Could a few of Sallie’s ‘sisters and her cousins and her aunts’ be ranged alongside her as they appear on our streets, the romance of Indian life would suffer a fearful downfall. A venerable squaw, with tar on her cheek bones, thrusting mouth and nose into a double handful of rotten fruit, scooped from a grocer’s waste barrel, would probably be voted ‘too shocking. (NW 186)

A Virginia City paper, covering her “People I Met in the East” lecture, further suggested that, “All agreed she made a very creditable-looking Indian woman, but they were unanimous in the opinion that the lecturer bore no resemblance to the gay and festive Sally Winnemucca who used to romp around in this country with an old blanket tied at the waist with a piece of clothes-line” (NW 218). A number of scholars have also criticized her use of the “Indian Princess” trope. Joanna Scherer argues her exploitation of this image was a public relations misstep that undermined her political agenda (196). I contend that Winnemucca’s choice of clothing was indeed calculated, a costume that facilitated her reception with various audiences but it was not limited to the white person’s notion of “Indianness.” White individuals have been self-shaping and “playing Indian,” since the Boston Tea Party to suit their political and ideological purposes

(Deloria, 7). Winnemucca similarly used costume to shape an identity that aided the reception of her life-telling narratives and activism.



Fig. 4: Paiute Delegation (1880). From left: Sarah Winnemucca, Chief Winnemucca, Winnemucca's brother Natchez, Captain Jim, and an unidentified boy. *National Archives* (75- ip- 3- 26).

We should read Winnemucca's costume as a form of visual storytelling. Her attire when she visited the White House, "a neat-fitting dark suit, with satin facings and trimmings," demonstrates her ability to defy expectations and don whatever persona helps her achieve her goal (see fig. 4). According to the *Washington Post*, a number of delegations visited the city that winter to press their pleas and it reported Winnemucca's "deportment and appearance would compare favorably with most of her pale-faced sisters" (NW 114-115). Moreover, as Carpenter and Sorisio point out, Winnemucca's refusal to represent one singular, constructed identity resists stereotyping and challenges the colonial project, "which tries to fix bodies in single locations" (NW 28). Clothing was therefore but one element of her elaborately choreographed life-telling performance.

Language and delivery were also important components of her lectures. As Suzan Harjo argues, “words are weapons used to signal status information, such as who are the inferior and superior folks” (A5). Winnemucca, however, demonstrates that language also has the ability to destabilize power positions. In juxtaposition to the lexicon of settlers – “squaw,” “savage,” “braves” and “Injuns,” she uses language to urge the audience to refigure their understanding of Indigenous women. In her very first San Francisco lecture Winnemucca recognized that the audience appreciated her speaking style. *The Silver State* noted it was “eloquent, pathetic, tragical at times; at others her quaint anecdotes, sarcasms and wonderful mimicry surprised the audience again and again into bursts of laughter” (NW 95). Regarding her scathing critique of Malheur Indian Agent William V. Reinhart, the newspaper noted, “[t]here was little left of the redoubtable Christian agent when she finished him. She described him as having a right arm longer than his left, and while he was beckoning them to be kind and good and honest with the one hand, the other was busy grabbing behind their backs. She wound up her summary of Mr. Rinehart’s character with a bit of mischievous sarcasm that brought down the house” (NW 97). Winnemucca had discovered it was easier to level criticism with satire and a dose of humor.

Utilizing satire in her life-telling lectures not only added an entertaining element but also served as an effective means to convey facts and information in an engaging and memorable way. Lecturing a few nights later, the *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA) remarked on the lack of empty seats and the enthusiastic applause of the audience who appreciated “Sarah’s witty and telling points” (NW 98). While she enjoyed injecting a bit of humor into her performances, Winnemucca’s priority was to provide a history of her people and generate sympathy for the wrongs they had incurred. This she hoped would foster white support and encourage calls for action. Her delivery, like costume, was therefore modified according to the arena and spectators.

For example, when she began lecturing in New England, Winnemucca was known to adopt a sentimental, Christianized tone, that appealed to an East coast, and frequently female audience.

In 1883, with the assistance of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and her sister Mary Mann, Winnemucca began lecturing up and down the Eastern seaboard, appealing to church groups and women's organizations who were interested in advancing the Indian cause. The sisters, who were well known for their philanthropic endeavors, introduced Winnemucca to powerful and influential connections, including Justice Oliver Wendall Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Senator Dawes. In all, she delivered over 300 lectures aimed at enlightening those comfortably ensconced in their colonial homes about the dire circumstances of the Northern Paiutes. Lectures that were delivered to women audiences, including one to Vassar College students, typically focused on education, Christian kindness, the independent role of women within the Paiute community, and the ability of women to take on leadership roles –topics that most assuredly resonated with those championing the suffrage and reform movements. From the onset, newspaper reporters applauded her gift for telling an “unhappy story,” “in a very pretty way.” According to the *Boston Evening Star*, she displayed, that “subtle command of figurative language so peculiar to her race, coloring all she eloquently has to say (NW 151). Moreover, she was able to appear self-effacing and soften her criticism with humility and humor:

After expressing her modesty in appearing before a Boston audience with neither the knowledge of Oscar Wilde nor the beauty of Mrs. Langtry, she said that the policy of the agents taught the Indians to lie, steal, and cheat. The agent's wife was usually the teacher, and drew a high salary for figuring out on the blackboard her husband's income. When stores were issued about two and a half yards of calico were issued to the women and a yard and a half of flimsy flannel to the men, and large bales of goods piled up in the warehouses unaccountably disappeared in the hands of the agents. Desperate white men committed outrages which drove the Indians to retaliation. The lecturer favored the appointment of women as agents, and said that if they stole two-thirds of the annuities paid by government the Indians would be satisfied with what remained (NW 150-1).

As illustrated by her reference to Wilde and Langtry,⁴⁴ Winnemucca was familiar with the theater scene and those who were considered prominent or noteworthy in popular culture. Despite her “modesty,” she had knowledge beyond her own community and carefully cultivated the support of white women who were affluent, educated, and powerful. But as this report illustrates, it was a complicated, delicate process. Although she disparages the white female teacher, she appeals to the audience’s sense of fairness and skillfully upends the “savage” trope by arguing Indigenous people were forced to retaliate. Her suggestion that women would be better reservation agents, is not only a nod to female management capabilities but also a proposal that elevates women, giving them an active role in government machinations. Although positions of leadership and responsibility outside of the home were familiar to Native American women, it was still something unrealized but desired by many white women.

Generally, Winnemucca’s lectures were well received, but Peabody acknowledges on this early occasion she offended a Methodist audience member with her criticism of Agent Wilbur. The Christian lady then “endeavored to bribe her to say no more about him, by promising her hospitality and other assistance. But Sarah was obliged to tell her she had nothing else to tell but just such actions of agents as his. This led to opposition to her lectures and message, and as a result, “the Woman’s Association turn a cold shoulder to her” (*Practical Solutions* 37). This episode underscores Winnemucca’s dedication and resolve, but also the difficult terrain she was negotiating.

Mary Mann encouraged Winnemucca augment her activism by publishing the Paiutes story and offered her assistance as editor. This not only provide an opportunity to tell a more

⁴⁴ Oscar Wilde, an Irish writer and playwright, gained prominence for his wit, literary works, and involvement in aestheticism. Lillie Langtry, was an English actress, socialite and friend of Wilde’s. Both celebrities, known for notoriety, toured the U.S. in the 1880s. See: Marcovitch, Heather. *The Art of the Pose: Oscar Wilde’s Performance Theory*. Peter Lang, 2010.

complete history, and to a wider audience, but also to increase funds. Although the lectures were free, efforts were being made to form an association that would further Winnemucca's "educational plans" and purchase land for the Northern Paiutes (Canfield 203). Six weeks after her first lecture, newspapers lauded the idea that an "association [be] formed [to] which the Piute reservation in Nevada shall be deeded, and so taken from the grip of the Government agents" (288). During her lectures Winnemucca derided government duplicity that "sends one man to say one thing and another to say something else. The man who just left us told us the land was ours, and what we do on it was ours, and you come and say it is government land and not ours" (*Life* 144). Agents not only argued the reservation was government property, but also, that the Paiutes must work the land if they wanted to receive supplies or sustenance. Deeding the land to supportive white members would eliminate government oversight, and if problems did arise, their citizenship status meant they could take it to the courts. Not surprisingly, this plan had its detractors, but this illustrates Winnemucca's awareness of the U.S. legal system and her realization that performance was a means for attaining Paiute sovereignty.

While Winnemucca was writing her book, she was also making political enemies. During her lectures, there was an unspoken understanding that what occurred on the frontier stayed there, and importantly, it could not happen in the "civilized" East. However, when she spoke to the newly formed Massachusetts Indian Association, she laid the blame for the atrocities at New England's doorstep. After recounting the theft of land, Indigenous genocide, the threat of rape, and the separation of families, Winnemucca described the behavior of agents, who stole supplies and threatened the very survival of the Paiutes. Addressing the audience, she said, "I have asked the agents why they did these wrong things. They have told me it was necessary for them to do so in order to get money enough to send to the Great Father at Washington to keep their position.

I assure you that there is an Indian ring; that it is a corrupt ring, and that it has its head and shoulders in the treasury at Washington” (NW 158-159).⁴⁵ While she was careful to separate the actions of *some* white men from the Indian agents, this reignited the debate regarding the management of the BIA, in particular, the role of the Methodist Church. Nevertheless, Winnemucca was not afraid to confront issues head on, and frequently, with little regard to decorum or propriety. She was a complicated individual who did not align with the Western concept of an Indigenous woman.

Mediating Space on the Printed Page or Text as Performance

Newspaper reviews of Winnemucca’s lectures were often divided, either vilifying or supporting her performance and objectives. Many were critical because she did not conform to Western gender standards –not only in her willingness to reveal and challenge corruption, but also in terms of public behavior off the stage. Papers took issue with the fact that she had been married more than once, occasionally played poker, and drank alcohol. Indian agents and businessmen attempted to discredit her activism with petitions, reports and letters to Washington. In February 1883, *The Council Fire and Arbitrator*, “A Monthly Journal . . . Devoted to the Civilization and Rights of the American Indian, and the Promotion of the Principles of Arbitration as a Preventive of War between the Different Nations” reprinted a letter Winnemucca had written to Senator Logan thanking him for his support and opposition to the Indian Appropriation Bill. In the missive, she states “the money appropriated year after year for the *education* of Indians, had better be styled an appropriation for Indian agents and their relations”

⁴⁵ Thomas Tibbles, the white husband of Susette LaFlesche had recently published a novel titled *Hidden Power: A Secret History of the Indian Ring, its Operations, Intrigues, and Machinations* (1981) According to Canfield, the story illustrates “Indians were kept as the helpless wards of agents, their self-respect lost while contractors on the reservation became affluent” (284) Although the book was fiction, it supported wresting control of the BIA from Methodist ministers and appointing Army agents in their place.

or at the very least, given to the military who traditionally came to the Indians rescue (my emphasis, 18).⁴⁶ Suggesting Winnemucca might not have been the author, or if she were, had been corrupted by Army influence, the article reveals the contentious battle for BIA control.

Two months later, the editors of the journal took more drastic action, assailing Winnemucca's character and labelling her an "Amazonian champion of the army." Referencing Reinhart's affidavits on file with the Indian Bureau, the paper stated:

She is so notorious for her untruthfulness as to be wholly unreliable. She is known to have been for some time an inmate of a house of ill-fame in the town of Winnemucca, Nevada, and to have been a common camp follower, consorting with common soldiers. It is a great outrage on the respectable people of Boston for General Howard or any other officer of the army to foist such a woman of any race upon them (69).

Both the *Bostonian Evening Transcript* and Nevada's *Silver State* newspaper defended Winnemucca and rallied against the slanderous attack. The latter wrote that the "whites in Nevada and on the frontier" know what is said in her lectures is fact. The New England paper derided the journal, claiming it was inconsequential and written by "persons accustomed to working upon public opinion" (NW 166, 168). These rebuttals point out that there was both a regional and national disdain for Washington and government insiders. Although *The Council Fire*, printed a few letters of support, it also mailed "marked copies" critical of Winnemucca to her supporters (NW 168). Elizabeth Peabody, offering her social standing as cover, wrote a number of letters to editors, as did Winnemucca's lawyer and army officer's she had worked with in the West. Significantly, both Peabody and Mann realized letters of endorsement must be appended to *Life* before it went to press.

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that the magazine was published in Washington D.C. and founded by A.B. Meacham, a Methodist minister, Indian agent, and past Superintendent for Indian Affairs for Oregon who was sympathetic to Indian relocation. The editors of the journal, Dr. Thomas Bland and his wife, Dr. Mary Bland, were also Indian rights activists.

We can surmise that it was difficult for Winnemucca to locate an agent who would underwrite *Life*. As she notes, booksellers did not want “to meddle with it on account of . . . its plain personalities” (NW 177). As a result, her 268-page autobiography was self-published and privately funded through donations, subscriptions and monies received during lectures. According to Canfield, five individuals underwrote the \$600.00 cost of the first printing, which was sold in Boston, New York and by the author (206). The preface of Winnemucca’s story also reveals that it is not only a liminal space, a textual threshold, but for an Indigenous female author an additional site of negotiation. Her editor carefully states:

MY editing has consisted in copying the original manuscript in correct orthography and punctuation, with occasional emendations by the author, of a book which is an [sic] heroic act on the part of the writer. Mrs. Hopkins came to the East from the Pacific coast with the courageous purpose of telling in detail to the mass of our people, “extenuating nothing and setting down naught in malice,” the story of her people’s trials. Finding that in extemporaneous speech she could only speak at one time of a few points, she determined to write out the most important part of what she wished to say. In fighting with her literary deficiencies [sic] she loses some of the fervid eloquence which her extraordinary colloquial command of the English language enables her to utter, but I am confident that no one would desire that her own original words should be altered. (3)

In other words, the front matter of Winnemucca’s autobiography addresses the *matter* of authenticity. This forward by “Mrs. Horace Mann” is meant to dispel the notion that Native Americans were incapable of authoring a book, but it is a space of concession for both parties. Her title, and Winnemucca’s (Mrs. Hopkins), not only labels them the property of their husbands but also suggests a woman’s worth and recognition primarily come from her marital relationship rather than her own individual accomplishments or identity. Although Mann attests to the veracity of Winnemucca’s story, and acknowledges her command of speech, she does not refrain from noting her deficiency. In using the term “colloquial,” the editor implies Winnemucca is conversationally adept but unskilled in formal or literary language. Indeed, in a letter to an

acquaintance regarding the manuscript, Mann noted the author's problems with spelling and grammar, "I need to recur to her sometimes to know what a word is . . . she often takes syllables off of words & adds them or rather prefixes them to other words" (Canfield 203). While she later compliments her poetical verse, Mann illustrates that ironically both she and the author, who is fluent in four languages, are dependent on each other for meaning making.

The afterward of *Life* also plays a strategic and calculated political role. A petition is inserted after the conclusion requesting Congress return the Paiutes to the Malheur reservation. The irony of the situation is not lost on Winnemucca, who acknowledges her people had "been signing papers for the last twenty-three years" –and often in the dark about the document's content (242). Her enlightened readers have an opportunity to remedy the situation. The petition is followed by a 20-page appendix with letters from General Howard and other military supporters verifying Winnemucca's work as a guide, interpreter and her help during the Bannock War. Interestingly, it also includes reprints of the newspaper editorials that came to her defense following *The Council Fire* attack. Winnemucca, carefully planned this section, not only as support but as *evidence*. As she explains in the final chapter of *Life*, she intends to add these so her "reader will see how many were against me" (241). The author has clearly learned that written documents carry legal weight. *Life*, similar to a policy document, presents a problem backed with evidence (the Paiutes "wrongs and claims"), offers a solution, and proposes action. Bookended with white attestation and support, like Truckee's "rag friend," the letters carry power that grants her access to a white audience (*Life* 25). Appropriating Western discourses of *manifest manners* paradoxically provided a means for negotiating sovereignty and the ability to debate Indigenous rights on her terms.

Life after *Life*

Despite *Life's* relative success, Winnemucca continued to lecture, this is where she had the most freedom to express her views. The format capitalized on her ability to adapt, and engage with the expectations of an ever-changing milieu, and her embodied, entertaining approach of life-telling increased audience empathy, facilitating a more immediate response to her call to action. Examined together, Winnemucca's autobiography, lectures and engagement with newspapers highlight the complex rhetorical strategies she employed in her quest for political justice. Her message was often met with opposition, even among the Paiutes, who sometimes felt she'd betrayed their trust. But her goal was to preserve cultural traditions as an agent and performer of her people's life story. *Life*, although billed as an autobiography, is importantly Winnemucca's story "among" the Paiutes. Her life-telling performances, which document tribal life pre and post contact, serve as evidence for the damage wrought by settler colonialism. Importantly, they offer insight about the Indigenous autobiographical subject(s), their agency, and available modes of communication before Native American boarding schools became a cog in the U.S. government's assimilation machine.

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CHAPTER THREE

Every Image Tells a Story: Zitkala-Ša's Traditional and Transformative Life-Telling Performances

But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization.” – Zitkala-Ša (*American Indian Stories* 113)

The postindian warriors hover at last over the ruins of tribal representations and surmount the scriptures of manifest manners with new stories; these warriors counter the surveillance and literature of dominance with their own simulations of survivance. The postindian arises from the earlier inventions of the tribes only to contravene the absence of the real with theatrical performances; the theater of tribal consciousness is the recreation of the real, not the absence of the real in the simulations of dominance –Gerald Vizenor (*Manifest Manners* 5)

Post Wounded Knee Life-Telling

By the turn of the nineteenth-century Native Americans increasingly had access to tools and discursive spaces that allowed them to challenge dominant white nationalist rhetoric. These included Native American and U.S. publications and public speaking engagements. Indigenous people engaged in political and diplomatic efforts by sending delegations to Washington, D.C., to negotiate with the federal government and advocate for their rights. This included petitioning for policy changes, defending tribal sovereignty, and challenging oppressive legislation. During the Progressive Era (1890-1920), a number of Indigenous activists, the first generation of boarding school graduates, acknowledged they could not recapture the past but they also saw fault in surrendering or abandoning their cultural traditions in the name of progress (Hoxie 3-4). They additionally realized Indigenous peoples had common complaints (lack of resources, government abuse and inefficiency) and goals (citizenship, education, and land rights) that could be addressed via pan-tribal alliances. Solidarity expressed through various coalitions offered greater political agency and the possibility of restructuring Indigenous place within America.

After Wounded Knee, the government concentrated its efforts on civilizing and assimilating Native Americans. The U.S. government had justified removal and displacement on reservations as a means of protecting the “vanishing Indian” from land poachers. The same patriarchal discourse was now employed to promote new policies that would Americanize Indigenous peoples. Land allotment, by way of the Dawes Act, would turn Native Americans into farmers and teach them the value of property ownership (mention was never made of the additional land this would free up for white settlement). Boarding schools, a cog in the civilizing machine, would assist by imparting Euro-American wisdom and religious ideology. Ironically, the skills learned at boarding schools, and the opportunities these afforded, became sites for opposition.

The podium and the stage became a space for not only reconfiguring or fashioning identities but also for resistance. This chapter explores the performances of political activist Zitkala-Ša, aka Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, and demonstrates her life-telling narratives (spoken and sung) were an effective means for “talking back to American civilization” (Hoxie 2). She used her voice to protest boarding schools, defend Native religious practices, and advocate for self-determination. Instead of promoting a policy of assimilation, she sought a middle ground position where Indigenous peoples could exist “side by side” with white citizens, but, remain autonomous. Frequently, this was accomplished by appropriating the familial republican fatherhood discourse of settler colonialism, a discourse that implicitly and explicitly defined power relations. Zitkala-Ša deploys and subverts familial language to assert U.S. responsibility while simultaneously advancing policies that would ensure Indigenous cultural survival.

Boarding Schools and the Assimilation Machine

Beginning in 1879, off-reservation, anti-tribal education was increasingly seen as an avenue for removing the *savage* from the student and solving the “Indian problem”. A number of religious and federally funded boarding schools were established with the goal of teaching literacy, European ideals, and assimilating Native children into white mainstream society. The first institution, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, was established in Pennsylvania (1879) by army officer Col. Richard Henry Pratt. A prototype for future schools, Carlisle was patterned on Pratt’s experiences with Indigenous prisoners at Fort Marion and the instruction of Native and African Americans at the Hampton Institute. Importantly, the curriculum embraced his famous slogan, “kill the Indian in him, save the man” (Prucha 261). While recent scholarship argues Pratt viewed this as a preferable alternative to actual genocide,⁴⁷ his program nonetheless employed systematic measures to erase cultural and tribal identity. Students were stripped of their Indigenous clothing, braids were shorn, English supplanted Native language and children were given “white” names. Additionally, the schools “purposefully and consciously brought together children from different of tribal nations” making it difficult to maintain community and religious or cultural practices (Katanski 7). Culture is performative. It both reflects and influences or norms, how we know the world and those around us. Removing access to cultural rituals and shared ideologies is therefore a form of psychological abuse.

⁴⁷ See: Lomawaima, K. Tsianina and Jeffrey Ostler. “Reconsidering Richard Henry Pratt: Cultural Genocide and Native Liberation in an Era of Racial Oppression.” *Journal of American Indian Education*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2018, pp. 79–100.

Students were also exposed to sexual abuse, corporal punishment and were susceptible to disease –many did not survive the experience.⁴⁸ Those who did, were subjected to an assimilationist agenda that forced Western gender structures on students by molding Native American boys into self-sufficient, industrious farmers and girls into obedient homemakers. According to Pratt, this was accomplished by “planting treason to the tribe and loyalty to the government” (Prucha 269). Education focused on teaching literacy and promoting a new *Indian* image, both on paper and the stage. Many boarding schools established on-site presses that produced newspapers and magazines showcasing student essays, short stories and letters to the editor.⁴⁹ Administrators used the publications as propaganda, proof their project was a success. Students, however, discovered print forums also provided an opportunity to gain editorial control of their identity. While we must acknowledge that many of these publications were subject to white oversight and sanitization, scholars have uncovered moments and messages of subversion in student writings (Katanski, Fear-Segal, Emery). Moreover, stories and memoirs penned post-boarding school by Native American authors offer an unfiltered view of the boarding school

⁴⁸ Recent headlines demonstrate that it is impossible to definitively know how many Native Americans died due to their boarding schools experience. Many students were buried in unmarked graves or sent home when they became ill. History scholar Preston McBride has uncovered “at least 1,000 deaths at just four of the over 500 schools that existed in the United States, including the non-boarding schools on Indian reservations” between 1879-1934. In an interview with Rutgers, McBride estimated as many as “40,000 children [may have] died either in or because of these institutions,” which he likens to the deaths incurred on the Trail of Tears. See: Brooks, Brad. “Native Americans Decry Unmarked Graves, Untold History of Boarding Schools,” *Rutgers*, June 22, 2021.

⁴⁹ Carlisle’s press published an assortment of weekly and monthly magazines and newspapers including the *Eadle Keatah Toh*, later renamed *The Red Man* and *The Red Man Helper*, as well as the white-controlled newspaper *The Indian Helper*; the Santee Normal School (Nebraska), published *The Word Carrier*; the student -run newspaper, *Talks and Thoughts of the Indian Students at the Hampton Institute* (Virginia) offered a venue for writing against erasure; and the Seneca Indian School (Oklahoma) the student-edited newspaper *The Halleluiah*. For a complete history and examples of student writing see: Child, Brenda J. *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940*, U of Nebraska P, 1998 and Emery, Jacqueline. *Recovering Native American Writing in the Boarding School Press*. U of Nebraska P, 2017.

experience.⁵⁰ And while these writings may reveal an ambivalence, they importantly write against cultural erasure.

The school stage also played an important role in promoting the “civilized Indian.” Students were encouraged to take part in plays, music productions and oratory competitions as actors and performers of a *new* American identity. Music and storytelling, important means of Native American communication, thus became additional tools for stripping away cultural identity and supplanting it with Western traditions.⁵¹ Similar to texts, however, performances provided an occasion for students to resist assimilation efforts, exercise autonomy and express themselves. As performance scholar Della Pollock asserts, “performance becomes a site of transformation and even a paradigm for cultural resistance” (657). A number of students, including Gertrude Simmons (Bonnin), used the skills they acquired to critique the colonizer and sustain Native practices. An exploration of the ways she used life-telling performance (oral and musical) as a form of survivance, illustrates that she both rejected and *played* along with stereotypical representations to further her political and cultural mission.

Gertrude Simmons Bonnin /Zitkala-Ša

Gertrude Simmons was born on February 22, 1876 in present day South Dakota, the daughter of a Sioux mother, Ellen Simons /Taté I Yóhin Win (Reaches for the Wind), and a Euro-American father who abandoned the family. Raised on the Yankton reservation, her early childhood was informed by Sioux culture and traditions. At the age of eight, she left her family, travelling to White’s Manual Labor Institute, a Quaker boarding school in Indiana. Homesick

⁵⁰ Notable authors include Luther Standing Bear ((Lakota), Charles Eastman (Dakota), Susette La Flesche (Omaha), her half-brother Francis La Flesche (Omaha, Ponca) and Zitkala-Ša (Lakota). Some of these authors went on to work at the schools they attended or the agency/reservations where schools were situated.

⁵¹See John R. Gram. "Acting Out Assimilation: Playing Indian and Becoming American in the Federal Indian Boarding Schools." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2016, pp. 251-273.

and missing her mother, she returned to the reservation three years later but found readjustment difficult, and at the age of fifteen, resumed her studies at White's. Her second stay was a better experience, for she excelled both academically and musically. After graduating in 1895, she received a scholarship to attend Earlham College, a Quaker liberal arts school in Indian. Although illness curtailed her studies, she was acclaimed for her oratory skills, and secured a teaching position at Carlisle in 1897. A year later, disillusioned with Pratt's policies, she left to enroll in the New England Music Conservatory and focus on the violin.

In Boston she was also encouraged to write about her experiences. Adopting the name Zitkala-Ša (Red Bird) she crafted three essays that were published in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Critical of boarding school life and assimilation: "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," (January 1900), "School Days of Indian Girl" (February 1900) and "An Indian Teacher Among Indians (March 1900). Although she returned to Carlisle for a year, her time in the East marked a renewed interest in cultural traditions, and her shift towards political activism. After two failed engagements, she married Raymond Bonnin in 1902, and returned to reservation life. The couple eventually relocated to Washington D.C., where she was appointed secretary for the Society of Indians (SAI), a pan-Indian Association. As "Mrs. R.T. Bonnin," "Gertrude Bonnin," and "Zitkala-Ša," she energetically lobbied for peyote reform and Native American citizenship. She joined forces with the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC)⁵² to advocate for citizenship and welfare rights. In addition, she documented the crimes against the Indigenous

⁵² The GFWC, founded in 1890 and headquartered in Washington DC, united the growing number of women's clubs that sprung up during the progressive era. With 49 state federations, the focus of the umbrella organization was civil and social reform. See: Huebner, Karin L. and Winslow, Helen M. *Official Register and Directory of Women's Clubs in America*, Vol XXIII (1921). Lindsey & Co., 1922, pp 10-17.

people in Oklahoma,⁵³ then initiated the formation and became secretary of National Council of American Indian (NCAI) –an organization that functioned as a service program to investigate reservation living conditions and keep Native communities informed.

Zitkala-Ša’s autobiographical sketches for the *Atlantic Monthly* have been extensively analyzed. Early scholarship focuses on her authorial position (liminality or bicultural assimilation) and how this informed her writing. Recent analysis interprets her work through Vizenor’s lens of survivance. Indeed, Tadeusz Lewandowski identifies her as a significant forerunner of the Native American civil rights movement (*Red Power* 16). While the *Atlantic* essays are rich for study, I demonstrate that they’re not the sum of her autobiographical work. We must not limit ourselves to the Western concept of the genre and life narratives that focus on self (auto). As Agnes Picotte points out, Zitkala-Ša herself did not. Many of her purported experiences in her boarding school stories were actually those of others (xv). A study of her public performances reveals a unique form of life-telling—a combination of personal and community lived-experience, hard facts, with a dash of trickster humor, and ethos. A brief analysis of *The Sun Dance Opera* (1913), along with her winning speech at the onset of her career (“Side by Side”) and a lecture delivered decades later (“Americanize the American Indian”), will illustrate that Zitkala-Ša capitalized on her oratory and musical skills (abilities honed during her boarding school experience) to create life-telling performances aimed at preserving community, culture and political agency. Her successful efforts led to the formation of the Indian Welfare Department within the GFWC and helped gain citizenship rights for all Native American peoples.

⁵³ As a representative of the GFWC, Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Bonnin), co-authored with Charles H. Fabens and Matthew K. Sniffen, *Oklahoma’s Poor Rich Indians: An Orgy of Graft and Exploitation of the Five Civilized Tribes – Legalized Robbery*. The report revealed a network of government corruption and private businesses had robbed Indigenous people of their oil-rich lands.

Playing Indian: Performative and Cultural Identity

According to biographer Nancy Rappaport, Zitkala-Ša “hid her identity when necessary and exploited it when beneficial” (158) This statement is problematic, for it implies she had one all-encompassing identity, versus overlapping facets of self. In addition, it ignores the possibility of change, the process of transition, and the very notion that *self* is a social construct. It would be more accurate to state that Zitkala-Ša-Sa moved within varied public and cultural spheres, refashioning her image, which is distinct from identity, as she saw fit. In 1898, she not only adopted a new name but also experimented with different personas and costume. Posing for famed Boston photographer Gertrude Käsebier, she staged a variety of performative identities (see fig. 5). In one photograph she stands in front of a floral wallpaper backdrop, wearing a white high-necked Victorian gown, holding her violin. In another, she is shown with beads in her hair, wearing a simple dress and clutching a basket to her chest. In the final photograph, she wears a Native costume with her hand to forehead, peering off into the distance in a theatrical Indian pose. As Raya Green contends, these scenes are representative of her varied *roles* –Gertrude Simmons, proper post-Carlisle school girl; Red Bird; and Zitkala-Ša, “stage lecturer and performer, [and] star of the ladies' reform club lecture circuit” (58). I assert these should not be read as false personas, but as examples of visual life-telling performances and evidence that she was aware of the different discourses surrounding Indianness, authenticity, and assimilation. According to Dwight Conquergood, “performance privileges threshold crossing, shape shifting and boundary violating figures” (qtd in Bell 17). Costume was another opportunity for self-fashioning and controlling the public image *she* wanted to project.

Zitkala-Ša's ability to vary her image via name, dress and props challenged the notion of a static Native American identity and critiques colonizer simulations of the *real*. Performing Indianness also served a purpose, it garnered more invitations to society circles, lectures and



Fig. 5. The Many Faces of Zitkala-Ša. Gertrude Käsebier was well-known for photographing Sioux performers from Buffalo Bill Cody's "Wild West" show. Experimenting with different backdrops, clothing and props, she photographed Zitkala-Ša in her portrait studio in 1898. *The National Museum of American History*.

conventions where she could advance her political and social work. In a letter to Arthur C. Parker, president of SAI she states she's agreed to wear "Indian dress" for an upcoming piano solo and lecture in California because it served as "a drawing card," and "is good for the cause." Moreover, she considers it part of her job –a uniform linked to an *imagined* identity –reasoning, even a "clown has to dress differently from his usual citizen's suit" (Lewandowski, Zitkala-Ša 146). This was not necessarily how the organization wanted to present themselves, but the SAI

and Zitkala-Ša discovered it was sometimes necessary to entertain audiences while campaigning for reform.⁵⁴

The press' perception of Zitkala-Ša at this event underscores her ability to use life-telling, performance and the media to her advantage. Unlike other newspaper reviews, the *Los Angeles Times* does not comment on her attire during her piano solo. Instead, the headline promotes her family lineage, introducing her as the "direct descent of Sitting Bull," who in addition to discussing the evils of peyote, "told of many adventures in her transition from the tepee to the college" ("Noted Indian Woman Visitor"). This short column succinctly reveals Zitkala-Ša's carefully crafted life-telling formula: attract audiences and guarantee authenticity by way of dress, language or genealogy; position oneself as a successful example of assimilation (teepee to college); include familial lived experiences ("reminiscences of her distinguished ancestor"); appeal to the audience's sense of fair play; and finally, advocate for reform. In this lecture, she accomplishes the latter by claiming "peyote is forced upon the Indians in the same manner the English forced opium upon the Chinese." Although it is implied that greed is the motivating factor in both cases, her analogy cleverly distances the audience from blame, a maneuver Zitkala-Ša was quite adept at deploying. She additionally offers those present an opportunity to feel superior to the English by supporting her cause.

Some have argued that this is another example of Zitkala-Ša embellishing and

⁵⁴ For a more information on the SAI and the balancing act it maneuvered by "pandering to white images" while simultaneously advocating for policy changes see: Patterson, Michell Wick. "'Real' Indian Songs: The Society of American Indians and the Use of Native American Culture as a Means of Reform." *The American Quarterly*, vol. 26 no. 1, 2002, pp. 44-44 and Stanciu, Christina. "Americanization on Native Terms: The Society of Native Americans, Citizenship Debates, and Tropes of 'Racial Difference.'" *Native American and Indigenous Studies*, vol. no. pp. 111-148, 2019.

exploiting a crafted or false identity.⁵⁵ This was not the first time a newspaper identified her as the granddaughter of Sitting Bull. A suggestion Rapport calls “absurd,” as the chief was Hunkpapa Lakota and she was Yankton Nakota (158). I find this argument problematic because it again uses a Western lens to quantify “family.” Native American’s concept of kinship includes not only those connected by blood, but also by adoption, tribal allegiance and through national community.⁵⁶ The Sioux are a confederacy of seven tribes, including the Lakota and Nakota. We cannot determine Zitkala-Ša’s purpose for permitting and possibly promoting these claims. Similar to Winnemucca, she may have found it beneficial to lean into the Indian princess trope. On the other hand, this might be indicative of the role she wanted play – *akin* to Sitting Bull, as a spokesperson and *postindian* warrior fighting for Indigenous rights.

Musical Life Performance

To understand Zitkala-Ša’s foray into theatrical performance we must first consider it within its historical and discursive context. In the 1880s the federal government became increasingly fearful of large Native gatherings. As a result, Indigenous ceremonial and religious performances were prohibited, including the Sun Dance. Plains people cleverly subverted the ban, performing the ceremony under the guise of a fourth of July celebration and assimilated patriotism. Substituting an American flag for their ceremonial pole, the Lakota Sioux continued

⁵⁵ During the 1918 Congressional hearings on peyote use, white Smithsonian ethnologist James Mooney not only challenged Zitkala-Ša’s stance (she wanted it outlawed) but also her Sioux authenticity. He argued the attire she had worn in a *Washington Times* photograph was evidence she was a sham, because she wore “a woman’s dress from a southern tribe, as shown by the long fringes; the belt is a Navajo man’s belt; the fan is a peyote man’s fan carried only by men usually in the peyote ceremony” (Peyote Hearings 163). Apparently, mixing clothing from different tribes and “cross dressing” is sufficient evidence to discredit her testimony and privilege his white scientific perspective.

⁵⁶ On Native American kinship systems see: Deloria, Philip Joseph and Neal Salisbury. *A Companion to American Indian History*. Blackwell Publishers, 2002 and on the Sioux in particular see: Demallie, Raymond J. “Community in Native America: Continuity and Change Among the Sioux.” *Journal de La Société Des Américanistes*, vol. 95, no. 1, 2009, pp. 185–205.

to meet annually and maintain their cultural rituals.⁵⁷ In a similar fashion, Zitkala-Ša's *Sun Dance Opera* created a public space for both performing and preserving sacred rituals, albeit on a stage that also included Western scenes and a melodramatic love triangle. A number of American composers were experimenting with Native music during this period, but her collaboration with Brigham Young University composer William F. Hanson is the only instance of an Indigenous musician taking part in the crafting of an "Indianist opera" (Smith "198").⁵⁸ Utilizing her advanced music skills and lived experiences she played a crucial role in the production of its life-telling narrative. As opera historian and bibliographer Edward Ellsworth Hipsher notes, "it was she who furnished the missing links that made a story of the Sun Dance; she who revised Mr. Hansen's poems, phrase by phrase, so they would truly represent her people; she who criticized his music, whenever it departed from Indian melody" (245). Hanson frequently neglected to give Zitkala-Ša credit for these contributions, in fact, her name is missing as co-author of the opera, but her influence is evident in the traditional Native American music, choreography, costumes and presence of Ute performers on the stage.

The Utes participation in *The Sun Dance Opera* should be read as an act of resistance, a form of enculturation to reinforce Native identity. Cariou argues that Indigenous life-telling is a "performance of cultural sovereignty and community self-determination," that depends on listeners who value, celebrate and "do the work of remembering" (315). Tribal knowledge and memories are not only spoken, they can also be vocalized through song and music. Participating in the opera offered the Utes an opportunity to play traditional music, wear authentic dress and

⁵⁷ Scholars contend the American flag was a fitting substitute as it is "imbued with Indigenous values" associated with power and honor (174) See Montgomery, Lindsay M., and Chip Colwell. *Objects of Survivance: A Material History of the American Indian School Experience*. University Press of Colorado, 2019,

⁵⁸ For information on the *Indianist* movement, a term coined by Gilbert Chase to link U.S. nationalism and identity with Native music, see Pisani, Michael V. "The Nationalism Controversy: Quotation or Intonation?" *Imagining Native America in Music*, Yale University Press, 2005, pp. 182–210; and Tara Browner, "Breathing the Indian Spirit": Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the Indianist Movement in American Music," *American Music*, vol. 15, no. 3. 1997, pp 265-84.

(re)live a cultural experience (see fig. 6). The production was also important for the Native American audience, who reveled in the opportunity to view a religious dance that had been forbidden on the reservation. Commenting on its February 1913 premier at the Orpheus Hall in

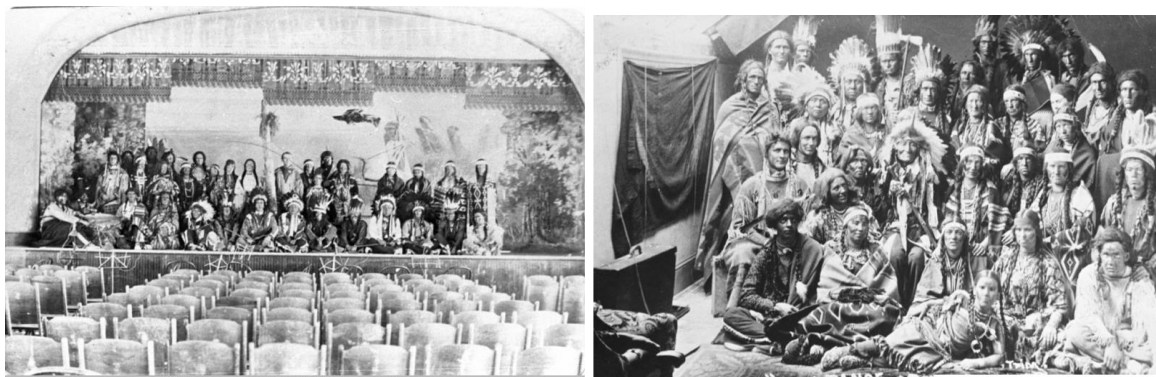


Fig. 6. *Sun Dance Opera Company* and Ute in costume on the stage at the Orpheus, Vernal, Utah (1913). Uintah County Library Regional History Center: <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6pc6gsw>; <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6zh05pd>

Vernal, Utah, *The Washington Post* noted that both “Indians and whites drove in from forty miles around to hear it, and, having heard it, pronounced it a triumph” (“Squaw Writes”). Granted, the opera’s solos were given to white singers, but in keeping with Indigenous people’s prioritization of communal identity, the dances and chorus were performed by the Utes. As the *Vernal Express* reported “each and every participant was necessary for its success” (“Sun Dance Opera was as Big Success”). The review unknowingly personifies Indigenous ideology, specifically, the belief that each individual is necessary and valued for their contribution to the community.

White performers and audience members also took pride in an opera, claiming it was a *uniquely* American production. Local citizens took paternalistic ownership of the “made-in-Utah” article which they believed provided a glimpse of a “vanishing” people, whereas promotional newspaper reviews of the performance, capitalized on not only on Zitkala-Ša’s but also Hanson’s Indianness (“Plays and Players”). A photograph from a later run at the Salt Lake

Theater depicts both in Native clothing (“Plays and Players”; “Local Indian”). In the tableaux, Zitkala-Ša appears amused or at the very least, aware that Hanson is *playing Indian*. Perhaps this is why he dons a feathered headdress that hides his short hair in another promotional photograph. Nevertheless, he is an obvious imitation of the real, a white man dressed in a costume, impersonating a Native American (see fig. 7). The irony here is that Hanson is using costume

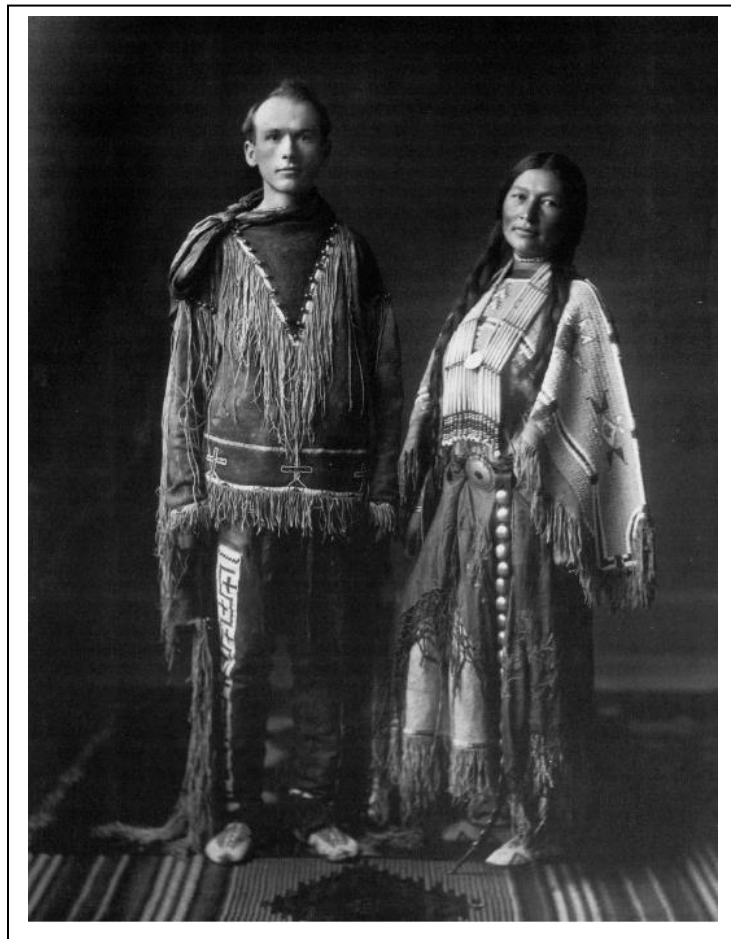


Fig. 7. “Plays and Players.” Stance and expression suggest the irony of the situation was not lost on Zitkala-Ša. Paradoxically, when the promotional photograph was reprinted in the March 1913 issue of the *Deseret News*, William Hanson is misidentified as Prof. Peter Hanson. Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. William Willard, photographer. (MSS 299, H27, 1659)

and performance to assert credibility and lend authority to his contribution. Local papers were also quick to point out that Hanson “has lived since boyhood among the Indians and knows them and their hearts as few know them” (“Plays and Players”). Implicit in the endorsement is the notion that *his* acculturation and experiences among Indigenous communities make him an expert on Sioux life. This echoes a myriad of faulty assumptions regarding assimilation –the idea that living among others, wearing their clothing, and being aware of their customs, erased a sense of being or belong from one’s native culture. Or for that matter, the notion that one would naturally be accepted by another culture simply because they have adopted some of their traditions.

Both Hanson and Zitkala-Ša’s participation in the production is complicated. As scholar P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo) asserts, the plot and music are prone to sentimentalism and songs that were originally sung *a capella*, or accompanied by Native instruments, have now been set to music played on European instruments—including Zitkala-Ša’s violin (104). While Hanson may have taken a “sympathetic” approach to the opera, Zitkala-Ša’s participation was very personal – the “heroic male lead” was named after her only child, her Native flute was used in the opera, and her knowledge of the Sun Dance was invaluable to Hanson (Hafen 104). Nevertheless, the production might be criticized for its commodification of a Native American religious ritual. Zitkala-Ša never wrote about the opera, making it difficult to ascertain her motivation. When asked in a 1913 review why she incorporated the ritual, she replied: “I have been trained in the concepts of the Christian religion, but I do not find them more beautiful, more noble, or more true than the religious ideals of the Indian. Indeed, if one allows for a change in names, the two sets of concepts are much the same. I should not like to see my people lose their ideals, or have them supplanted by others less fitted to influence their lives for good” (“Indian Opera on an

Indian Reservation”). The opera, with its celebration of a forbidden religious ritual, thus becomes a site of cultural resistance.

The opera is but another example of Zitkala-Ša “talking back” and resisting the notion that Native Americans should abandon their religious beliefs in favor of Christianity. In 1901, she wrote “A Plea for the Indian Dance,” in response to the federal ban on ceremonial gatherings. In the essay, first published in the school newspaper of the Santee Normal Training School, the narrator describes meeting a Christian man who is disgusted by the barbarianism and lack of dress present in Native American dance. Ostensibly, this same disdain is not directed towards nude museum sculptures or those who dance in evening gowns. Although she notes the latter hides what she considers barbaric (wire corsets), she ponders why one culture’s dance or religion should be deemed superior to another. As she rides off on a pony, she observes the exercise will soon “restore to me the sweet sense that God has allotted a place in the universe for each of his creatures, both great and small –just as they are.” (*American Indian* 238). A year later she penned “Why I Am a Pagan,” in response to a “Christian” pugilist (most likely Col. Pratt) who had described her as “morally bad” (*American Indian* 117). Juxtaposing the voice of the Great Spirit residing in “nature’s garden” with the rigidity and punishment found in the Christian religion, she asserts the “pale-face missionary and the hooded aborigine are both god’s creatures” (117) Ironically displaying more Christian principles than her critic, Zitkala-Ša effectively embraces “pagan,” dogma while simultaneously acknowledging the two can co-exist.

Along with religion, the opera challenges colonial attitudes regarding Indigenous aesthetics and art. Melding “highbrow” theater with Native music and dance dispels the idea that one form of production, or one race, is culturally superior to another. The performance additionally employs the politics of visibility to counter the myth of the vanishing Indian. White

audiences are presented with authentic, admittedly embellished, scenes of Native presence. As Hipsher posits, “The opera does not depict the Indian in the dime novel fashion familiar in the stage and screen. It is a sympathetic portrayal of the real Indian in a conscientious attempt to delineate the manners, the customs, the dress, the religious ideals, the superstitions, the songs, the games, the ceremonials-in short, the life of a noble people too little understood” (247). Under Zitkala-Ša’s guidance, the life-telling opera swayed the opinions of the public and the authorities. Attenuated forms of the Sun Dance were already being celebrated in Utah and other Western states, but newspaper articles published after the opera’s premier demonstrate the spiritual ceremony became increasingly accepted and permitted.

The Sun Dance Opera continued to be staged, but recent scholarship has established the production changed after its initial few runs and Zitkala-Ša’s absence in 1915.⁵⁹ When the opera premiered in New York twenty-three years later, it opened to unfavorable reviews. One critic opined the score “was reminiscent of the European operettas of the nineteenth century and at times of a hokum treatment of the Indian (“Hanson Light Opera”). The review further notes the music was pleasant, but it “could be applied with equal success” to a European romantic tale. The lukewarm reception might be a result of Hanson’s continual editing of the score and the few Native Americans in the Broadway cast. It possible that the opera indeed lacked authentic Indigenous music, but the critic (and theater goers) may have also been disappointed that their *imagined* representation of Indianness was not on display.

⁵⁹ See Smith and Hafner. When the opera was produced by BYU students a year later the *Vernal Express* noted that “several new characters have been added and the orchestra re-written (“Musicians Enthusiastic About Sun Dance Opera.” 10 April 1914, p.2). *The Salt Lake Telegram* reported in December 1914 that additional changes were made by Hanson who “had the benefit of constructive criticism from local musicians,” obviously non-Native musicians, resulting in a “much more polished and acceptable production than before” (“Local Indian Opera to be Given Again at Salt Lake Theater” 2)

Audience appreciation could also reflect demographics and knowledge (or lack thereof) regarding Native peoples. Absent were those who had a cultural connection to the Sun Dance and its music (the Utes), and residents who had a familiarity with Native American life (Utahans). Notably, when the opera moved from rural Vernal to Utah cities, the program began with a “talk” by Zitkala-Ša in which she described the “principal myths and legends upon which it [the opera] was founded” (“Sun Dance’ Opera Scores Big Triumph”). Clearly, she believed context was necessary to enhance a revised, and possibly watered-down, production. The 1938 *N.Y. Times* review does not mention a prelude lecture, nor Zitkala-Ša and her contributions. Instead, it disappointedly reports that “tools of the operatic stage were used to translate this aboriginal culture to an audience of modern Americans” –tools that were foreign to the plot and its characters (“Hanson Light Opera”). Put differently, with the authorial “I(s)” absent,⁶⁰ the opera did not translate into a life-telling performance, but instead, “light” entertainment.

Spoken Life Narratives: Carefully Costumed and Staged Lectures

Zitkala-Ša’s oratory career was launched in February of 1896 at Earlham College. Representing her freshman class, she delivered the winning oration, “Side by Side,” a short treatise on Indigenous history and her belief that Native Americans and white people could enrich each other’s lives. Interestingly, the content of her speech, unlike the other five entrants, is not printed in full or summarized in the local school journal. Although, the reviewer does acknowledge “her delivery was pleasing, and her voice, though not strong, was clear and distinct” (“Oratorical”). A month later she represented Earlham at the Indiana State Oratorical

⁶⁰ Zitkala-Ša was absent from the opera both literally and figuratively, she died in January 1938, three months before the New York opening. *The NYTimes* did report on her death (“Mrs. R.T. Bonnin an Indian Leader: Interior Employee, a Sioux, Champion of Her Race, Dies at 62, was Founder of Council, Author of Several Books, Granddaughter of Sitting Bull, Famous Chief”) but again omitted any reference to her collaboration on the *Sun Dance Opera*.

Contest, where she stood out as the lone female contestant and for her perceived racial difference. According to the *Indianapolis News*, “the slight, dark-skinned girl, dressed in black, who sat in the row of speakers, had been gazed upon with curiosity. It was noticed that her face showed in delicate but firm lines the cut of the Indian face. Her eyes and hair were black, the small, well-shaped hands at her side were a dark copper color” (“Cheers”). Although she is viewed as an object on public display, her strong oratory skills disarm the colonial, voyeuristic gaze, allowing her to speak for her people. As the article further notes, “the effect of artificiality of a speaker, up merely on exhibition, was lost when she spoke, and the audience forgot it was an oratorical contest, and remembered only, that an Indian girl was *speaking for her race*” (Cheers; emphasis added). This is not to gloss over the difficulty of the situation nor her position within the predominantly white male venue. In her autobiographical sketch, “School Days of an Indian Girl,” she writes that she was aware of audience’s prejudice before her speech, and after, when a group in the hall unfurled a white banner with a picture of an Indian girl and the word “sq—w” (*American Indian Stories*, 102). But winning second place in the face of adversity speaks to her ability to use spectacle and the colonial gaze to her advantage.⁶¹

In “Side by Side,” Zitkala-Ša employs her gift of oral storytelling and rhetorical strategies to offer her perspective of the “Indian problem.” Some scholars argue her speech promotes assimilation, I prefer to view it as a skillfully crafted argument that balances recriminations with praise in order to advance Indigenous rights and privileges. She opens her speech with the assertion that all nations progress over time, suggesting this not only applies to white Anglo-Saxons but also Indigenous peoples. Acknowledging the technological and social

⁶¹ Zitkala-Ša’s second place finish is attributed to a biased Southern judge who took issue with her “reference to slavery as one of the blots on modern civilization.” Minus his low grade on content, she outscored her opponents, winning “two firsts on delivery” (“Oratorical Contest” 185).

advancements in the U.S., she then deploys sentimental rhetoric to turn back the clock and paint an idyllic Bierstadian picture replete with a primeval forest, smoke curling from a wigwam and a canoe gliding upon a river. This scene is calculated to resonate with her audience's romantic notions of the frontier and *their* mythical origin story (223). Speaking for "America's first born," she recounts *their* life story, including the ravages of manifest destiny, "broken treaties," and "aggressions," that continue to goad and disenfranchise her people –it is no wonder they seek revenge (223-225). Appealing to their Christian morality, she pleads with her listeners to direct their compassion, "to the rescue of *my* race," (227, emphasis added). Although she implies this can be accomplished by adopting the "White Man's ways," she also asserts her people have a "birth right" to education, labor and "honest independence" (226). While her desire to "stand side by side," worshipping the same god and pledging sovereignty to the U.S. is troubling, later speeches voice more concern for Native American rights and equality. a skill that would be used to promote activism in the near future.

Zitkala-Ša's "talks" at opera performances can be viewed then as a return to her preferred medium of life-telling. Shortly after the opera's premier, she began lecturing to women's groups on "Indian Lore and Legends." She generally wore a beaded buckskin dress, but was known to don Western clothing when meeting with political groups (see fig. 8). Lecturing to the



Fig. 8. On the Lecture Circuit. The photograph on the left was captioned, “Among the prominent women who attended the meeting of the National Women’s Party in Washington was Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin, nee Princess Zitkala-Ša of the Sioux tribe” (January 1921). The picture on the right read, “Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin, a member of the Sioux Tribe educated in Boston, is lecturing in California in an endeavor to promote a better understanding between the white and red races” (July 1922). *Getty Images*

“Daughters of Utah Pioneers,” she advocated for religious freedom and citizenship rights.

According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, “she emphasized that the Indians have a great future before them, despite the contrary arguments of many anthropologists, who contend that the Indian race is on the decline.” On this occasion she concluded her talk with the story of “Iktomi, a selfish Indian lad” (“Indians Will Not Give Up Religion”). Zitkala-Ša most likely recounted one of the trickster tales she published in in 1901, which describes Iktomi as “a wily fellow,” whose “conceit leads him hard against the common sense of simpler people” (*American Indian Stories* 7). Although Zitkala-Ša originally gathered these stories for a Native audience, she writes in the preface they were also for the “the little blued eyed patriot” and “wise grownups” (5). As a finale to her lecture, the didactic tale was meant to encourage self-reflection amongst the “wise”

audience members who ignored the common sense of Indigenous peoples. She may have hoped that they also realized there was a connectedness between the two cultures.

Under the auspices of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, Zitkala-Ša travelled from coast to coast delivering over four hundred lectures focused on cultural survival and advocating for Indigenous equality. She carefully cultivated support from likeminded groups that would provide a stage to increase funding, support and endorsement of her various causes. This included the Women's Temperance Movement, which was sympathetic to her stance against peyote, and suffragettes, who understood her fight for voting rights. Documenting Native American needs, she urged audience members to recognize Indigenous rights for education and to partake in the political process. In June of 1921, she delivered the speech "Americanize the First American" at the GFWC National Convention in Salt Lake City. A pamphlet produced the same year contains similar ideology, but whether it informed her lecture or was produced after the convention is not known.⁶² What is known is that she had a profound and persuasive impact on the over eight hundred attendees. Following the convention, Native American citizenship and welfare became a significant focus of the Federation. The group later funded Zitkala-Ša's investigations into the fraud and exploitation of Oklahoma's Indigenous peoples.⁶³

Some have criticized Zitkala-Ša's political agenda, claiming it supported an American nationalist policy that erased tribal autonomy. But reading her speech, published a month later in the *Atlanta Constitution*, along with newspaper reviews, suggests otherwise. It reveals her ability

⁶² A number of scholars have described the undated policy brochure and its longer title, "Americanize the First American: A plan for Regeneration" (Davidson, Lewandowski, Stanciu). The cover page has a photograph of Zitkala-Ša bordered with small American flags. Copies can be found in the Papers of Mary Walden in the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois and among the Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁶³ Zitkala-Ša's investigation resulted in the publication of *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians: An Orgy of graft and Exploitation of the Five Civilized Tribes -Legalized Robbery* (1924), an expose of government fraud and abuse. Wilkinson, Davidson, and Chiarello contend this report led to a substantial change in U.S. Indian policy.

to mold a life-telling performance that would spur audience emotion and incite political action.⁶⁴ Americanization was already a significant political topic, and not only in terms of immigrants who were flocking to the U.S., but also for Native Americans. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century so-called “Friends of the Indian” campaigned in earnest to assimilate Indigenous peoples through a combination of religious, patriotic, and federal policy measures. One Indian Affairs Commissioner ironically stated, their objective was “to make the Indians feel at home in America” (qtd. in Prucha 3). Zitkala-Ša joins the conversation on Americanization to push back on Indigenous people’s domestic subject status. She is not advocating for assimilation, but for citizenship, education, and *natural* rights that Indigenous people, the *first* Americans, should already enjoy. Numerous newspapers commented on her presentation, noting her success in educating audiences and rousing their empathy. Writing for the *Indianapolis Star*, suffragette and civic leader Grace Julian Clarke admits she did not understand the topic when she saw it listed in the program – wrongly assuming it concerned the Puritans or other early “importations” who needed guidance and instruction on the “fundamentals of Americanism” (“Americans Present Real Problems”). Zitkala-Ša not only corrects this misconception, she effectively positions Indigenous peoples as “native” Americans. And as Clarke further reports, “there was a delicately veiled thrust” within her lecture. As the “original” American, Indigenous peoples had a right to the protections and liberties afforded other citizens.

Zitkala-Ša’s carefully crafted speech is rhetorically persuasive, utilizing language and imagery that would resonate with her audience. Although she asserts Native Americans have

⁶⁴ In her comprehensive study of Gertrude Bonnin, Paige Allison Conley asserts the text published in the *Atlanta Constitution* is not her actual speech, but rather, marketing literature sent to the paper by Bonnin after the convention. Conley cites the GFWC August 1921 newsletter as supporting evidence. The *News* contains snippets of Bonnin’s speech that do not align with the Atlanta article, but instead, match an essay printed in the SAI “Americanization” policy pamphlet. Her interpretation, however, is complicated by an article written by Grace Julian Clark in the *Indianapolis Star*. Clarke states Bonnin discussed Native American veterans who served with marked heroism –text that is absent from the GFWC *News* but included in the *Atlanta Constitution*.

similar interests, she importantly points out the differences in Indigenous and white culture. The audience must acknowledge and make space for these differences, just as they must recognize a commonality. Zitkala-Ša begins her talk with a familiar Native American phrase (two summer moons) and stylized imagery (comparing the prairie to the sea) that simultaneously bolster her Indigenous identity and her educated, “civilized” status.⁶⁵ In other words, her costume and language conform to their perceived concept of Indianness, but she is also different enough to be accepted by her audience –white middle and upper-class women. Similar to “Side by Side,” she illustrates a scene meant to capture and evoke an emotional response in her audience:

During two summer moons I followed Indian trails over an undulating prairie. The blue canopy of sky came down and touched the earth with a circular horizon. Within such an enclosure of infinite space, virgin soil appeared like a heaving brown sea, slightly tinged with green—a profoundly silent sea. Far out upon its eternal waves now and then came into sight a lone houseboat of crude logs. A captain on one of these strange crafts wirelessly to me a ‘S.O.S.’ My inquiry brought the answer: ‘Many of these houseboats are set adrift with a funeral pyre for a burial at sea. (“Americanize”)

As the latter lines reveal, she maintains audience interest with an unexpected image, “a lone houseboat,” –an image meant to symbolize the harsh reality of reservation life. Living on the sea, similar to life on the vast prairie, was frequently depicted as exciting (if not dangerous), and the schooners (covered wagons) plying its waters, as valiant vessels sailing into unknown adventure. But Zitkala-Ša reveals the vessel in her analogy is not autonomous, or travelling under its own flag, but instead, a log home turned coffin under the stewardship of the U.S. government and the Pine Ridge Agency.

⁶⁵ Boarding school educated and a published author, Zitkala-Ša’s was undoubtedly familiar with popular 19th century American literature and poetry. Numerous authors, including James Fennimore Cooper (*The Prairie, A Tale*), Washington Irving (*A Tour of the Prairies*), Walt Whitman, Helen Hunt Jackson (*Bits of Travel at Home*), Willa Cather (*O’ Pioneers*), Mark Twain (*Roughing It*) and Hermann Melville (*Moby Dick*), metaphorically likened the prairie to a vast undulating ocean. Also see: Hacker, Robert. *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination*. U of New Mexico P, 1989.

S.O.S. –save our ship –is thus a plea to save the Sioux and other Native Americans “adrift” on reservations. Zitkala-Ša’s canny analogy is a not-so-subtle critique of forced removal, allotments, and government oversight (or lack thereof). Just as she did in her autobiographical sketch, “My Childhood,” she points out that Native American land was virgin before colonial invasion. Now it is untouched reservation soil with only a tinge of green due to a lack of resources and poor living conditions. In *Speaking of Indians*, Ella Deloria (Sioux) provides a dismal description of allotment log cabins: “small, one-room affairs, low and dark—and dank because of the dirt floors. Compared with the well-constructed tipis with their manageable windflaps for ample ventilating, the cabins were hot and stuffy. Germs lurked everywhere, causing general sickness” (59-60). Native Americans were removed from their homelands and forced to live in foreign, unhealthy living accommodations. And these, coupled with remoteness, exacerbated European borne diseases and Indigenous deaths.

Traditionally, the Dakota and Sioux lived in cooperative bands of extended family, *tiyospaye*,⁶⁶ but the goal of reservation agents, like boarding school administrators, was to break communal ties, believing it made Native Americans easier to manage. In addition to eliminating traditional housing, allotment policy divided the land into typically barren, 160-acre single-family parcels that discouraged kinship practices. Zitkala-Ša states the 7500 Sioux were “widely scattered” on a 5000 square mile “sea” with little resources and only two government doctors to tend the sick. When the Spanish influenza reached the reservation, it disproportionately impacted its inhabitants. The February 1919 issue of *The Oglala Light* reported 3,642 cases and 267 deaths at Pine Ridge (Britten 25). A later article in *The Native American*, stated “four hundred Sioux

⁶⁶ In *Speaking of Indians*, Ella Deloria describes the extended kinship system, *tiyospaye*, as “a group of families, bound together by blood and marriage ties, that lived side by side . . . [and] operated as, a single unit in practically all activities (40).

from the Pine Ridge reservation succumbed from the flu” (Britten 156). Although Zitkala-Ša does not report these statistics, she does point her finger, attributing the epidemic’s devastation to government inefficiency and a lack of medical supplies.

Still weaving story with fact, Zitkala-Ša paints a picture of the frigid winter and the disaster that befell the Sioux on the Pine Ridge reservation. Although she offers information (evidence) regarding the lack of resources and manpower, she depends on audience compassion, their ability to understand her thinly concealed accusation and willingness to assign blame:

I tried to visualize two government physicians going forth in a Dakota blizzard to visit the sick and dying Sioux. Had they divided the territory evenly between them, each would have had to traverse 2,500 square miles to attend to 3,750 Indian people. Could they have traveled like whirlwinds to respond to the cries for help, their scant supply of medicines would have been exhausted far too soon. It would have been a physical impossibility for these two wise men to vie with the wind, so they did not. They received their salary as quickly for treating one Indian as if they had cared for a thousand. Therefore, the small medical supply was saved and the Indians died unattended. (“Americanize”)

Zitkala-Ša treads a fine line here. A potential downside to her veiled criticism and rebuke of the “wise men” is offending those in attendance. Audience gender is on her side, but it is the impossibility of the situation, as well as assigning blame to a few individuals and the BIA that helps her avoid this pitfall. As she further asserts, “It is a tragedy to the American Indian and the fair name of America that the good intentions of a benevolent government are turned into channels of inefficiency and criminal neglect.” She calculates censure of bureaucracy would be easier for the audience to accept, and notably, one that can be corrected through policy reform and GFWC activism.

Identifying a problem provides an opening for Zitkala-Ša to focus her petition and plea for the “American Indian . . . our fellow-man.” Recognizing Indians as American and utilizing pronouns *we*, *our*, *him* and *us*, she continues to blur distinctions, aligning herself with both her

subject and those in attendance. One must picture her in front of the crowd, most likely in Indigenous costume, speaking for her people but demanding the audience recognize “our” common humanity. How can we turn away from or fail to acknowledge the *Native American*? Employing ethos, Zitkala-Ša appeals to the audience’s democratic, patriotic values and Christian maternal instincts:

The time is here when for our own soul’s good we must acknowledge him. In the defense of democracy his utter self-sacrifice was unequalled by any other class of Americans. What now does democracy mean to him and his children? Many Indian children are orphans through the inevitable havoc of war and Influenza epidemic. Poor little Indian orphans! Who in the world will love them as did their own fathers and mothers? (“Americanize”)

Highlighting Indigenous patriotism, Zitkala-Ša shrewdly prods her audience to consider the democratic ideals they hold so dear. Indigenous soldiers fought for American values abroad, and in unprecedented numbers, shouldn’t they be afforded civil rights when they return home? Notably, her information regarding *Native U.S. nationalism* is not baseless. According to WWI historian William C. Meadows, “compared to their total population at the time, Native Americans volunteered and were inducted at a rate nearly twice that of the rest of the American population” (14). Some fought because it offered an opportunity to take up arms and fight, something they were denied on reservations, others for the right to citizenship. Nonetheless, the higher rate of participation, in combination with the roles they were assigned, resulted in a higher death rate. Approximately 5 percent of “all Indian servicemen died in action, compared with 1 percent” of American Expeditionary Force as a whole” (Barsh 278). As a result, many children became orphans, certainly a topic that would pull at the heart strings of female conference attendees who valued motherhood and family unity.

Paradoxically, Zitkala-Ša reminds the audience the U.S. has a familial responsibility to Native Americans. During the period of removal and subsequent discussions surrounding the

Allotment Act, the government persisted in employing a paternalistic and benevolent facade to exert control, downplay land encroachments, and rationalize federal education efforts, all while continuing to exploit Indigenous communities. But as she did in her essay, “School Days of an Indian Girl,” Zitkala-Ša lays bare the hypocrisy of the situation. *Civilized* society and the government have not protected or taken care of their *wards*. Continuing her maternal appeal, she further contests the savage trope:

Never in all history was there an Indian mother who left her darling in a basket upon a doorstep. Indians do not believe in corporal punishment. They are keenly aware that children are spirits from another realm, come for a brief sojourn on earth. When and where they found this great truth is wrapped in as much mystery as the origin of their race, which ever puzzles thinking men and women of today. If a correction is necessary, they speak quietly and tenderly to the intelligent soul of the child. Appreciation of the spiritual reality of the child places the Indian abreast with the most advanced thought of the age—our age, in which one of the notable signs of progress is the coordination of humanitarian and educational organizations for child welfare. (“Americanize”)

The audience is pressed to reflect on their definition of *civilized* people, but again, Zitkala-Ša is careful to not criticize those in attendance. She does not say, look how white society behaves. but rather, see how we are different. Still, this is a silent rebuke of corporal punishment and those who share a “save the rod, spare the child” mentality—the philosophy of federal boarding schools administrators and one espoused by Christian believers. Indeed, she is also asking attendees to reflect on their religious ideals and abide their own doctrine—accept others, make room for additional religious cultures. And not just any religious ideology, but one that is on par, if not more advanced, than theirs.

Zitkala-Ša’s focus on “progress” is calculated and reminiscent of her charge in ‘Side by Side.’ As Frederick E. Hoxie observes, by “the end of the nineteenth century, faith in American civilization pervaded every corner of American life. Even the usually critical academic world was absorbed in the rhetoric of national progress” (7). Her reference to the “thinking men and

women of today,” who puzzle over the origin of Indigenous peoples, acknowledges this preoccupation. Again, she is talking back to Indianist scholars who study Native American customs and languages as a means of marking their own advancement. Zitkala-Ša is engaging with and contesting manifest destiny ideology that posits progress is the natural and inevitable right of civilized white society.

Zitkala-Ša further spurs club member activism by informing them that Arthur Dunn, educational pioneer and Junior Red Cross administrator, advocates for teaching American students about other children in the world. As he notes, this would enrich the education of future U.S. citizens, and “cultivate, not only a broad human sympathy, but also an Americanism with a world perspective” (“Americanize”). This strategic bit of knowledge demonstrates Zitkala-Ša’s intellectual reach and it aligns her goal with a club familiar to the GFWC. But it also begs the question, “why is the Native American child absent from this plan?” She enlightens the audience, because “they are on Indian reservations—small remnants of land not shown on our maps. They are in America, but their environment is radically different from that surrounding other American children” (“Americanize”). Significantly, Zitkala-Ša not only identifies Indigenous peoples as Americans, she also makes a possessive claim of ownership – “our maps.” Referencing “our” here, infers commonality—we additionally live here, therefore we (Native Americans) have a right to land and educational opportunities.

In response to discourse that seeks to dehistoricize Indigenous peoples and literally erase them from the map, Zitkala-Ša schools her audience on the “unlovely facts” regarding U.S. history. In addition to broken treaties, only one quarter of Native Americans had been granted citizenship at that time, and despite their military service, were “virtually prisoners of war” on isolated reservation where conditions were deteriorating (“Americanize”). A tour de force of life-

telling, Zitkala-Ša's speech comes full circle, with a reminder that winter is approaching for the Sioux at Pine Ridge, but attendees are in a position to prevent future suffering ("Americanize"). Addressing them as "Womanhood of America," and "in behalf of the red man and his children" she leans into traditional Western or white female gender constructs that figure women as home makers and keepers. She urges them to "[h]eed the lonely mariner's signal of distress. Give him those educational advantages pressed with so much enthusiasm upon the foreigners. Revoke the tyrannical powers of government superintendents over a voiceless people and extend American opportunities to the first American—the red man" ("Americanize"). Zitkala-Ša appeals to their female consciousness, urging them to transform the U.S. into a safe harbor for Native Americans and their children (ironically, the Indigenous' home port) and advance corrective measures that will guarantee Indigenous welfare by "cleaning up" politics.

Zitkala-Ša's insistence on Indigenous rights challenges white expectations by reimagining Native Americans within a U.S. nationalist paradigm. For many, her clothing marks her as an anomaly, someone from the past, but she speaks from a position of power and presence, at the podium of a national pro-feminist convention where Indian welfare, spearheaded by GFWC club member Stella Attwood,⁶⁷ is a primary focus. Women in attendance, who were enjoying their new political agency, were moved by her lecture and responded quickly and in an expanded capacity to her appeal. As reported in the August issue of the GFWC newsletter, "With woman suffrage won, following a war of fifty years, women of America will now work for the enfranchisement of 'the first Americans' who are still denied rights of citizenship" ("Indian

⁶⁷ Attwood, a progressive and "cultural relativist," sought reforms for Indigenous peoples in California. She was appointed, and served for almost a decade, as the chair GFWC Indian Welfare Committee. In 1922 she hired John Collier (who would later become the BIA Commissioner) as a research agent for the committee and funded Zitkala-Ša's investigation in Oklahoma. Attwood and Zitkala-Ša worked together on a number of reform and policy projects.

Appeal” 1).⁶⁸ Taking up Zitkala-Ša’s Americanization banner and notably, identifying Indigenous peoples as “first” Americans, the organization formed the Indian Welfare committee that for fifteen years dedicated its efforts to equal educational opportunities, health access, and preserving Indigenous cultures.

Conclusion

Zitkala-Ša learned, as Philip Deloria suggests, “to move within the rhetoric—of assimilation for instance—that structured expectations” (*Indians* 230). Satisfying (by way of costume) but also moving beyond audience expectations, she challenged those who viewed Native Americans as vanishing people or did not envision them as part of the future. Admittedly, she recounts life stories of the past, but does so to pose a revisionist history and advocate for a future that includes self-determined Indigenous peoples as contributors to American life. Performance theorist Elizabeth Bell defines performance as a dual concept, that is both “traditional and transformative. Performance always makes reference to former ways of doing, acting, seeing, and believing. Those references can uphold the status quo, critique the status quo or contain the potential for changing the status quo by performing anew” (17). *The Sun Dance Opera*, and Zitkala-Ša’s storytelling lectures propose and act out a radical, reimagined role for Native Americans that makes explicit (and implicit) claims about what is valued and by whom. As a result, her audience must consider their own positionality, in terms of power, political ideology and religious morality. Her life -telling performances are thus *traditional*, preserving Native oral traditions threatened by assimilation, and *transformative*.

⁶⁸ After the passing of the 19th amendment, the GFWC endorsed the flawed ideology that given the vote, women would vote “en bloc.” Atwood leveraged membership and the club’s reach, often claiming the “2,000,000 strong voting women of the GFWC” supported Indigenous policy reform. While that claim is exaggerated, the GFWC was instrumental in the passing of the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act (Huebner 344)

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CHAPTER FOUR

Testimonios de Mujeres Californianas- Actos Performativos de Resistencia

This lady is the widow of the late Thomas Ridington. Never had the opportunity to acquire an education –cannot read or write, but is able to speak English quite fluently. She is quite intelligent and conceals her age in the most extraordinary manner—is sixty-four years old and no one would take her to be much over forty-five –has hair as black as a raven’s wing, without the slightest sign of gray.⁶⁹

—Thomas Savage, North San Diego, January 11, 1878

When Juana Machado sat down to be interviewed by Thomas Savage, she had witnessed significant changes in the California’s social, cultural and political landscape, outlived two husbands, and, for the last twenty-five years, supported herself as a successful ranchera and nurse. Savage, along with Henry Cerruti, worked as a research assistant for ethnologist and American West enthusiast Hubert Howe Bancroft. They were tasked with gathering documents and oral records from Californios⁷⁰ for Bancroft’s seven-volume treatise, *The History of California* (1882). It has been argued that Bancroft’s intention was to capture and romanticize the halcyon days of California, before the goldrush and American conquest, which Anglo-Americans consider an eventuality. Most of the questions posed by the interviews focused on the period between 1821-1846, before the American takeover. Although they were primarily interested in the stories of men, Savage and Cerruti also interviewed thirteen women regarding their lived experiences and perspective on California pre-statehood. Notably, the women’s stories were mediated –transcribed by a male, “foreign” intermediary, possibly edited, and in the

⁶⁹ Bancroft and Savage refer to Juana Machado and her late husband as Ridington, however, the correct spelling is Wrightington. Savage quote: Beebe and Senkewicz, 122.

⁷⁰ I refer to the men who lived in Alta California as Californios and the women as Californianas. Hispanics adopted the term of identity after Mexican independence.

case of Cerruti, (re)constructed after the event.⁷¹ Also troubling the authenticity of the narrative was time. The women were recounting memories more than three decades old, and some learned secondhand.

Savage's brief biographical sketch of Machado exposes the limits of the Californianas agency and their authority. He foregrounds her identity in relation to her appearance, deceased husband and the connections of her four living daughters and two granddaughters, who were all married to North Americans. In other words, he offers an objectifying "picture" of the narrator and one that privileges Anglo-American marriage. Moreover, together with a concluding note and his signature, he frames and contains her text, exposing the filters as well as the competing and gendered voices entangled within the women's recorded narratives. Despite these limitations, the life narratives or testimonios of Alta California women are valuable for their contribution to our understanding of Mexican American culture and for providing a gendered perspective often missing from this important historical period.

Californianas were Spanish-speaking Mexican settler-colonialists and native-born residents of Alta (Upper) California. They lived through the Spanish colonial period (1769-1821), Mexico's independence from Spain (1821), the Mexican American War (1848), and subsequent American occupation. The Spanish period was characterized by missionization –the displacement and exploitation of Indigenous peoples with the goal of converting them to Christianity – and the arrival of the first wave of settlers with the Juan Bautista de Anza Expedition (1775). The priests and Spanish settlers established a racialized hierarchy that

⁷¹ Transcripts of the interviews were hand written in Spanish, both Cerruti and Savage were fluent, and then "polished" later at the Bancroft library in San Francisco. According to Beebe and Senkewicz, Cerruti took notes of his meetings, wrote up the text later in his hotel and was known to embellish the truth. Savage, on the other hand, was business like, professional, and attempted to record the subject's recollections, "word for word." Bancroft relied heavily on Savage's manuscripts. Henry Oak, supervisor of Bancroft's library, argued that Volume III of *The History of California* was entirely written by Savage (xxiii-xxix).

differentiated the “civilized” *gente de razón* (people with reason) from the neophytes (newly baptized Native peoples) and the gentiles, the Indigenous peoples who continued to live on their *rancherías*.⁷² This mode of racial and social stratification continued into the Mexican era, which is notable for secularization –the disbursement of mission lands to elite Californios and loyal supporters of the new regime. The sprawling *ranchos* of the Mexican era transformed California’s economy. Rancheros traded in cattle hides, tallow, and a few engaged in the production of wine and the cultivation of citrus fruits, which were subsequently exported. By 1850, more than 200 families possessed sizeable ranches. Californianas had property rights not available to Anglo-American women. According to Gloria Ricci Lothrop, of the seven hundred land grants issued during Spanish colonization and after secularization, thirteen percent were awarded to married and single women (68). After the Mexican American war and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the rights of Californio “citizens” were weakened.⁷³ At the time of the Bancroft interviews many of the land grants were being broken up and the landowners were dealing with squatters, settlers without legal claims, which was exacerbated with the California Gold Rush 1848-1855.⁷⁴ The Californianas’ interviews capture a women’s viewpoint of these events.

⁷² Although the *gente de razón* touted their Spanish ancestry and superiority, “they were biologically more indigenous American than European” (Miranda 265). As Rosaura Sánchez argues, the benefit of focusing on “civilized” versus “heathen,” circumvented the *casta* system Spanish authorities had devised to maintain their power in the colonies (*Telling Identities*, 57-61).

⁷³ The history provided here is drawn from: Kropp, Phoebe S. Pitt, Leonard. *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-speaking Californians, 1846-1890*. U of California P, 1998: Smythe, William Ellsworth. *History of San Diego, 1542-1908*. History Co., 1907, pp. 293-294.

⁷⁴ For information on the effect of the of the California Land Act (1851) and the Gold Rush on property rights and the population of California, which according to public policy scholar Karen Clay, jumped from “15,000 in mid-1848 to 265,00 in mid-1852,” (). see: Clay, Karen B., “Anarchy, Property Rights and Violence.” <https://conference.nber.org/confer/2005/si2005/dae/clay.pdf>; Pisani, Donald J. “Squatter Law in California, 1850-1858.” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1994, pp. 277–310; and Shelton, Tamara Venit. *A Squatter’s Republic: Land and the Politics of Monopoly, 1850-1900*. U of California P, 2013.

Like autobiography, the testimonio is meant to document and preserve personal experiences and history. Smith and Watson acknowledge the genre is “a practice of self-narration” that challenges “the traditional Western limits of individuality and normative discourses” (259). Nevertheless, the testimonio is widely considered by some contemporary scholars as a form of autobiography and a mode of resistance specific to, but not limited to, Latin America or Hispanic life narrations.⁷⁵ The autobiographical narrative is a recording of oral history and lived experience that is meant to bear witness, expose an injustice, or as demonstrated in the Californiana testimonios, provide a viewpoint absent from dominant discourse. Still, it is important to distinguish the testimonio from oral history. According to John Beverly, in the latter, “it is the intentionality of the recorder—usually a social scientist—that is dominant, and the resulting text is in some sense “data” (32). In contrast, in the testimonio “it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount” (32). What further ties the testimonio to autobiography is “the voice that speaks to the reader in the form of an ‘I’ that demands to be recognized, that wants or needs to stake a claim on our attention. This presence of the voice, which we are meant to experience as the voice of a real rather than a fictional person, is the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated” (34). While the Californiana testimonios are mediated, the women’s voice as narrator, is ever present in Savage’s written recordings. This is not always the case in Cerruti’s interviews, who sometimes referred to himself as “I,” and recorded the women’s voice in third person (Beebe xxviii). Nevertheless, in the process of narrating their stories the Californianas exercised self-determination and gained authority from their mediators. I read their testimonios as life narratives that reflect the personal and collective lived experiences of a diverse group of empowered women.

⁷⁵ History of using oral narration as historical documentation. Interestingly, used to resist colonization. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2080049>

I also consider their testimonios a performance by women determined to take a place on California's historical stage. Their statements are a performance in the sense that they involve an active retelling of personal experiences and stories in front of an audience, in this case, either Cerruti or Savage. The women often use narrative techniques to convey their message, perspective, and evoke an emotional response from their interviewer. Some of the memories are collective or generational, the actor is thus performing the story anew, not just recounting events, but (re)shaping them into a compelling narrative using storytelling techniques such as characterization, dialogue, and description. In this sense, the Californiana testimonios can be seen as a type of performance art, as the act of telling involves not just the sharing of information, but also the deliberate creation of a narrative with a specific emotional impact and intention. The use of storytelling techniques in a setting with an audience, and the delivery of the testimonio, all contribute to the performance aspect of the genre. Performance reinforces the power of the story and its message, making it a potent means of self-expression and cultural preservation.

The Bancroft interviews have increasingly been the subject of significant scholarship. In her authoritative analysis on the gendered and political spaces of Alta California, Chicana historian and literary critic Rosaura Sánchez argues the testimonios are “discourses of the subaltern, the Californios, who, acutely aware of their displacement, feel compelled to speak, to engage in cultural struggle, not as an end in itself, but as a strategy toward positioning themselves collectively” (xiii). In “Framing the Voice: The Bancroft Narratives of Apolinaria Lorenzana, Augustus de la Guerra Ord, and Eulalia Pérez,” Virginia Bouvier posits the testimonios are discursive sites of “struggle for female agency.” Both the interviewer and their subject utilize various strategies to support his or her view of history and “women’s place in

history,” still, the women found ways to assert themselves and challenge male authority (148). Scholar Karen Roybal, who focuses on the testimonios to examine women’s property rights, contends gender, more often than race, shaped outcomes, possible dispossession, and their identity as Mexicanas.

This chapter builds upon and contributes to this scholarship with an examination of the testimonios of Josefa Carrillo, Juana Machado and María Inocenta Pico. Their lives were informed by varying forces and sites of colonization that were both exclusionary and community building. Rosaura Sánchez has focused on the mission as a heterotopic site.⁷⁶ I explore the rancho and haciendas as similar spaces, particularly in terms of liberation and empowerment. Carrillo, Machado, and Pico played a vital role in the success of these institutions. It is thus important to analyze how they negotiated their subjectivity and agency within these spaces. I am also interested in the ways the Californianas used language, affect and storytelling as performative acts of resistance. In their interviews they cast themselves as actors, not on the margins, but often center stage and in public spaces. Their testimonios contribute to our understanding of settler colonialism and this transitional period in California history. They not only demonstrate the power of oral narration for challenging the written word, but also, women’s ability to challenge dominant narratives and ideologies of gender construction in order to disrupt colonial and patriarchal authority.

Josefa Carrillo de Fitch: “Narración de una Californiana”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Sánchez, pp. 50-90;

⁷⁷ Josefa Carrillo was interviewed by Cerruti on November 24, 1875 in the city of Healdsburg. It’s presumed the title “Narración de una Californiana” was written by Cerruti who transcribed of the “Dictation of Mrs. Captain Fitch of Healdsburg.” suggesting her position and identity are solely linked who her deceased husband. Carrillo, however, asserts her subjectivity by erasing the “Mrs.” in her concluding affirmation of the document’s veracity: “I have read what Señor Cerruti has written down regarding what I have told him and I find it consistent with the truth. Josefa C. de Fitch” (Beebe 84). Carrillo not only establishes her literacy but also (re)claims authorship and control of her narrative through her preferred title and use of “I.”

Josefa Carrillo is famously known for the romanticized story of her elopement with American sea captain Henry Delano Fitch, but his emphasis on her role as heroine fails to recognize her political savvy.⁷⁸ Born in 1810 and raised in San Diego, Carrillo came from a long line of strong, capable women. Her widowed grandmother, accompanied by her two young daughters, traveled to Alta California in 1775 as part of the Anza expedition, and her mother successfully challenged her husband, when he attempted to sell her children's inherited property. Carrillo met Fitch in 1826 and within a year agreed to marry him; however, their union was delayed until he converted to Catholicism. The marriage ceremony was finally scheduled three years later, a day after Fitch's baptism, but was halted when news arrived that Governor José María Echeandía forbade the union. In her testimonio Josefa Carrillo claims that Echeandía was a spurned suitor, but it is likely the governor was more worried about opening up the ports of Alta California to ever increasing American trade. Unwilling to have his plans thwarted, Fitch enlisted the help of Carrillo's cousin, Pío Pico, who fled with the bride to be on horseback and delivered her to Fitch on his awaiting ship. The next day they set sail on the *Buitre* (Vulture), and were married by a Catholic priest in Chile. When they returned to San Diego a year later with their first son, they were met with the consequences of their actions. Fitch was briefly jailed at the Monterey presidio, and both husband and wife were required to testify during an ecclesiastic trial. After agreeing to purchase a church bell as penance for Carrillo's "abduction," Fitch was

⁷⁸ Carrillo and Fitch's elopement figured prominently in early California lore and literature. See Robinson, Alfred. *Life in California Before the Conquest*. William Doxey, 1891; Godwin, C.G. *The Sea King: The Building of a Nation*. Dingby, Long & Co, 1922; Davis, William H. *Seventy-Five Years in California*. John Howell, 1929; Older, Fremont, Mrs. *California Missions and Their Romances*. Coward-McMann, 1938; and for a Hollywood treatment, a memoir written by her great nephew, Leo Carrillo, *The California I Love*, Prentice-Hall, 1961. In "The Elopement" (1875), Charles Christian Nahl, a significant painter in the state's early history, depicted Carrillo's flight on horseback with her cousin Pío Pico to meet Fitch aboard his ship.

freed.⁷⁹

Carrillo's testimonio demonstrates her awareness of the ever-changing political environment, her ability to use this knowledge to manipulate patriarchal authority, and her displeasure with U.S. statehood. It is also notable for using performance and theatrical narration as discursive strategies of resistance. Her narrative differs from Machado and Pico as it is dictated to Cerruti, who was not only known for having a prepared list of questions, but for embodying the role of narrator (Beebe xxvii). His queries and voice, "I asked," are prominent at the onset of the interview, but Carrillo wrests and maintains control of the narrative. Asked about the origin of the word "California," what Cerruti no doubt considered a tame subject, Carrillo quickly veers off script to vent her frustration with American rule. Waxing nostalgic, she reworks her identity from colonizer to *native* Californian, an identity with heritage, and a refashioning that subsumes Indigenous culture, if not their peoples. Carrillo claims her mother, "who spoke the language of the Diegueño Indians perfectly" told her California was an "Indian word," but in Spanish it translated to "high hill" (Beebe 76).⁸⁰ Her reverence for Native American place names reaffirms Indigenous scholar Philip Deloria's (Sioux) claim that colonizers, including Spanish Californios, idealized Indigenous place names as a way to conceive and reinforce their own identity (33).

⁷⁹ Similar to their elopement, the story of the "Penance Bell" was popular in early California lore and continues to be represented in contemporary popular culture. Located in the Plaza Church in Los Angeles, the bell bears the inscription: "This bell (known as the Penance Bell) was given by Henry Delano Fitch as a forfeit for his transgression when he defied the civic and ecclesiastical [sic] authorities and eloped with Josefa Carillo, [sic] a Spanish California lady –the first elopement of California –1829."

⁸⁰ There are differing accounts regarding the origin of the name "California." One of the most widely accepted theories is that it comes from the popular Spanish adventure novel *Las Sergas de Esplandián* (The Exploits of Esplandián), by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo. The story describes a fantastic island in the Indies (California) ruled by a warrior woman, Queen Calafia. Beebe and Senkewicz satirically note that "[i]n this work of fiction, 'California' is associated with wealth, conquest, indigenous people who are willing to convert to Christianity, and indigenous women willing to give themselves to European men" (11). Beebe, Rose Marie and Robert M. Senkewicz. *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California, 1535-1846*. Santa Clara U, 2001.

By linking Spanish and Native American language, and claiming the two cultures *always* called a place by a certain name, Carrillo creates an alliance that historizes and legitimizes Californios as first peoples, and as such, those with land rights. She thus takes issue with Anglo-Americans, who “without permission from anyone” renamed Point Quintín, San Quinten. Paradoxically, Carrillo suggests place naming should not be influenced by a change in colonial power or considered a right of ownership, but rather, one that honors the cultural significance of the area. According to Cerruti, “what amazes her most is that all those name changes were made by people who did not have the right to baptize anyone” (Beebe 78). Underlying Carrillo’s annoyance is the value she places on cultural traditions and the authority of the Catholic Church, believing them to be integral to the identity and history of her community. In other words, only priests should be able to “baptize” a place with a Catholic saint’s name, and to do so in her Spanish language. Her irritation is also due to American capitalism and the legal ramifications of the California Land Act (1851). Constantly threatened by land-grabbers and squatters, Carrillo had to auction off part of her large grant, Rancho Satiyomi, to pay taxes and legal fees.⁸¹ Now known as the city of Healdsburg, after purchaser Harmon Heald, she was sure some “Yankee” would soon change the name of her home to “Santo You and Me” (Beebe 76-77). Ironically, Satiyomi is the tribal name of the first Indigenous peoples of Sonoma County, however, she contests the rights of future owners who might Americanize and religionize the area’s nomenclature. We do not know if the name Carrillo chose for her rancho was meant to honor the land’s previous inhabitants, but this highlights the complex nature of settler colonialism. Each

⁸¹ For more information see: Davis, M. B. “The War of Words: Confederate Rhetoric in the Healdsburg Squatter War.” *California Journal of Politics and Policy*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2015; *The Squatter and Don* by Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832-1895), famously considered the first Mexican American author to publish two novels in English, denounces American’s land grab, but is equally critical of the lack of respect that Californio’s received. Ruiz de Burton, María Amparo. *The Squatter and the Don*, edited by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita. Arte Público Press, 1992.

colonial power and influx of new settlers introduces additional layers of impact and reshaping to the land's cultural and symbolic dimensions.

When Cerruti finally addresses his primary interest, Carrillo's elopement, she again subverts his direction, offering a less romantic version of an event that was already California myth. Her rendition, not surprisingly, conflicts with Bancroft's depiction in the *History of California 1825 -1840*. In his chapter on the Fitch marriage, which he describes as a "runaway match," the historian ironically relies on the *recuerdos* of men, including Carrillo's future brother-in-law, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, and his elder brother José de Jesus (neither of them were present at the ceremony), as well as Pío Pico. The resulting script not only perpetuates the romance legend, it also suggests Carrillo instigated the elopement with her query, "Why don't you carry me off, Don Enrique?" (140-141). According to Bancroft's informants, the scene was emotionally charged, but "the arguments and angry ravings of the Yankee novio nor the tears and entreaties of the novia could not overcome the padres' fears and scruples."⁸² Josefa Carrillo's first-hand account, on the other hand, is matter-of-fact, devoid of emotion and theatrics. Instead, she is focused on the politics and social conventions at play. She claims her uncle, an assistant to Echeandía, called a "halt to tying of the nuptial knot, under penalty of incurring the wrath of the civil, military and ecclesiastical authorities." This she confirms was naturally obliged since "the preemptory command was announced in the presence of a large gathering of people, who by character and upbringing, were used to blindly obeying all government orders" (78). Carrillo's jab at those who blindly accept authority should not be ignored; it demonstrates her awareness of the seeds of liberalism in Alta California.⁸³

⁸² Bancroft, *The History of California*

⁸³ Mexico's independence from Spain, from a monarchy and colonial control to a republican form of government, had significant implications for its people. Liberalism, with its emphasis on personal freedoms and limited government intervention, became a guiding ideology during this time. Embracing all freedoms, Mexico moved away

Carrillo's narration is an example of a Californiana willingly resisting colonial and gendered power structures. Her elopement defies government authority and her agreement to marry Fitch before he'd been given her father's blessing, challenges Californio cultural traditions and patriarchal authority. In a chapter devoted to "Woman and Her Sphere" in *California Pastoral*, Bancroft details betrothal customs, noting it was common for girls to marry at a young age, but with "the parents selecting the husband" (308). Carrillo, however, accepts Fitch's marriage request because she finds his "refined manners and handsome presence to her liking." When they were set to wed three years later, he then discussed the proposal with her parents. This suggests Carrillo was already exercising self-determination and agency that countered cultural gender constructs.

In contrast to Bancroft, Carrillo saves performance to narrate what I term "The Return of the Prodigal Daughter"—a melodramatic play with a veiled critique of government and ecclesiastical authority. Determined to reconcile with her father, Carrillo returns to the family home, where she finds him seated at his desk, "with a shotgun by his side" (Beebe 82). Despite the implied threat of violence, she announces she has returned to beg his forgiveness. When he does not respond, she "throws herself down on her knees," and appeals to his sense of political fair play. Aware of his obvious dislike for Echeandía,⁸⁴ she reasons that *if* she has been disobedient, it was for the "sole purpose of getting away from an odious tyranny that laws and customs condemned." Failing to elicit a response, Carrillo then crawls on her knees to her father, who eventually forgives her, stating "it is not your fault that our leaders are despots"

from the dominance of the Catholic Church, which in Alta California, resulted in the secularization of the missions. See: Saavedra, Yvette J. *Pasadena before the Roses: Race, Identity, and Land Use in Southern California, 1771-1890*. The U of Arizona P, 2018; Sánchez, Rosaura. "Theoretical Disjunctures and Discourses of Liberalism." *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios*, U of Minnesota P, 1995, pp. 96–141.

⁸⁴ Don Carrillo, who preferred distant Spanish rule, took issue with the change in colonial authority, loss of Californio autonomy and the geographical proximity of the newly appointed governor. Echeandía, preferring the climate of San Diego, made it the de facto capital of the territory.

(Beebe 82). As history scholar Richard Griswold del Castillo concurs, Carrillo cleverly politicizes her actions so her father can “accept her return with honor” (234). Put differently, she brokers her return by manipulating patriarchy and her father’s political leanings –his preference for local Californio authority versus central Mexican authority. She thus did not disobey her father, but rather, a despot ruler who dishonored the authority of the patriarch.

It is difficult to reconcile Carrillo’s account of the elopement with Bancroft’s telling. It is possible that Cerruti watered down her recollections of the event, but then how do we account for the dramatic scene where she begs for her father’s forgiveness? I suggest she wanted to (re)craft an ending or create a new script with a performance that she could direct, and one that could not be countered by one of Bancroft’s interviews or male documentation. Her script is overly emotional and dramatic, replete with stereotypical characters, dialogue, and tropes traditionally found in melodrama. Tension between father and daughter drives the plot, but *good* (pious Californiana daughter) eventually triumphs over *bad* (Mexican despotic rule). The narrator characterizes herself as damsel in distress, and her sympathetic father becomes the hero when Echeandía is cast as villain. The church is summarily cast in a negative light. Carrillo was angry that she and Fitch had to contend with the “outlandish demands of the Catholic Church” (84). The scene of her crawling on her knees can be interpreted as a figurative jab at the ecclesiastic authority. She would rather give benediction and penance to her father than the Catholic Church.

Further demonstrating Carrillo’s prowess and ability to capitalize on the political developments, when Echeandía overthrows Governor Victoria just a few years later, he is back in the family’s good graces. She contends he let his desires get the better of him, but eventually Carrillo forgives Echeandía and recasts him as hero because he liberated “my country from the

yoke of the tyrant Victoria” (79). In declaring California, “my country,” Carrillo again reasserts and privileges her Alta California identity. Indeed, in concluding her narrative, Carrillo acknowledges she has forgiven the church and the Mexican authorities, but notably absent in her recital are the Americans who have altered Californio legal status and their way of life. Reading Carrillo’s testimonio, alongside Bancroft’s published text underscores the value of her narration in providing a counter history, and counter representation of Californianas. Her narration demonstrates her awareness and ability to subvert the various power structures that oppressed women in Alta California.

Juana Machado de Ridington, “Tiempos Pasados de California”

Born in San Diego in 1814, Juana Machado was sixty-four years old when interviewed by Thomas Savage.⁸⁵ Her ancestors were the original Spanish settlers of what is now Los Angeles. Her father, Manuel Machado, a *soldado de cuera* (a soldier in Mexico’s famed “leather jacket” army) and her mother, Santa Barbara native Maria Serafina Valdez, had three children. At the age of fifteen, Juana Machado married an enterprising corporal stationed at the San Diego presidio, Dámaso Alipás. Although he had a relatively short military career, Alipás joined with San Diego troops in 1831 to overthrow the unpopular Mexico-appointed Governor, Manuel Victoria. The successful revolt increased Alta California autonomy. Alipás died in Sonora in 1835, a few years later, Juana Machado married Thomas Wrightington, a “one-eyed” shoemaker

⁸⁵ Biographical information was gleaned from a number of sources: Beebe and Senkewicz (118-122); Brandes (195-240); Griswold; Masterson; Smythe; and Machado Family documents on file at the San Diego Historical Center. Although a note in one of the History Center’s files dated “the latter part of 1963,” observes that, “the Machado Book, along with its contents, very mysteriously, disappeared” they still retain a number of property deeds, genealogy trees and a wonderful calling card announcing when J. Wrightington will be at home. The card features a picture of Machado and the cactus hedge in Old Town on the front and an overview picture of Coronado and San Diego on the reverse.

from Fall River, Massachusetts.⁸⁶ Second only to Henry Fitch, Wrightington is considered one of the earliest American settlers in San Diego. He became a naturalized citizen, was active in local politics and volunteered in the Mexican American war. Doña Juana Machado was again widowed in 1853. She remained in San Diego with her children, where revered for her healing skills, she was known as the “Florence Nightingale of Old Town.” She eventually moved to Coronado to live with her daughter and son-in-law, a retired Point Loma lighthouse keeper, where she died in 1901.

My analysis of the Machado testimonio centers on her reflections of the Mexican takeover of early California, the impact of colonization on Native Americans and in turn, on Californians. Her recollections, which provide important facts on military events and the secularization of the missions, are clearly driven by Savage’s agenda as many of the stories she relates occurred when she was very young or not present, and conspicuously absent are her reflections on life after American occupation. Nevertheless, she strategically employs tactics, including digression, to assert her authority as a narrator and to subvert Savage’s limited perspective on women. For example, she interrupts his directed inquiry regarding the 1822 change of colonial rule to emphasize Californio self-sufficiency and women’s crucial contributions to the community. Noting the lack of provisions sent by Spain, she stresses the families of the soldiers survived because there was an abundance of cattle and animals for sustenance and “the women had their own shoe-making operation in their homes” (Beebe 126). In a clever reversal of Savage’s focus on female beauty, Machado offers detailed descriptions of the military who arrived from Mexico, focusing on the men’s physical appearance and clothing –

⁸⁶ In his famous memoir, *Two Years Before the Mast, A Personal Narrative*, Houghton Mifflin, 1911, Richard Henry Dana provides this colorful description of Wrightington. When he returned to San Diego twenty-four years later, Dana wrote that both Wrightington, who owned a “grog Store” and Henry D. Fitch, “the big vulgar shop-keeper and trader” who “kept the rival pulperia,” were deceased (141, 481).

and not always favorably. In contrast, when discussing their wives, she highlights their accomplishments and ability to empower other women. Machado singles out Doña Apolinaria Lorenzana, “*La Beata*” (the pious) who never married, but instead, devoted her life to serving the church and children. She underscores Lorenzana “was a godmother to a large number of children, as much to children of *gente de razón* as Indian children” and although she “did not have a formal school, would dedicate as much time as she could to teaching” young girls to read and write (127). This break in Savage’s guided narration is but one example of Machado redirecting the discourse to highlight the role women played in their communities and in California’s early history.

When Machado resumes the story of the change of flags in 1822, she highlights the incongruity of the spectacle to criticize the Spanish and Mexican governments and their inability to effectively support those who were defending the settler-colonial territory. She claims authorities focused on empty gestures, and style over substance. She “remembers well” that the attire of the Mexican official who arrived to oversee the ceremony, the *Canónigo*, (canon), was *loud*, “very striking and colorful” (Beebe 127)⁸⁷. As Machado observes, many were in awe of his splendor, but when someone would inquire, “Who is that man?,” the reply was simply, “the *canónigo*.” No one like him had never been seen before in California. In other words, he appears out of place, a foreigner who is only recognizable by his peacock attire and titular position. Further describing the superficiality of the event, she recalls the calvary and canons were arranged around the plaza, but because they had no flag pole, a soldier held the flag of Spain in one hand and the flag of Mexico in another, each attached to “little sticks.” A commander

⁸⁷ María Inocenta de Pico also comments on the appearance of the *Canónigo*, noting his large entourage, and that no one had seen someone before who possessed such power, or at least, “as he seemed to have, to direct the fate of the country” (Beebe 312).

shouted “Long live the Mexican Empire! Then the Spanish flag was lowered and the Mexican flag was raised amidst salvos of artillery and fusillade. After this the soldiers received nothing” (Beebe 127). Machado’s remarks here underscore the lack of real change brought about by Mexican conquest. While the raising of the Mexican flag symbolized a transfer of power, the soldiers who maintained a colonial presence did not realize tangible improvements in their daily lives, such as better provisions or clothing.

Machado further highlights the superficial nature of Mexican authority by recalling the government's demand for soldiers to cut off their long braids, which she observes bore a resemblance to the Chinese queue. She poignantly remembers that her father arrived home with his braid in hand and his mother wept the sight of it (128). Machado’s reference to the Chinese queue underscores the complex settler dynamics within California. While she does not mention the Mexican-American war or California statehood, the subsequent gold rush resulted in waves of immigration.⁸⁸ The region, including San Diego, experienced a constant influx of newcomers, each bringing their own cultural practices, aspirations, and impact on the Indigenous population and earlier settler colonials. Machado’s reference to Chinese immigrants unwittingly illustrates the tactics colonizers often employ to sever those they consider Other from their cultural identity, both figuratively and literally. The pain felt by Machado’s father would parallel the experience of Native American boarding school students who were later forced to cut their hair in order to assimilate into U.S. society. This show of dominance through physical change is meant to

⁸⁸ Mining and the railroad brought an influx of Chinese immigrants to California. According to history professor Robert Seager, by the middle of the 19th-century, “the twenty-five thousand Chinese comprised the largest single minority group in the state” (49). Seager, Robert. “Some Denominational Reactions to Chinese Immigration to California, 1856-1892.” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1959, pp. 49–66. In addition to being an important supply and shipping point for cattle and mining operations, San Diego was a crucial port for the fishing and whaling industry. Combing through 1870 articles from the *San Diego Union*, anthropologist Florence C. Shipek discovered Chinese fisherman and merchants established abalone businesses (meat and shell) and harvested shark fin for export. Shipek, Florence Connolly. *Lower California Frontier: Articles from the San Diego Union, 1870*. Dawson’s Book Shop, 1965.

transform the colonized, but as Machado demonstrates, it rarely results in cultural erasure, but instead, in sentimental memories that foster resentment and resistance.

In addition to the lack of better governance, Machado's narrative not only documents an increase in Indigenous attacks after Mexican independence, but the effect this had on Californians. It is pertinent to emphasize here that Indigenous peoples not only had to negotiate their positions and identities within the social and colonial hierarchies of the mission system, but again after secularization.⁸⁹ Moreover, we must acknowledge that various Indigenous cultures existed in the Western frontier. Just as Californios held different political views and attitudes about their neighbors, so too did the Native peoples regarding the colonizers. Still, Machado's stereotypical, racist observations, including her labeling of Indigenous peoples as "horse thieves," as well as her explicit account of her father's killing and scalping of an "Indian," are highly problematic for contemporary readers (125, 131). The troubling nature of her observations is compounded by the historical knowledge we now possess regarding the exploitation, abuse, and systemic injustices suffered by Indigenous peoples during the mission era and well after secularization. This includes the forced labor, economic exploitation, and cultural suppression that many Indigenous individuals experienced, as well as the widespread sexual violence and mistreatment of Indigenous women. "Between 1846 and 1870," historian Benjamin Madley reports, "California's Native American population plunged from perhaps 150,000 to 30,000" (3). It is not surprising they resisted and fought against colonial subjugation.

⁸⁹ For scholarship regarding the impact of Spanish colonization on Indigenous peoples in Alta California see: Lightfoot, Kent G. *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers*. U of California P, 2005. In *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850*. U of North Carolina P, 2005, Steven W. Hackel reveals mission secularization offered opportunities for increased autonomy, although it came with restraints.

Instead of glossing over Machado's remarks, we should consider the sociocultural environment that informed her opinion. As scholars Sánchez and Griswold del Castillo argue,⁹⁰ Californianas, similar to Southern women, were conditioned to feel vulnerable and fearful of the "uncivilized" Other. Indian captivity narratives, which circulated in colonial literature and amongst women on the ranchos, only confirmed and compounded their fears.⁹¹ Machado recounts two threats of attack that occurred in 1837, the first in Jamul, at the home of Pío Pico's widowed mother, Doña Eustaquia López. The rancho was distant from the presidio in San Diego, underscoring the vulnerability of its inhabitants, including Lopez and her three unmarried daughters. Machado was also not present, making this "recollection," second-hand knowledge. The event became engraved in the collective consciousness of San Diego Californianas, for it was also recounted in the testimonios of Apolinaria Lorenza and Felipa Osuna de Marron. Passed down and around, from woman to woman, the attack was not only remembered for its historical occurrence, but also its cultural, emotional, and symbolic significance.

According to Machado, one afternoon, an Indigenous servant warned Doña Eustaquia Lopez, "in a language that she understood well . . . that the Indians were going to revolt, kill the men, and take the women captive" (Beebe 129).⁹² When the widow informed her *mayordomo* (ranch foremen or overseer), Juan Leiva, he assured her there was no danger and suggested she "calm down." Instead, she immediately fled with her daughters to the nearby rancho of Doña

⁹⁰ Griswold del Castillo, 240-241; Sánchez, 143-144

⁹¹ Dime novels and colonial fiction perpetuated the trope of the kidnapped white female. In reality, it was the Indigenous female who frequently was subjected to sexual violence. Rosaura Sánchez notes it was common practice for young girls to be kidnapped to work at the missions (86 – Perez testimonio).

⁹² None of the accounts of the incident identify the language or community of Indigenous peoples working on the rancho. The Kumeyaay (Diegueño) lived in what is now San Diego County, but those who attacked may have been from a different area. See: Farris, Glenn J. "José Panto, 'Capitan' of the Indian Pueblo of San Pascual, San Diego County." *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1994, pp. 149–61.

Apolinaria. Once they had been warned, they continued to the presidio, which sent help to the rancho. Reinforcements, however, arrived too late. Leiva and his older son were killed, his twelve- and fifteen-year-old daughters kidnapped, and his wife and young son left naked on the ransacked, burned-out rancho. Efforts were made to rescue the girls, but Machado reports they were never successful and it is believed the Indigenous leaders of the revolt had taken them as wives (Beebe 128-131). Machado then narrates the story of a second attack that took place at the home of Captain Fitch. Again, an Indian servant girl warns her employer and godmother, Doña Josefa Carrillo, that she had heard Indigenous servants plotting to kill Fitch's store clerk, kidnap the women, pillage and burn homes in the San Diego pueblo. Carrillo informed the authorities and a number of servants from multiple households were quietly rounded up, questioned, and those found guilty, were executed (Beebe 131-132).

Together Machado's stories expose the divided loyalties on the California frontier – between the Californios, Indigenous peoples, and within their respective societies. They additionally highlight a tenuous solidarity among Native women and Californianas, as well as, women's contribution in transmitting valuable information and constructing community. Located within the rancho and pueblo, women of various ethnic and sociopolitical positions frequently worked side by side. A hierarchal and economic power relationship existed, this was an uneven labor system built on continued colonial occupation, but there was a measure of cultural adaptation and accommodation. Californianas were known to adopt Indigenous clothing, cultivate Native crops, eat their food, and as Doña Eustaquia demonstrates, learn to speak their languages. Although the identity of the *gente de razón* depended on a perceived cultural and linguistic superiority, we can surmise that shared gender identity and proximity sometimes acted as mitigating factors. Some form of kinship or perhaps loyalty existed, for in both of Machado's

recollections, Indígena actively seek to protect the welfare of the Californianas and their families. One possible explanation is a mutual resistance to patriarchal authority and the marginalization of women's voices. Machado blames the disastrous consequences of the Jamul attack on the patriarchal power structure of the rancho, the *mayordomo*, who ignored the wisdom of women. Whereas at the San Diego pueblo, the women's warnings were taken seriously and acted upon, resulting in safety. While Californianas were vulnerable to violence, they also demonstrate an ability to protect themselves and thwart danger through collective feminine agency. This is not to imply Californianas resisted all forms of patriarchal authority; women were frequently complicit in reproducing and enforcing colonial oppression.

Labor afforded economic opportunities for Native Americans, but a legacy of the mission system is that they were often treated like indentured servants and slaves, leading to rebellion and aggression. Machado's testimonio provides evidence that Indigenous servants were not submissive nor unable to organize resistance. Aiding the Indigenous intruders in Jamul, a servant from the Lopez household impeded the foremen Leiva from safeguarding the rancho by locking away its weapons. Similarly, servants within the Fitch adobe, and from the nearby home of a prominent politician, along with possible Native invaders from the North, were implicated in the foiled San Diego attack. While her narration fails to delve into the motivations behind resistance,⁹³ the constant threat of Native violence was closely intertwined with Californiana's skepticism towards secularization. Many considered the mission system a means of authority and Indigenous control through its extreme brutality.

Like Carrillo, Machado was initially critical of Echeandía's liberal ideology and the push for mission secularization, fearing what greater Native American autonomy meant for

⁹³ Neophytes never received the land grants they had been promised with secularization nor the livestock they had raised at the missions. As a consequence, raiding of the ranchos and rebellion in the pueblos.

Californianas. When the governor was replaced by Victoria in 1831, her family rejoiced, for he promised everything would return to the state it had been, “the missions and the Indians would remain under the *care* of the Fathers.” She further explains “at that time, we believed the Fathers to be holy men. To prevent the Fathers from managing the temporalities of the missions would be a huge theft against the Church and an injustice to the Fathers” (Beebe 135). “At the time,” is significant here, but it is not clear who the “we” references, Californios, both male and female, or the women only. According to historian Leonard Pitt, the transition of governance and property from the church to the state was achieved without violence, but missions were stripped of their assets –land, livestock, furnishings, building materials, and the Indigenous workforce (8-10). “At the time,” Californianas were concerned about the Kumeyaay neophytes, who eventually became laborers in town or on the ranchos, with little or no compensation, or dispersed to their *rancherías* on the outskirts of San Diego.

Machado’s testimonio is significant for conveying Californiana’s concerns during secularization, but notably missing is her perspective and response to American colonization of the frontier. After secularization women continued to negotiate positions of power, and identity – both Indigenous women and Californianas. The testimonios of Eulalia Pérez and Apolinaria Lorenzana, both mestiza women, are notable for articulating their ability to mediate positions of power, but complicated by their use of power to serve the oppressor or subjugate others (Sánchez 190). Pérez carves out a position of power within the mission, where she becomes a keeper of keys, but locks up the neophytes. Lorenza works as a nurse, but she primarily administers to the missionaries and is given rancho land as reward for her service to the church. Similarly, Machado’s testimonio exposes her complex subjectivity. She disparages the Indigenous,

sensationalizes their attacks, and her brother fights against Kearny during the Pauma massacre but then guides troops to help American forces.

At the time of her interview with Thomas Savage, Machado worked closely with San Diego priest, Father Antonio D. Ubach, who had been given religious jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples from San Juan Capistrano to Baja California and inland.⁹⁴ According to San Diego historian Millard F. Hudson, they held Ubach in high esteem, almost to the point of reverence. His immense influence was a crucial factor in avoiding a violent confrontation when the Temecula Indians were forced from their home (4). Machado was a frequent travel companion of the priest, but also visited rancherías on her own, administering Catholic sacraments, working as a *partera* (midwife), and a translator. Analogous to Lorenzana, she is respected for her *beata* disposition and compassionate service. Machado's mastery of multiple languages—Indigenous, Spanish, and English—enabled her to navigate and bridge the gaps among the diverse peoples of San Diego. While she initially feared Indigenous independence and perpetuated stories of Native American violence, her work as a healer and her language proficiency (a linguistic reality and necessity) were both skills of mediation, especially in terms of labor, (re)production, family and as a religious disciple. While stories like Machado's offer valuable insights into Californio history, this reveals the limitations of the Bancroft testimonios. The narratives are shaped by the interviewee's desire to romanticize the Spanish California era and construct an American identity, which often overlooks the profound impact of American takeover and occupation on the state's residents. Understanding the full extent of Californiana experiences requires

⁹⁴ Savage was in San Diego to copy mission records; he interviewed Machado because Ubach was away. Ubach tirelessly advocated for the rights of Indigenous peoples. Interestingly, he was the inspiration for Father Gaspara, the sympathetic priest in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*. For additional information see: Hudson, Millard F. "The Passing of a Spanish Missionary." *Out West*, vol. 26, no. 6, June 1907, pp. 515-523; Hebert, Edgar W. "The Last of the Padres." *San Diego Historical Society Quarterly*, vol.16, no.2, April 1964.

acknowledging the ongoing adaptation and challenges they faced with changing power dynamics and cultural shifts.

María Inocenta Pico de Avila, “Cosas de California”

Similar to Carrillo and Machado, María Inocenta Pico’s ancestry can be traced to the earliest families of Alta California, but unlike her counterparts, her family was often burdened by hardship and early demise. Born in 1810 at the presidio in Santa Barbara, Pico traveled to Monterey where she received an education, a rarity for girls, “because their mothers take them out of school almost always to marry them off” (Beebe 312). At the age of sixteen, she married Miguel Avila, who became a successful dairyman, one-time mayor, and prominent local. In 1839, he was given a land grant in San Luis Obispo but struggled to maintain his property rights after California statehood.⁹⁵ Pico’s testimonio, per Savage’s direction, first discusses the revolts against Mexico-appointed governors Nicolás Gutiérrez and Manuel Micheltorena. She relates the unrest after Mexican conquest and offers insight into the oligarchy network of wealthy landowners, and their desire to maintain political and economic control.⁹⁶ A fierce protector of her husband and his reputation, Pico’s testimonio offers invaluable insight on the role women played at the rancho and during conflict. Her engagement within the public domain in managing property, supporting Californio rebels, and her focus on preserving family and community honor disrupts discourses of gender that limit a woman’s function to that of mother and wife. She successfully navigates overlapping public and private roles.

⁹⁵ Biographical information for Pico is derived from: Beebe and Senkewicz (297-300)

⁹⁶ Gibb, Andrew. *Californios, Anglos, and the Performance of Oligarchy in the U.S. West*. Southern Illinois UP, 2018.

Pico draws on personal experiences to illustrate that her value as a woman, and other Californianas, far exceeded that of reproduction and ornamentation. Highlighting her management skills, she recounts that José Antonio Castro, one-time governor of Alta California and godfather of Pico's daughter, "would trust me to take care of his home and other belongings when he was away" (Beebe 306). Her capabilities as overseer are confirmed by Savage, who emphasizes her ability to exercise "good judgement" when managing her large family and vast property holdings. At home, Pico frequently took on the role of political hostess, housing and entertaining a network of relatives that included the most prominent families in the area—Castro, Alvarado and Vallejo. The heads of these households were the young liberals who would later serve as Californio-born governors. Hosting events and engaging with guests, Pico forged valuable relationships, gaining a deeper understanding of the political situation and the perspectives of various stakeholders. As Sánchez argues, with secularization the ranchos assumed "center stage as sites for the inscription of the California nation" (142). The rancho thus challenges the public/private sphere dichotomy and discourse that figures the home as principally a domestic, female domain. It was a space where the boundaries between traditional gender roles were porous; men and women worked side by side in the fields and tending livestock (Sánchez 193). Californiana matriarchs, especially the widowed rancheras, were in a unique position. They had authority, autonomy, and a front row seat to any political maneuvers that threatened landholders.

"Cosas de California" provides a women's perspective on the conflict between the *liberlista* landholders who desired provincial autonomy and the authorities representing the Mexican republic. It further illustrates Pico's knowledge of the political environment and roles of various players. She first focuses on her part in saving her husband and her contributions to

the revolt against the centralist governor, Nicolas Gutiérrez. She begins by discussing Avila's arrest, which she attributes to retribution for angering the wife of Gutiérrez's enforcer, Captain Juan Antonio Muñoz. Pico actively intervenes on her husband's behalf, sending off letters to the local authorities, and only fifteen days after giving birth, sets off with her four-year-old son to reason with the governor. Although she is on friendly terms with Gutiérrez, after all, she'd entertained him in her home, he is not swayed by Pico's womanly charms nor her state of motherhood. When "viciously" asked if she would rather have her husband shot five times or exiled to Guadalajara for five years, she opts for widowhood, replying, "if he thought it was fair, then he should probably shoot my husband five times, because there would probably be justice on earth as surely as there was justice in Heaven. I was determined that he not see one bit of cowardice in me" (Beebe 305). Confounding the image of woman as the weaker sex by focusing on courage, traditionally a masculine trait, and actively protecting her husband's welfare, Pico thus undermines conventional gender roles.

Indeed, when Avila is eventually released, Pico actively joins in the revolt against Gutiérrez as an empowered defender of the Californio republic. Asserting her agency and challenging societal expectations, she adopts the role of female soldier, immediately sending word that she will provide provisions and ammunition to the rebels. When the Californios are set to attack the plaza, she positions herself as a major actor, implying it is her words that instill courage in the men, "I urged them to enter bravely into battle, knowing some might die" (Beebe 308). Portraying herself as an active, emboldened protector of family and nation, Pico disrupts the stereotypical image of the maternal Californiana *muñeca* (doll), contained within a patriarchal and gendered sphere (Padilla 118). Nor is she shy about claiming and taking responsibility for her role in the rebels' triumph, affirming, "I was very satisfied with that

outcome, since I contributed greatly with my resources, my influence and even with my own hard work. Many times my hands were the ones that put the bridles on the horses. And many of those bridles were made with pieces of my clotheslines” (307). Emphasizing her subjectivity through the autobiographical “I,” Pico underscores her contributions as well as her refusal to have her identity defined by gendered expectations or realms. Refashioning a clothesline to assist in the rebellion, she refigures the domestic space as a site where women influence and shape historical events. While she is focused on the “I” here, she reveals other women were also actively engaged in defending the community. When news of the win is confirmed, Pico states, “we, the women who supported the cause, went together to the *castillo*” (Beebe 310). There they appoint a woman as their “commander” and hail the win with a twenty-one-gun salute. The rebel leaders, including Pico’s husband, are away in Santa Barbara, but the female *soldiers* are determined to unite in a show of solidarity and collectivity that foregrounds their accomplishments and power.

Pico’s recollection of the 1836 revolt is but one example of the ongoing power struggles that existed in Alta California during the Mexican era –between cities in the North and the South, those who desired complete sovereignty and those who were willing to accept Mexican authority, and the mission administrators and prospective landowners. Regardless of position, the primary goal of all parties was preserving a distinct Californio identity and society. The nucleus of Californio identity was honor, and maintaining it was essential for gaining respect within the community. Pico states she entered into the revolt against Gutierrez, who she casts as “the villain,” because she was determined “he be punished for repaying us so cruelly for the courtesies my husband and everyone else at my home had extended to him” (Beebe 308). Her

actions are thus not only tied to Californio loyalty, but also to avenging her family's personal reputation and social standing.

Pico's testimonio informs our understanding of the role honor played in the territory's political disputes, in decision making and the import it held for California men and women. She shares that later her husband was again "in grave danger," accused of plotting to steal funds for California troops, and arrested by Mexico-born governor, General Micheltorena (Beebe 303). Once more Pico rides to her husband's rescue, utilizing the resources of the rancho to appease his aggressor. Embracing the old adage that a way to man's heart, or perhaps his sympathies, is through his stomach, she sends "a wide variety of provisions" to the general, including "chickens, mutton, cakes, cheese enchiladas, good wine, whiskey and more" and all of it "arranged in an elegant fashion, with fine napkins, etc." (Beebe 303). Eschewing gunpowder and clothesline, Pico instead weaponizes the rancho larder and the accoutrements of civility. Micheltorena, unlike Gutiérrez, has a more favorable reaction to her entreaties and tactics. He promises to release Avila, and she in turn, continues to supply the general and his soldiers with provisions (Beebe 303). As a result, her husband is treated well and able to bunk with the *enemy* officers. He also avoids formal charges and is freed once they reach Santa Inés. Pico thus functions as an active political agent who engages in bartering and negotiation to secure her husband's release. Significantly, she notes that Avila never takes up arms against Micheltorena.⁹⁷ We cannot discern if this is due to general's response to the "courtesies extended to him," or Avila's eventual acceptance of Mexican authority. Nevertheless, it does underscore

⁹⁷ Scholars posit Micheltorena concern was preserving the inhabitants of Alta California, not maintaining the territory as a possession of Mexico. See: Ross, Travis E. "Continuity in Any Language: Memory, Ethnicity and Acculturation in California, 1877-1878." *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 96, no. 2, 2014, pp 141-171.

the significance honor and respect held for Californios, especially in terms of loyalty, commitment, and allegiances.

During her interview with Savage, given just four years after her husband's death, Pico challenges the historical record to restore Avila's reputation, and thus, reinforce her standing within the community. In his obituary, Don Miguel Avila is characterized as a man unable to change with the times, "a man of more than ordinary education in his own language, but [one who] failed to acquaint himself with the language or the ideas of the race which succeeded in dominion that to which he belonged."⁹⁸ Although he had been a prominent landowner and *alcalde*, her husband is marginalized, cast as a "foreigner" in his own country,⁹⁹ and criticized for failing to embrace Anglo-American exceptionalism. Pico, however, refigures Avila, portraying him as a pragmatic and progressive thinker. She acknowledges he fought against the American forces, but "after this country was turned over to the United States, my husband considered himself as a citizen of the republic. He tried as far as his influence could extend to get his Californio countrymen to take advantage of the benefits the new regime offered for progress" (Beebe 304). She further states, "Avila was a strong man of much character. At the same time, he also cherished freedom and public education (as do I) and he was a preserver of documents" (Beebe 304). Pico's tribute to her husband is in stark contrast to the political and cultural arrogance exhibited in his epitaph. The latter, which most likely is Anglo-American authored, ignores the diversity and complexity of Californio society. Instead, it reveals the colonizer's expectations –assimilation and cultural erasure. Pico, ironically, envisions a more democratic

⁹⁸ "Death of Con Miguel Avila." *San Luis Obispo Tribune*, 28 February 1874, p. 2

⁹⁹ Juan Nepomuceno Seguín, Tejano politician and soldier, is famous for describing himself as "a foreigner in his own land." Ongoing hostilities between Mexican Texans and Anglo-Americans forced him to flee to Mexico. Similar to Pico's narration, the goal of Seguín's memoir was to rehabilitate his image and vindicate his actions.

outcome for the conquered by highlighting the similarities between U.S. and Californio cultures and the possibility of mutual benefice.

Of particular interest in Pico's rebuttal, is the emphasis she places on preserving documents. I read her husband's "failure to acquaint himself" with the colonizer language as a deliberate choice to preserve his own cultural identity and resist assimilation. Correspondingly, what was maintained in their family archives was another opportunity to preserve and *protect* Californio culture and reputation. In his biographical sketch Savage acknowledges the incentive for visiting Pico was the possibility of securing the vast collection of documents Avila had amassed. While he is given a few records, Pico explains the majority had been lost in a fire, and she personally destroyed others to prevent any adverse effects on those who had been portrayed negatively (Beebe 301). Savage is therefore forced to rely on Pico's oral documentation, which offers an opportunity for her to craft and preserve a historical, social, and collective Californio identity of her choosing. History is written by the conqueror, but Pico wrests control from the colonizer, privileging oral over written record.

Preservando Recuerdos

In her testimonio, Juana Machado recalls visiting the wife of one the Mexican officers at the presidio, Doña Lugarda, for instruction in needlecraft (Beebe 126). She taught Machado new skills, as did other women in the area, including Indígenas and the occasional New England transplant. In 1953, Everett D. Israel, donated a quilt crafted by his grandmother, Juana Machado, to the San Diego Historical Society (see fig. 9). The quilt and stories of its maker had been passed down for generations. The artifact is highly valued for its vibrant materials, its

composition and execution, which scholars contend, not only reflects the artisan's heritage, but also the influence of the diverse peoples within California.¹⁰⁰



Fig. 9. The Machado Quilt, *San Diego History Center*.

I view Californio women's testimonios in a similar fashion, as vivid pieces of memory that carry with them the experiences of their narrator. Each is influenced by their subjectivity and ideological position, as well as, the historical and cultural environment in which it was constructed. Although the women did not sit down and craft their testimonios in the comfort of their home, or with other women, they drew on the stories of their ancestors and community members to enrich their own narratives. And just as a quilter selects fabrics and colors to create a particular mood or theme in their quilt, the Californiana storytellers carefully chose words and phrases to evoke specific emotions or images in the mind of the listener. Pieced together, the testimonios present a diverse picture of Californio women who united in their determination to

¹⁰⁰See: Ciani, Kyle Emily. "The Machado Quilt: A Study in Multi-Cultural Folk Art." *Uncoverings*, 1991, vol. 12, pp. 190-207.

preserve their cultural identity and history. They document a significant and transformative time in California's history –and significantly, from a female’s perspective. Their testimonios challenge the dominant narrative about the history of California, a narrative that has been shaped by white male historians, to offer insight on the patriarchal, colonial and religious structures of authority within Californio life. In sharing their stories, the women’s agency as narrators, historical, cultural witnesses and shapers emerges, despite the controlling transcription of Bancroft’s agents. Savage and Cerruti’s interest were the women’s domestic roles and the exploits of their husbands. The latter were not the focus of the women’s stories, nor were the women merely wives or mothers, defined or confined to a domestic space. The private sphere was also a public and often political space. The women worked in the community as translators and cultural brokers, midwives and nurses, owned and managed land

Missing from the testimonios was Californiana’s more recent history. At the time of the interview all were widowed landowners, actively managing their ranchos or haciendas and negotiating with the legal system to retain their property. After the death of her husband, Carrillo oversaw Fitch’s San Diego store before moving to Northern California where she was closer to her mother-in law and sister who had ranchos in Santa Rosa. Burdened by her husband’s mismanaged finances, she became embroiled in “The Healdsburg Squatter Wars” and was forced to sell off property.¹⁰¹ Although Juana Machado was also forced to relinquish her rancho,¹⁰² she had carefully secured her daughters’ financial welfare by deeding them several parcels of land in

¹⁰¹ Clayborn, Hannah M. *A Promised Land: Grantees, Squatters and Speculators in the Healdsburg Land Wars*. Sonoma State University, 1990, MA Thesis.

¹⁰² Machado and other prominent Californio families that continue to reside in San Diego are still resentful over their loss of land and ranchos. See: Manson, Bill. “The Great Families Who Created San Diego Are Still Angry.” *San Diego Reader*. Nov. 1996, <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/1996/nov/14/cover-the-great-families-who-created-this-town-are/>

their names which ensured their husband had no control over their real estate assets.¹⁰³ Pico continued to manage her family's vast landholdings near San Luis Obispo. Her obituary in 1886 is a testament to her efforts to contradict historical record. It notes her husband "was a man of superior education in his native tongue," a former mayor of the city, but all trace of criticism for not embracing American culture has been erased. Although her epitaph capitalizes on her heritage, "her relationship to the many prominent families in California's early and present history, renders her demise of more than ordinary of interest and worthy of more than passing notice," it acknowledges the community will feel her loss due to her many acts of charity and care for the sick and needy.¹⁰⁴ Significantly, the Californio women remained valued, active community actors who continued to contest the politics of gender and inscribe themselves into history.

¹⁰³ Machado deeded land to her two daughters from her first marriage – Josefa Alipás (Peters) and Maria Acadia Alipás (Israel) and subsequently to their heirs. Machado specifically stated the property was "not to be held subject to any debt or debts which their present husband" may owe and they were given full "sole" power to rent or lease, and was "free from constraint from said husband or subsequent husband." "Indenture 13 June, 1851;" "Indenture, December 11, 1869, between Juana Wrightington and Acadia Israel" "Indenture, April 27, 1854, between Juana Wrightington and Arcadia Israel." Document Files. DOC "Wrightington, Thomas and Family." *San Diego History Center Research Archives*

¹⁰⁴ "Died." *San Luis Obispo Tribune*, 8 October, 1886, p. 5

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CONCLUSION

Why 19th-Century Life Narratives of Black, Indigenous and Women of Color Matter

“There is nothing particularly interesting about one’s life story unless people can say as they read it ‘Why this is like I have been through. Perhaps, after all, there is a way to work it out.’” –Elenore Roosevelt

According to recent news reports, conservatism and an “anti-woke”-driven agenda have taken over American education. As a result, high-school Advanced Placement courses in African American Studies have been stripped of content, and the history of Indigenous peoples has either been mythologized or excised from textbooks. The Texas State Board of Education, responsible for the education of over 2.7 million Mexican or Latino students, has recently approved an *elective* course in “Mexican-American Studies” following years of disputes. However, it is noteworthy that the course title was altered to “Ethnic Studies: An Overview of Americans of Mexican Descent,” a whitewashing that reinforces American exceptionalism (Tuma). There is also a growing movement to censor school library books. Targeted opposition led to the ban of the Pulitzer Prize-winning memoir by Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, a graphic novel that recounts his parents harrowing experiences at Auschwitz.¹⁰⁵ Spiegelman argued the censors “want a kinder, gentler Holocaust they can stand” (Chute). In other words, audiences do not want to visualize, hear, or be confronted by life stories that present an uncomfortable and/or inconvenient truth. As Deborah Caldwell-Stone, the director of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom reports, there has been an increase number of challenges to books about racial injustice, Black American history, and the *lived experience* of Black, indigenous and persons of color” (Richman and Donaldson; my emphasis). Driving these

¹⁰⁵ According to *Pen America*, between 2021-2022, 1,648 books were banned from school libraries. Of those, “40 percent contain protagonists or prominent secondary characters of color; 21 percent directly address issues of race and racism; 10 percent have themes related to rights and activism.” Freidman, Johnathan. “Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools.” *Pen America*, Sept. 2022, <https://pen.org/report/banned-usa-growing-movement-to-censor-books-in-schools/>

changes, as well as resistance to change, are opponents fears and misunderstandings of critical race theory (CRT).

A theoretical framework, CRT expands on Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality and race as a social construct. It presumes racism is embedded in society by asking us to consider how racial bias is not only shaped by, but also, influences the legal system and other institutions of power (the workplace, education systems, government and politics). Storytelling and counterstorytelling as a means for legitimizing the racial and subordinate experiences of marginalized groups is a key tenet (Bridges, Delgado). While contemporary legal scholars primarily focus on storytelling as a tool for courtroom defense, CRT co-founder Richard Delgado recognizes its value for making an appeal or supporting an argument is not new. "Legal storytellers," Delgado argues, "draw on a long history with roots going back to the slave narratives, tales written by black captives to describe their condition and unmask the gentility that white plantation society pretended to. American Indians, of course, were great storytellers who used history and myth to preserve culture, to bind the group together, and to remind it of its common destiny. In Latino society, picaresque novelists made sly fun of social convention, puffed-up nobility, and illegitimate authority" (45). I would argue that Indigenous activists additionally utilized storytelling to contest displacement, expose government abuse, and demand equal rights. And as Machado's portrait of the "puffed-up" *canonigo* illustrates, the Californio women employed a bit of picaresque to satirically resist authority (fathers, the church, Mexican and American colonization). Delgado's observation mirrors and supports my contention that the storytelling slave narratives of Jacobs and Wilson, the performances of Winnemucca and Zitkala-Ša, and the testimonios of the Californianas perform legal and cultural work.

CRT is not focused on inclusion or diversity, but on awareness. Critics, nevertheless, argue it is divisive, promotes a reverse form of racism against whites and perpetuates a sense of victimhood. This controversy extends into discussions around education, where justifications for banning books have been based on the claim that they would cause student discomfort, guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress due to their content related to race, gender or sex. These debates highlight the ongoing complexities and differing perspectives within the broader discourse on race in education. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that experiencing uncomfortable emotions is necessary at times. Understanding the lived experiences of others, being aware of institutionalized racial inequality and exclusion are essential to preventing their repetition. As Crenshaw asserts, CRT “just says, let’s pay attention to what has happened in this country and how what has happened in this country is continuing to create differential outcomes so we can become that country that we say are” (Ellingwood). The life stories and the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color provide a foundation for understanding “what has happened in this country.” Enslaved Africans, who had just as much to do with the founding of the nation as its *fathers*, were violently abused and dehumanized by laws that produced and protected the institution of slavery. Indigenous genocide *happened*. U.S. settler colonialism and immigration policy displaced and racially subjugated non-Euro or non-Anglo-American peoples. Having this knowledge helps us recognize that laws and structures of power (such as the medical and industrial complexes and educational institutions) and immigration laws *continue* to perpetuate and facilitate racial inequality.

Contemporary developments in education reveal the pressing need to acquire alternative sources of knowledge that challenge the dominant master narrative and provide a counterbalance to the prevailing assimilationist approach. A recent study by Sarah B. Shear et al. revealed that

K-12 U.S. history content standards “overwhelmingly present Indigenous Peoples in a pre-1900 context and relegate the importance and presence of Indigenous Peoples to the distant past” (68). This not only reaffirms the trope of the already extinct or *vanishing Indian*, it also embraces the slogan of *Carlisle* founder Gen. Richard H. Pratt, to “kill the Indian in him, save the man” (Prucha 261). Looking at the findings from the study, more than half of the states did not name an Indigenous individual in their curriculum standards, “it is easy to argue that the narrative of U.S. history is painfully one sided in its telling of the American narrative, especially with regard to Indigenous Peoples’ experiences” (89). Marginalizing underrepresented voices and their narratives not only perpetuates the existing power dynamics, it also hinders students' access to a more comprehensive understanding of the past and the future.

Although Black feminism and all secondary scholarship related to CRT was removed from the AP African American Studies curriculum, first-person accounts and life narrations were retained. According to David Coleman, the head of the College Board, feedback from students suggested they connected more with primary sources and “looking directly at people’s experience” (Hartocollis and Fawcett). This is why the life narrations by 19th-century Black, Indigenous and women of color are significant. Their stories are about negotiating identity within oppressive systems that are inevitably raced, gendered and classed. When we recover and study silenced subaltern voices, their perspectives are not only brought to light but also *heard* and valued. Using their stories as resources, we can correct the historical imbalance and provide authorial agency for counterstorytelling narratives which Delgado notes, are meant to “cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (171). Utilizing life narration in the classroom will broaden student's historical and cultural knowledge – allow them to see things from a different perspective, consider the relationship between history

and memory, the connections between their own lives and the lives of others, and understand the complex social reality for those who are different. Doing so, would not only encourage us to examine our access to both individual and collective pasts but also promote self-reflection and examination.

To accomplish this, we must expand our understanding of autobiography. It is imperative we embrace “outlaw” modes of self-(re)presentation and lived experiences in all their heterogenous forms. Of the books banned last year, 141 were either biography, autobiography, or memoir (Freeman). This means revisiting the narratives we’ve already discovered and *reading* them in new ways, as I have done with my examination of Jacobs and Wilson texts. It also entails digging into the archive, and uncovering first-accounts that are traditionally overlooked. In my analysis of Winnemucca and Zitkala-Ša, I have argued for reading their lectures as sites of narrative performance and survivance. Their engagement with newspapers and public performances (including the *Sun Dance Opera*) counter the one sided “Eurocentric-knowledge power structure inherent in U.S. history” that Shear et al. discovered in their study (75). Although I am not the first to read the Californiana’s transcripts as testimonio, I believe my use of performance and feminist theory as a framework adds a valuable layer of analysis to existing scholarship.

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