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Cultural Democracy: From Uncle Tom's Cabin To A House Made Of Dawn; Unto Us Is Born A Manchild In The Promised Land

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Cultural Democracy: From *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to a *House Made of Dawn*; Unto Us Is Born a *Manchild in the Promised Land*

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Biographical Sketch

In the literary world Herbert M. Ricks is known as Ismael Khatibu. As organizer of the Piedmont Spoken and Literary Arts Movement (SLAM), a non-profit organization with a mission of building community through the literary and performing arts, Mr. Ricks has been the featured artist at numerous poetry and literary events around the country. He has facilitated discussions for the Forsyth County Library's On the Same Poem series and been a judge and an emcee at the National Endowment for the Arts and Poetry Foundation's, Poetry Out Loud competition. He is an award winning writer placing second in the 2011 NC A&T University poetry contest and first in the 2011 Clark Atlanta University Community Essay Contest with a scholarly work centered on George Moses Horton and liberation theology. Mr. Ricks graduated Cum Laude with a BA in English/Language Literature from Southern New Hampshire University and is a candidate for Master of Arts in English and African American Literature at NC A&T University. Mr. Ricks is a member of the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society and a Wadaran Latamore Kennedy 4.0 GPA Scholar.

Dedication

Ultimate thanks and praises goes to the Creator Herself, who has come in multiple forms and identities and blessed me with the guidance and strength to complete this endeavor. It validates my life's journey and shapes my future direction. To my earthly gods, Beverly C. Ricks and Herbert Marvin Ricks Sr., nothing beats a mother's love and a father's concern. To my eternal life partner, Olivia J. Sledge, you've been by my side throughout this entire organic process. Your spirit and energy run throughout this document. Ashe!! And finally, to my son, Orion Asher Herbert Sledge-Ricks, Daddy is finally finished. Let's go outside and play!!

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Abstract

Cultural democracy is the ability of a people to define their existence regardless of the dominant culture whose norms and values are institutionally accepted and expected. Where most freedoms refer to the individual, cultural freedom, in contrast, is a collective freedom referring to the right of people to follow or adopt a way of life of their choice. While varying levels of economic and political democracy have been achieved in America, the social techniques devised to create and implement cultural democracy are dependent upon capitalist endeavors developed from religious indoctrination and colonization. Through a close examination of Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, this study explores the historic role that religion and colonization have played in the economic and political progression of African American and Native Americans. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* serves as a reference point to examine the culture of the oppressed from the standpoint of the dominant culture and how it differs in scope from the humanity displayed in the works of Brown and Momaday. *Manchild in the Promised Land* and *House Made of Dawn* demonstrate how when those who comprise the best knowers of the tangible and intangible assets of a culture have the capacity to be active participants as opposed to passive followers in the development of their communities, it is much more likely to create a thriving economic and political center to stimulate opportunity and human progression.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> Political democracy – the right of all to vote – we have inherited. Economic democracy – the right of all to be free from want – we are beginning to envisage. But cultural democracy – a sharing of values among numbers of our various cultural groups – we have scarcely dreamed of. Much less have we devised social techniques for creating it. (Graves 10)
>
> --Rachel Davis Dubois

In *Cultural Democracy: The Arts, Community, and the Public Purpose*, James Bau Graves raises an important question: "What does your community need to keep its culture vital and meaningful?" (1) On the surface this seems like a very harmless inquiry. Within it lies the implication that culture is important and must remain relevant to a specific community or group. While many definitions of culture exist, as evidenced by anthropologists A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, who published 164 definitions of the word in 1952, all generally acknowledge culture's link to self-identification. Noted theorist Arjun Appadurai wrote that "the most valuable feature of the concept of culture is the concept of difference, a contrastive rather than a substantive property of certain things" **(**15). But if we view culture from this lens, it is easy to see, in a society that historically has been less than accommodating to those outside of a Eurocentric patriarchy, how culture is antithetical to America's core values. In a 1995 publication, *Our Creative Diversity*, UNESCO proclaimed that "cultural freedom properly interpreted is the condition for individual freedom to flourish…cultural freedom is rather special; it is not quite like other forms of freedom. First, most freedoms refer to the individual…cultural freedom, in contrast, is a collective freedom. It refers to the right of a group of people to follow or adopt a way of life of their choice" (Graves 11-12). Again, in a society that has become progressively more homogenous, cultural freedom of the collective must be protected through a form of governance that allows for "fair, equitable, proportional, and transparent representation

of all in the process of building a civic society" (16). Educational theorist Rachel Davis DuBois developed the concept of cultural democracy for just this purpose. Cultural democracy thus serves as the response to Graves' query.

By way of definition, The Cultural Democracy Initiative at Sacramento City College asserts that the underlying theme of cultural democracy transmitted through stories, context and artistic endeavors, gives the creator the ability to tell their story and define their existence regardless of the dominant culture whose "norms and values are institutionally accepted and expected" putting those of a "different cultural background at a disadvantage" (Cultural Democracy). It is through two such artistic endeavors that I seek to examine why we need cultural democracy and how the United States, through its institutions, has created a climate of cultural exclusivity that negatively affects the economic and political power of non-white, hyphenated cultures. Because of its capacity to create "active participants rather than just passive receivers of culture" (Graves 11), cultural democracy often examines artistic expression. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, was described by one northerner as "throwing a firebrand into the world" because it achieved through fiction what truth failed to accomplish (Goldfield 79). Indeed, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* called for active participants to create a culture of spiritual tolerance for all human beings.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's literary grenade examined the American institution of slavery. Never before in American history had slavery been magnified through such a lens. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a polarizing work that contributed to the growing chasm between North and South. Goldfield recounted how upon meeting Stowe, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed, tongue in cheek, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war" (79). Given the era from which it emerged, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was extraordinary for its emphasis on the obvious

position of the South, whose economic and political survival was tied to slavery as well as slavery's westward expansion. It was monumental because prior to its publication the North was seen by both slaves and slaveholders alike as a bastion of freedom for blacks. But Stowe portrayed the North as accommodating to the institution of slavery and because of this fact she believed that they were in greater need of obloquy than the South. While the Fugitive Slave Law appealed to southern apprehension about losing their "property" to this ideological Land of Canaan, it also reflected northerners' indifference to its abolition. Stowe implored the North to "look to the evil among themselves (495**)** because, as she put it, "the people of the free states have defended, encouraged, and participated; and are more guilty for it, before God, than the South, in that they have not the apology of education or custom" (495).

Stowe's position is laudable, particularly considering the time period in which she wrote, the scrutiny she was forced to bear and the unenviable position in which she placed herself juxtaposed against a deteriorating Union. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is antithetical to the concept of cultural democracy because while Stowe perpetuates what Graves calls a symbiotic relationship "linking the cultural with the political and economic spheres" (Graves 12), and she is dedicated to proving her cause that slavery was wrong and "perfectly horrible," her position, as James Baldwin points out, "is not to be confused with a devotion to Humanity" (1700).

In "Everybody's Protest Novel," James Baldwin extols Stowe's "determination to flinch from nothing in presenting the complete picture" (1700). Yet he considers *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a "very bad novel" that "falters only if we pause to ask whether or not her picture is indeed complete; and what constriction or failure of perception forced her to so depend on the description of brutality – unmotivated, senseless – and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds" (1700). For

Baldwin, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* presents self-righteous and virtuous sentimentalities that leave the reader with "wet eyes" but do not allow for the oppressed to be redeemed beyond the horrors of slavery and achieve full humanity. For Baldwin, the failure of a work that addresses social problems, i.e. a protest novel, "lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended" (1705). The noted abolitionist Frederick Douglass criticized Harriet Beecher Stowe less directly but still regarded her with reservation.

While writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe sent a letter to Douglass requesting information and insight into slave life. In this letter she states that she had followed Douglass' writings and was attaching a list of questions that she hoped he could pass along to fellow abolitionist Henry Bibb, so as to provide her with slavery's modus operandi (Stowe 133). Stowe also boldly added that after reading Douglass' various works, she regretted his sentiments on two subjects – the church and African colonization. While *Uncle Tom's Cabin* moved Douglass, Stowe's views annoyed him. Douglass had been disenfranchised by the Protestant Church and he disagreed with Stowe, who believed that while the church was, in certain respects, responsible for the sin of slavery, it would stand at the forefront of the anti-slavery movement. For Stowe, the movement "must and will become a purely religious one. The light will spread in churches, the tone of feeling will rise, Christians North and South will give up all connection with, and take up their testimony against slavery, and thus the work will be done" (Stowe 136). As Stowe confessed, she was "a minister's daughter, and a minister's wife"; and "had six brothers in the ministry" (135). So her ardent defense of Christianity made sense. But as I will show, the abolition of slavery was not the end of what Stowe considered work to be done. In fact, she endorsed a position which meant that slavery redirected as religion would contribute to colonizing the minds of those in the

African and Native American communities, thus limiting their capacity to keep their culture vital and meaningful.

Stowe also sparred with Douglass regarding the position of blacks once the scourge of slavery was removed. David Goldfield, in his work *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation*, discusses the disagreement over colonization that ensued: "Harriet's position on colonization troubled Douglass more. The prospect of freed slaves created a conundrum for Harriet. Like some other anti-slavery proponents, she believed that Africa offered the best solution. There, black men and women would reach their full potential, unencumbered by white interference or prejudice" (80). Abraham Lincoln also echoed this sentiment, which caused Douglass much consternation. He responded to Stowe, "The truth is, dear madam, we are here, and we are likely to remain. Individuals emigrate – nations never" (80). For Stowe, and Abraham Lincoln for that matter, four million new citizens created an immediate problem not just from the standpoint of blacks' being able to reach their full potential. It created an economic issue for whites because in a burgeoning capitalist system, whoever owned land controlled the earth's resources. As this thesis will make clear, it became necessary to wrest ownership of the land from both African Americans and Native Americans and house them in ghettoes, slums and reservations to maintain economic, political and cultural dominance.

Stowe's social milieu was so dominated by a religious fervor that it did not allow her to see the emancipation of blacks outside of the context of religion, which greatly troubled Douglass. Stowe saw Christianity as the saving grace of "poor, oppressed, bleeding Africa" (135) and she developed the characters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in accordance with this view. Stowe, never devoted to the humanity of African Americans, did not envision them on the same equal footing as whites and therefore did not perceive them as entitled to the same economic

resources. Consider that Stowe sent the character George Harris and his family to Canada and eventually Liberia after their escape from slavery. To her credit, she did later admit to Douglass "that if she were to write 'Uncle Tom' again, she would not send George Harris to Liberia" (80**).** But she only reached this conclusion after several discussions and debates with Douglass, which underscores once more the importance of cultural democracy in affirming one's capacity to define one's existence.

Cultural Democracy, therefore, allows those who are misrepresented to tell their stories and define their existences within a culture free from restrictions and dominant ideologies. A classic 20th century protest novel is Richard Wright's *Native Son*. The protagonist, Bigger Thomas is, as Baldwin states, "Uncle Tom's descendant" (1704). Bigger exemplifies cultural democracy lost. He is what happens when one's humanity is defined by another culture. "Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth." This thesis will examine cultural democracy and its significance as a means by which marginalized cultures can develop their humanity. Using Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, I will first analyze religion and its historical impact on oppressed cultures, specifically the African and Native American communities. Here I will employ a gendered approach focusing on the emasculation of the African and Native American male, since, as Bruce Dorsey points out in his essay, *A Gendered History of African Colonization in the Antebellum United States*, the anti-slavery histories and research up to this point have mainly concentrated upon "the relationship between white women's abolitionist activism and the origins of feminism and the woman's

rights movement" (Dorsey 77). I will focus on indoctrination and what that has meant in terms of cultural democracy. Next, I will consider the synergistic connection between religion and land as well as the economic and political impact that land ownership or the lack thereof has had upon the African American and Native American communities, and how this has affected their ability to define themselves. Lastly, I will analyze the detrimental effects that religious indoctrination and European land acquisition have had upon the African American and Native American communities and what this has meant in the way of response to such effects. This close reading of Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, will ultimately demonstrate that one's ability to define one's existence culturally increases one's capacity for human development and thus minimizes oppression.

CHAPTER 2

Theological Terror

> Uncle Tom's Cabin, then, is activated by what might be called a theological terror, the terror of damnation, and the spirit that breathes in this book, hot, self-righteous, fearful, is not different from that spirit of medieval times which sought to exorcize evil by burning witches; and is not different from that terror which activates a lynch mob. (Baldwin 1702)
>
> --James Baldwin

While Frederick Douglass debated with Harriet Beecher Stowe about the significance of both religion and colonization, the fusing of the two forces has become arguably the greatest obstacle to cultural democracy in America. Stowe's passionate diatribe, outlined in a letter to Frederick Douglass, emphasized the evangelical vanguard that Stowe thought necessary for the anti-slavery movement to succeed. For Douglass, religion did not solve the greatest impediment to black freedom and progress. He saw poverty, ignorance and degradation as the combined evil that constituted the "social disease of the Free Colored people in the United States (Letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe)." The readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* saw in the novel a great imperative to become better Christians. However, most did not consider slavery, or the individual slave, for that matter, as an integral part of Christian doctrine. Subconsciously, Stowe seemed to understand this, which can account for why she believed that the slaves' unencumbered progress would only be reached far from the prejudicial shores of America. We should consider two things here. For these so-called proponents of anti-slavery to deduce that black potential could only be reached apart from white interference serves as the foundation upon which the adage of 'separate and unequal' is based. It also calls into question the character and historical basis of their Christian values because even in this separate and unequal philosophy, they believe that Christianity must play the authoritative role in humanizing such individuals, even if they have their own cultural norms and spiritual views. Thus, religious fanatics such as Stowe and her

ministerial family felt it their duty to the Lord to enlighten “poor, oppressed, bleeding Africa” as if no other belief system existed.

Secondly, as Stowe and Abraham Lincoln learned, it was no easy feat to repatriate some four million newly freed men and women. The obvious result, which Douglass prophetically pointed out, was that nations cannot emigrate. So the question of that historic hour was what to do with such a large societal infusion of men and women vying for the same economic and political resources as whites and other immigrants. This thesis will explore the powerfully reactionary conclusion of the evangelical right, motivated by what James Baldwin considered a panic motivated by cruelty, which emerged from that fusion of religion and colonization. Fear and racism led to an organized effort to maintain social control. For if emigration proved impractical for the newly freed four million men and women who were clearly not equal to their white counterparts, then it would be necessary to set up mechanisms to ensure the economic and political dominance of Anglo America. For this religion proved a perfect tool.

Slaveholders used Christianity to reinforce and maintain dominance, and its success was viewed as a “coping strategy on the social and psychological level” (Karenga 232). Within society its acceptance allowed blacks to avoid punishment, i.e. beatings, and psychologically it provided the hope of a future deliverance. Through forced conversion and even partial acceptance, Christianity became a legacy that subsequent generations accepted as integral to their way of life. That is not to say that it was totally accepted in its mentally colonizing form, for through time a distinctive African American brand of Christianity took shape as well as various forms of liberation theology. However, as Karenga points out, the Christianity introduced by slaveholders played a huge role in the social conditioning of African Americans (232).

Claude Brown's semi-autobiographical work, *Manchild in the Promised Land*, tells the story of Brown's youth in Harlem (Sonny as he is known in the novel), and his connection to a community suffering from poverty, degradation and the ignorance that emerged from promises left unfulfilled after freed blacks made the Great Migration north. Brown is among the "children of these disillusioned colored pioneers" who "inherited the total lot of their parents – the disappointments, the anger" (Brown viii). He carries the reader into a world of innocence lost to this anger and frustration made manifest in crime, poverty and addictions. Sonny's ability to circumvent this world grows from his evolving awareness of how the various American institutions played a significant role in his social conditioning. This understanding enables him to navigate and overcome the hurdles they create, although not without pitfalls and grave consequences, which are instrumental to his learning process. Organized religion, for example, plays a large role in shaping Sonny's thinking. One of his friends, Floyd, who has converted to the Nation of Islam, explains religion to Sonny thusly:

> If it wasn't for Christianity, Negroes would have stopped praying a long time ago. They would've started raising a whole lot of hell. They would've known. There would've been thousands of Nat Turners and Denmark Veseys. But most of the Negroes were too damn busy looking up in the sky and praying to some blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus and some white God who nobody was suppose to ever see or know anything about. (332)

As Floyd, asserts, religion allowed whites to transition blacks from slavery to freedom easily and systematically. This underscores the view of Frederick Douglass, who identified poverty, ignorance and degradation, or the "triple malady" as he called them and not religion, from which

blacks in America needed deliverance in order to be on "equal footing with their white fellow-countrymen" (Frederick Douglass Letter to Stowe).

But Native Americans, or Indians, as they have been widely mislabeled, proved much more difficult to "civilize". They constitute the first residents of America, its indigenous people, and by modern estimations are: "divided into at least two thousand cultures and more societies, practiced a multiplicity of customs and lifestyles, held an enormous variety of values and beliefs, spoke numerous languages mutually unintelligible to the many speakers, and did not conceive of themselves as a single people – if they knew about each other at all" (Berkhofer Jr. 3). Native Americans had an intimate knowledge of the land and could readily disperse into it. So it proved difficult to enslave them. Although costly, therefore, it made much more sense for white Europeans to traffic humans from other areas, i.e. Africa. African Americans, then, as an amalgamation of various tribes brought thousands of miles from Africa, created a conglomerate intentionally disconnected from their culture and land for the sole purpose of serving the economic needs of a dominant white culture. But Native Americans were also negatively impacted by Europeans.

In Momaday's *House Made of Dawn,* the self-appointed "priest" Rev. J.B.B. Tosamah, Pastor & Priest of the Sun, tells the story of his grandmother, Aho, a Kiowa native, and how Native Americans were disconnected by Europeans from their culture and land:

> In alliance with the Comanches, they (Kiowas) had ruled the whole of the Southern Plains. War was their sacred business, and they were the finest horsemen the world has ever known. But warfare for the Kiowas was pre-eminently a matter of disposition rather than survival, and they never understood the grim, unrelenting advance of the U.S. Cavalry. When at last, divided and ill-

> provisioned, they were driven onto the Staked Plain in the cold of autumn, they fell into panic. In Palo Duro Canyon they abandoned their crucial stores to pillage and had nothing then but their lives. In order to save themselves, they surrendered to the soldiers at Fort Sill and were imprisoned in the old stone corral that now stands as a military museum. My grandmother was spared the humiliation of those high gray walls by eight or ten years, but she must have known from birth the affliction of defeat, the dark brooding of old warriors. (113)

As we shall see in Chapter 3, European encroachment on indigenous land played a huge role in disconnecting Native Americans from their culture and while they attempted to resist Anglo American brutalities, as evidenced by the Creek Wars of 1813 and 1836, they too, like many African Americans, responded to European influence and power by imitation and assimilation.

Native American cosmogony, in particular, came under assault from the beginning of European colonization. Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas challenged orthodox Christian thinking because the presence of natives created the problem of how to trace Native Americans back to Adam and Eve. Seen through Eurocentrism, the "Old World was the original one and the New World with its peoples was the one that required explanation" (Berkhofer Jr. 35). The widely held belief that Native Americans migrated to the New World across a bridge, probably from Asia, was proposed by Jose De Acosta in *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*.[1] Berkhofer quotes De Acosta and examines how his ideology solved the issue of Native American presence in America prior to Columbus but did not solve the issue of "reconciling

[1] Jose De Acosta was a Spanish Jesuit who first proposed this idea of the "New World" through his observations as a "missionary in Peru and Mexico, as well as from the writings of other missionaries, naturalists, and soldiers who explored the region during the sixteenth century. (http://www.powells.com/biblio?isbn=9780822328322)" Acosta's work contributed to Renaissance Europe's thinking of the New World.

cultural diversity with Biblical chronology and history (36).” In order to resolve this, the “degeneration of human beings after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden to the present” became a theory capable of “othering” both Native Americans and African Americans, who were believed to be cursed through the line of Ham. As Berkhofer again suggests:

> The basic idea of degeneracy became fused with later interpretations of the Indian through the doctrines of environmentalism, progress, evolutionism, and racism to explain the decline of Native Americans from alcohol, disease, and general deterioration in the face of White contact. In that sense, the idea of Indian degeneracy and decay extended far beyond its religious origins of the Renaissance period to become entwined in and with the very foundations of modern social scientific thinking. (38)

It is Tosamah who best interprets the theoretical basis of the modern white social scientific thinking in a sermon entitled, The Gospel According to John:

> Now, brothers and sisters, old John was a white man, and the white man has his ways…He talks about the Word. He talks through it and around it. He builds upon it with syllables, with prefixes and suffixes and hyphens and accents. He adds and divides and multiplies the Word. And in all of this he subtracts the Truth. And, brothers and sisters, you have come here to live in the white man’s world. Now the white man deals in words, and he deals easily, with grace and slight of hand. (Momaday 83)

Tosamah, fully aware that his followers had been educated through Christian indoctrination, uses the Bible to explain how Native American existence has been compromised. From this perspective, we can clearly see how Momaday perceives the religion/education nexus to play a

vital role in colonization. As Tosamah implies, the end result is a watered-down cosmogony that inevitably decreases one's capacity to define existence on one's own terms resulting in the inevitable deterioration that contact with white culture has brought the indigenous American.

2.1 Misplaced Generations

In the forward to *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Claude Brown tells us:

> "I want to talk about the first Northern urban generation of Negroes. I want to talk about the experiences of a misplaced generation, of a misplaced people in an extremely complex, confused society. This is a story of their searching, their dreams, their sorrows, their small and futile rebellions, and their endless battle to establish their own place in America's greatest metropolis – and in America itself. (vii)

Brown refers here not to any one individual, but rather to a group whom he calls a "misplaced generation" and a "misplaced people." These are people, as we shall discover, subject to the control of a ruling class that has dominated successive generations through its ability to limit the options of social policy. As was noted in the introduction, James Baldwin saw *Native Son's* Bigger Thomas as a descendant of Uncle Tom. In Stowe's dramatization, Tom is the paradigm of what black manhood should strive to be. He represents the black nation in its infancy; committed to God and the slave master, country and white ontology, with an unyielding, child-like obedience. He is sub-human and unflinching in his desire to attach his identity to the progress of white civilization. Bigger Thomas is the evolving child now old enough to start asking questions. He longs to disassociate his identity from white civilization yet he is also confined by it. He feels but cannot articulate the cultural democracy rising within and he becomes frustrated and antagonistic; growing up too fast in a world that denies him self-determination. Where Bigger

Thomas is the original “man-child” and the progeny of Uncle Tom, *Manchild in the Promised Land* represents the group reality of Bigger Thomas.

Manchild in the Promised Land begins with the transition that blacks in America made from the end of slavery and the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Great Migration from the rural south to the proverbial Land of Canaan:

> These migrants were told that unlimited opportunities for prosperity existed in New York and that there was no “color problem” there. They were told that Negroes lived in houses with bathrooms, electricity, running water, and indoor toilets. To them, this was the “promised land” that Mammy had been singing about in the cotton fields for many years. Going to New York was good-bye to the cotton fields, good-bye to “Massa Charlie,” good-bye to the chain gang, and, most of all goodbye to those sunup-to-sundown working hours. One no longer had to wait to get to heaven to lay his burden down; burdens could be laid down in New York. (vii)

Here we clearly see the religious significance placed upon economic attainment.

Briefly examining the time period between *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Manchild in the Promised Land*, we can likewise identify the impact of religion, a powerful institution on black development.

Newly freed and exemplifying the burden of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Abraham Lincoln, blacks joyously embraced the advent of the Reconstruction era. Having been bequeathed Christianity, blacks, for the first time ever, were able to conduct religious services without white supervision. Black churches “quickly became the most prominent social

organizations in African American communities." As *Making America: A History of the United States* points out:

> Churches were, in fact, among the very first social institutions that African Americans fully controlled. During Reconstruction, black denominations, including the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and several Baptist groups (all founded well before the Civil War), grew rapidly in the South. Black ministers helped to lead congregation members as they adjusted to the changes that freedom brought, and many ministers became key leaders within developing African American communities. (Berkin et al. 2: 465)

The early progenitors of black schools were primarily ministers and church members. They had the greatest influence over the black community and were central in encouraging an intense desire for learning. In conjunction with the Freedman's Bureau, more than 4,000 schools with over 9,000 teachers and 247,000 adult and children students had been supervised by 1870 (Berkin et al. 2: 465). With such a large body of students incorporated into the American educational system, it made sense that if the leadership or those instructed on educating the newly freed were ministers and religious pundits, then the learning to emerge would be theologically driven.

For various reasons, such as the halting of land redistribution, violence and, the lack of jobs and sufficient work, blacks migrated north for better opportunities. Brown summarizes this migration using a pointedly religious voice:

> So, they came, from all parts of the South, like all the black chillun o'God following the sound of Gabriel's horn on that long-overdue Judgment Day. The Georgians came as soon as they were able to pick train fare off the peach trees.

> They came from South Carolina where the cotton stalks were bare. The North Carolinians came with tobacco tar beneath their fingernails. (vii)

Indeed Brown is fully aware of the impact that religion had on those who migrated from the South. The nexus of religion and education that blacks had received prior to migration caused them to view the North as a promised land. Brown continued:

> They felt as the Pilgrims must have felt when they were coming to America. But these descendants of Ham must have been twice as happy as the Pilgrims, because they had been catching twice the hell. Even while planning the trip, they sang spirituals as 'Jesus Take My Hand' and 'I'm On My Way' and chanted, 'Hallelujah, I'm on my way to the promised land! (vii)

Again, we can recognize here the vital role that religion played in the social development of blacks after their release from bondage. Slavery in particular and the south in general symbolized "twice the hell" and were similar to obtrusive arms blocking their path to self-determination. Many ex-slaves stayed in the South. But those who emigrated did so joyously; unprepared for what the North had to offer. How could they be otherwise? The rural south differed markedly from the urban north:

> It seems that Cousin Willie, in his lying haste, had neglected to tell the folks down home about one of the most important aspects of the promised land: it was a slum ghetto. There was a tremendous difference in the way life was lived up North. There were too many people full of hate and bitterness crowded into a dirty, stinky, uncared for closet-size section of a great city. (viii)

As they packed their bags, blacks did not expect what Harriet Beecher Stowe forewarned: that despite having denounced the south, northerners had still not confronted their own prejudices. Stowe did offer the north a solution. She quite simply urged them to pray.

This selfsame instruction was instilled through early black curriculum and made manifest in an education developed through religious adherence. This underscores once more the impact that religion had on education. Yet certain missing components, coupled with northern racism became unforeseen obstacles in this migration for deliverance. This prompted Brown to write, "They had little hope of deliverance. For where does one run to when he's already in the promised land?" (viii) In his letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass reminds her that the increased capacity for education among blacks in America had created few individuals who were "educated far above a living condition," and that while many blacks had entered the ministry, she should remember that "an educated people is needed to sustain an educated ministry." As Douglass believed, "There must be a certain amount of cultivation among the people to sustain such a ministry" and "at present, we have not that cultivation amongst us; and therefore, we value, in the preacher strong lungs, rather than high learning" (Letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe).

Here Douglass did not deny the need for ministry; he rather acknowledged a need for a higher education unencumbered by institutional doctrine. And while parts of his letter recall Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Compromise, which privileges mechanics and Industrial college over ministers, lawyers, doctors, editors, merchants or any other fashioners of civilization, his point is well taken. More than anything else, slavery had robbed blacks of self-reliance and the ability to define their existence. Douglass was speaking of cultural democracy. America, fresh from the Civil War, sought to rebuild the country through economic development, urbanization,

technological advancement and innovation. Douglass astutely recognized that blacks in America need not take the same paths as the dominant culture. It was much more important for them to fight this triple malady by gaining rudimentary skills that they had been denied before achieving excellence in scholarship. This inability to define their existence was packed in their belongings as they headed north and "before the soreness of the cotton fields had left Mama's back, her knees were getting sore from scrubbing 'Goldberg's' floor. Nevertheless, she was better off; she had gone from the fire into the frying pan" (viii).

In *House Made of Dawn*, N. Scott Momaday, tells the story of Abelito, or Abel as he is often called, a young Native American man who roams the southwestern portion of the United States trying to reclaim what he has lost. It is a tale told on the heels of preceding generations dispersed throughout the western United States due to the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the forced exodus of Native Americans to Indian Territory or Oklahoma in what became known as the Trail of Tears (Berkin et al. 1: 296). We might consider this forced exodus a miniature Middle Passage. Over 4,000 Native Americans died from diseases and starvation as they trekked singly or were constrained in stockades on the arduous journey. Abel is a microcosm of the next generation Native Americans, stripped of their land and culture but trying to survive on reservations and land still encroached upon by the US government and private industry. Momaday himself calls it a "story of world war, of cultural conflict, and of psychic dislocation. And at last it is a story of the human condition (9)." Abel embodies all of the typical stereotypes associated with Native Americans; he is wild, a drunkard and often lazy. Yet the text shows us the extent to which he is the cultural creation of Anglo America, suffering from poverty, ignorance and degradation, concocted from the bowels of Judeo-Christian social theory.

Just as so many blacks headed north in search of better opportunities and self-determination, Native Americans moved in their search for freedom. Both communities were in perpetual motion and both based their emergent identities on an Anglo-American belief system. From the Creek Wars of 1813 and 1836 emerged what whites called the "Civilized Tribes." These constituted leaders from the five major tribes of the southeastern states – the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole. They became known for their willingness to adapt and embrace Anglo American life. Grant Foreman in the preface to *The Five Civilized Tribes – Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole,* describes them thusly:

> These tribes, the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole, were distinguished by character and intelligence far above the average aboriginal. From their geographical and historical association with the white man in the South they acquired a measure of his culture as well as of his vices. Through the influence of their leading men they had copied some of the customs and institutions of the whites and four of the tribes crudely modeled their governments on those of the states. Because of their progress and achievements they came to be known as the Five Civilized Tribes. (7)

Ever since the European arrival in North America, Native Americans have resisted colonization through an extensive series of wars and insurrections. But whether the New England area Pequot War in 1637, Bacon's Rebellion in the south in the late 1600's or the Revolutionary War and Wars of 1812, indigenous American resistance has generally led to genocide and further seizure of native lands. Those who survived had no recourse but to intermingle with white settlers or be forcibly removed from the land. In *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Natio*n, David Goldfield points out that Native Americans satisfied the Anglo Christian duty to

"rescue inferior races by offering instruction and the possibility of salvation" (108). As Berkhofer has previously shown, the Anglo capacity to reconcile cultural diversity with Biblical chronology and history meant that they could justify the appropriation of native lands, as they had slavery, because God was on their side. As was the case with African Americans, Native Americans could also benefit from civilization if they adhered to the "white man's civilization." Any attempt to disobey would be futile as "God has given this earth to those who will subdue and cultivate it, and it is vain to struggle against His righteous decree" (109). Momaday's Tosamah again explains:

> It's part of the Jesus scheme. They, man. They put all of us renegades, us diehards, away sooner or later. They've got the right idea. They put us away before we're born. They're an almighty wise and cautious bunch, those cats, full of discretion. You've got to admire them, man; they know the score. I mean they see through us. They know what we're waiting for. We don't fool them for a minute. (132)

Tosamah believed that Native Americans were waiting to murder whites. They would be content to find a "wagon train full of women and children" and to exact revenge which would fulfill their savage nature. A Native American would not hesitate to murder the white man "for he would know what the white man was, and he would kill him if he could. A man kills such an enemy if he can" (91). In *House Made of Dawn,* Abel is one such angry Native American. His identity was compromised by Anglo American institutions that existed even within his tribe. Clearly, the Anglo American favored the Five Civilized Tribes because they, like the church-going African Americans, accepted Christian indoctrination.

While many Native Americans did mount fierce resistance to the new culture, Anglo Americans used the Five Civilized Tribes as a paradigm of Native American possibility. Although lauded for their "amazing progress in civilized ways", the Five Civilized Tribes along with all Native Americans in the South were eventually forced to leave their homeland under President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830. Due to this law, any achievements that Native Americans may have reached, either independently or in conjunction with whites, "was wrecked by the ruthless expulsion from their homes" (Foreman 17). Native Americans were forced to flee their original homelands and resettle west of the Mississippi River into what was known as Indian Territory and later became Oklahoma. While African Americans had packed their rosy dreams and inability to define themselves for their journey north, Native Americans carried despair and compromised identities west.

The concept of civilization and the institution of Christianity thus served the interests of Anglo Americans but left African and Native Americans economically and politically disenfranchised as they tried to piece together remnants of their shattered cultures. As academic and social critic Harold Cruse once said, "There is more disequilibrium in the economic, cultural, and political status of ethnic groups than there is class warfare in America" (317). The economic, political and cultural imbalance in the Native American and African American communities serves as a huge detriment to their progress. While there have been varying levels of economic success in both communities, together with varying degrees of political achievement, both have been essentially disenfranchised, left voiceless, with a very limited capacity to participate in policy decisions that affect the quality of their cultural lives. While cultural democracy activists such as Rachel Davis Dubois have lobbied passionately for cultural democracy to combat white superiority and nativism, it is obvious that religion has served as a vehicle for a culturally

homogenous society. This has had a lasting impact on racism in America and has diminished and marginalized the achievements of both Native and African Americans.

In closing, both *Manchild in the Promised Land* and *House Made of Dawn* reflect the utter confusion that this religion/education nexus has created within these two communities. Sonny noticed the confusion in his parents as they carried religion with them from the south to the north: "this was the sort of life they had lived on the plantations. They were trying to bring the down-home life up to Harlem. They had done it. But it just wasn't working. They couldn't understand it. Liquor, religion, sex, and violence – this was all that life had been about to them. And a prayer that the right number would come out, that somebody would hit the sweepstakes or get lucky" (291). The same confusion overcomes Abel: "He tried to think where the trouble had begun, what the trouble was. There was trouble; he could admit that to himself, but he had no real insight into his own situation. Maybe, certainly, that was the trouble; but he had no way of knowing. He wanted a drink; he wanted to be drunk. (93)" As we will examine in Chapter 4, this need to be drunk is a coping mechanism for the lack of clarity and insight into one's own life. Finally, one of Tosamah's church members, Napoleon Kills-in-the-Timber, articulates most clearly the identity turmoil into which religion/education nexus has plunged the Native American. Napoleon Kills-in-the-Timber has accepted the possibility that Native Americans are sub-human:

> Great Spirit be with us. We gone crazy for you to be with us poor Indi'ns. We been bad long time 'go, just raise it hell an' kill each others all the time. An' that's why you 'bandon us, turn you back on us. Now we pray to you for help. Help us! W been suffer like hell some time now…Gee whiz, we want be frens with white mans. Now I talk to you, Great Spirit. Come back to us! Hear me what

I'm say tonight. I am sad because we die. The ol' people they gone now…oh, oh. They tol' us to do it this way, sing an' smoke an' pray…Our childrens are need your help pretty damn bad, Great Spirit. They don' have no respec' no more, you know? They are become lazy, no-good-for-nothing drunkerts. Thank you. (Momaday 100)

CHAPTER 3

Redrawn Frontiers

> When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land. (Bishop Desmond Tutu Quotes)
>
> --Bishop Desmond Tutu

In the previous chapter, we examined the historical role that religion played in indoctrinating African and Native Americans and how coupled with education, this nexus helped to form the basis for a dominant Eurocentric view that prevents cultural democracy. This chapter rigorously analyzes how land seized on the basis of religious justification was essential in developing an economic system that led to culture loss and the subsequent disintegration of the African and Native American communities' group cohesion. In the quote above, Bishop Desmond Tutu draws an inextricable link between religion and land that could be considered synergistic because spiritual regeneration or salvation in Christian theological doctrine is connected to the land. In *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World,* Joel Kovel explains how important it was for Europeans to connect their economic interests to the acquisition of land. The various wars fought between Native Americans and European invaders were a function of the "latter's capitalism that required the alienation of land as property, something the Indians would rather die than submit to (which is pretty much what happened)" (192). Land, as capital, plays a huge role in wealth creation. A rudimentary analysis of capitalism in the United States reflects an economic system based on private ownership of capital goods and the means of production, with the creation of goods and services for profit. If we analyze land from this perspective, it makes sense when Kovel states: "Capital originates with the exploitation of labor, and takes shape as this is subjected to the peculiar forces of

money. Its nucleus is the abstraction of human transformative power into labor-power for sale on the market" (51-52). It's no wonder why slavery became known as the "peculiar institution."

Here we can clearly see, from the standpoint of wealth creation, how important it was to wrest ownership of the land from Africans and Native Americans. Religion gave Europeans *carte blanche* to possess such lands and establish civilizations by way of a theocratic eminent domain that presupposed the inferiority of indigenous cultures. In *House Made of Dawn,* Tosamah explains to his followers how Europeans interspersed their idea of God with the truth, therefore making them synonymous:

> He couldn't let the Truth alone. He couldn't see that he had come to the end of the Truth, and he went on. He tried to make it bigger and better than it was, but instead he only demeaned and encumbered it. He made it soft and big with fat. He was a preacher, and he made a complex sentence of the Truth, two sentences, three, a paragraph. He made a sermon and theology of the Truth. He imposed his idea of God upon the everlasting Truth. 'In the beginning was the Word…' And that is all there was, and it was enough. (83)

3.1 In the Beginning Was the Word

In *The White Man's Indian,* Robert Berkhofer depicts Europeans as committed to reconciling cultural diversity with Biblical chronology and history (36). For the sake of European expansion into the New World, it became necessary to define Native Americans as "others," savage and disobedient to God and therefore needing reproach. To illustrate, Grant Foreman gave an account of a missionary station established in 1818 in the Choctaw nation. One of the early missionaries, Rev. Cyrus Byington explains the condition of Native Americans prior to religious indoctrination:

There was a period, previous to the time when the missionaries went among them, that the Choctaws used the teeth of beaver, and the outer bark of cane and reed dried hard for knives. They made bags of the bark trees, twisted and woven by hand. Ropes were made of the bark of trees. Blankets were made of turkey feathers. Fire was formerly produced by friction. Two dried pieces of ash wood were rubbed rapidly across each other till fire was produced. When they planted corn, it was not secured by any fence, nor was the land plowed – it was dug up with hoes and planted without rows, or any order. This Labor was performed by the women. The men were hunters and followed various amusements, talked, smoked, and danced, and attended councils and feasts, weddings and funerals…When the missionaries arrived in 1818, it was a rare thing to see a Choctaw warrior wear a hat, pantaloons, or shoes. Inquiry was made, and but very few were found who would not get drunk, when whiskey was offered them…Their fields were small and poorly cultivated. There were few among them who could read…The late Dr. Cornelius passed through the Choctaw Nation in 1817, and preached at the Agency. A white man who had attended the meeting has since stated to the writer, that he had then resided among the Choctaws seven years, and during that time had not heard a sermon preached, a prayer offered, or a blessing asked at a table. They had at that time no written form of government, no written laws, no trial by jury. The widow had no dowry, and children no inheritance in their father's property. (Foreman 18-19)

Here Rev. Byington painstakingly describes how uncivilized the Native American was. He underscores what he sees as Native American degeneracy, the general consensus among Anglo Americans, and thus supports the need to educate them through religion.

From a theocratic standpoint, Europeans envisioned themselves as doing the works of God. As Berkhofer points out, "Native Americans as 'Indians' became colonial subjects in their own lands as Whites advanced toward their goals as imperial powers in the New World. Future generations of Native Americans, whether descended from peoples conquered then or subsequently, inherited that subordinated status" (115). This status emerges clearly in Bishop Desmond Tutu's statement, and while he is refers to Africans in the above epigraph, the same held true for Native Americans, who inherited a subordinated status through religion at the expense of their land and ultimately, their culture. Again, Tosamah explains to his followers how Europeans compromised Native American culture through religion:

> Do you see? There, far off in the darkness, something happened. Do you see? Far, far away in the nothingness something happened. There was a voice, a sound, a word – and everything began. The story of the coming of Tai-me has existed for hundreds of years by word of mouth. It represents the oldest and best idea that man has of himself. It represents a very rich literature, which, because it was never written down, was always but one generation from extinction. But for the same reason it was cherished and revered. I could see that reverence in my grandmother's eyes, and I could hear it in her voice. It was that, I think, that old Saint John had in mind when he said, 'In the beginning was the Word…' But he went on. He went on to lay a scheme about the Word. He could find no satisfaction in the simple fact that the Word *was*; he had to account for it, not in

> terms of that sudden and profound insight, which must have devastated him at once, but in terms of the moment afterward, which was irrelevant and remote; not in terms of his imagination, but only in terms of his prejudice. (85-86)

Here Tosamah proclaims how Europeans' interpretations of the "Word" have influenced Native American oral traditions. In *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge Sources of Life*, Peggy Beck and A.L. Walters reveal that "oral tradition tells of the origins of things, places, and the people. Described in the oral tradition of a tribe are geographical areas and defined boundaries, terrestrial and supernatural" (70). From this we can see how a forced conversion to Christianity and the taking of indigenous lands directly affects Native American culture. The access of oral tradition to a geographic location gave Native Americans an "origin of arrival." Knowing it, a tribe of people maintain a 'sense of place' and certain rights to that place or territory. (70)" Beck and Walters continue:

> How receptive the area was to the needs of a tribe was usually explained in the oral tradition also. The geographic area included everything attached to the earth, or associated with that part of the earth. This of course included the sky, since it could not be separated from the area a tribe knew. It was often indicated in the oral tradition that "the place" the tribe occupied was especially created to meet the needs of that tribe. (70)

In *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday uses Abel as a paradigm for his generation, who represents, unlike Stowe's characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, not just the conflict of culture or a "psychic dislocation," but the humanity within indigenous culture.

Momaday points out that Native Americans belonged to the land. Their stories and culture are directly connected to it. *House Made of Dawn* reminds us of how Native Americans

are “estranged from the wild land, and made tentative. They are born and die upon the land, but then they are gone away from it as if they had never been” (52). As capitalism shows, land remains the ultimate resource because it is the commodity that no one can create more of, and as this thesis has shown, it became necessary to aggressively take indigenous lands as a means of production. Even as the Indian Removal Act pushed Native American tribes west, their land was constantly encroached upon and their way of life, heavily dependent upon the buffalo, disturbed. According to Goldfield, “There seemed no end to the white migration, or to the destruction of the Sioux land, the buffalo, the grasses, and the water. Only disease flourished” (105). With white expansion westward and various trails to California and Oregon carved out of the earth, the buffalo disappeared, which severely affected the Native American male hunting regimen. Momaday again explains how difficult it was for Native Americans to adapt their culture to the changes that colonization brought:

> They do not hanker after progress and have never changed their essential way of life. Their invaders were a long time in conquering them; and now, after four centuries of Christianity, they still pray in Tanoan to the old deities of the earth and sky and make their living from the things that are and have always been within their reach; while in the discrimination of pride they acquire from their conquerors only the luxury of example. They have assumed the names and gestures of their enemies but have held on to their own, secret souls; and in this there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting. (52-53)

So, too, in *Ceremony*, Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko wrote:

> But the fifth world had become entangled with European names: the names of the rivers, the hills, the names of the animals and plants – all of creation suddenly had

> two names: an Indian name and a white name. Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul; Jesus Christ was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family. (68)

Clearly Christianity had a huge impact on Native American existence.

From a cultural democracy standpoint, it is important to consider how the Native American identity became shaped not by Native Americans, but by the dominant Anglo American culture, thus feeding into the stereotypes currently associated with Native Americans. This oversimplified concept of Native American degeneracy sows the seedlings of racism and strongly resembles Edward Said's Orientalism, which, John McLeod suggests, in *Beginning Postcolonialism*, demonstrates the "link between knowledge and power" (47). As McLeod asserts, Orientalism, according to Said, is a form of colonial discourse interested in the ways that "material reality and cultural representations – the conditions of the world and the knowledge we make about the world – are always intertwined and mutually supportive" (46). The European creation of the "Indian" reflects the typical stereotype of the "Orient" or any culture outside of the Occident or West, regarded as 'primitive', 'backwards' or in the case of Native Americans, 'savage'. McLeod described Said's 'Orientalism' thusly: "Orientalism posited the notion that Oriental peoples needed to be made civilsed (sic) and made to conform to the perceived higher moral standards upheld in the West. In perpetually creating these discursive stereotypes, Orientalism justified the propriety of colonialism ideologically by claiming that Oriental peoples needed saving from themselves" (55). Cultural democracy, therefore, becomes necessary to imbue those who comprise the best knowers of the tangible and intangible assets of their heritage

with the power and collective capacity to define the parameters of their culture. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a breach of the link between knowledge and power, as evidenced by Stowe's disagreement with Frederick Douglass on the issues of religion and colonization, because it stripped African Americans of their identity and established the idea that African Americans needed saving from themselves.

In *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Claude Brown pointed out how powerful religion had become to African Americans as they embarked upon the Great Migration. They were following "the sound of Gabriel's horn on that long-overdue Judgment Day" (vii). Hymns and other symbolic representations of God accompanied them as they made the correlation between themselves and various biblical characters. Exodus 3:8 became their mantra, for they could identify with the children of Israel, who themselves had been oppressed by the Egyptians. African Americans had also been "delivered" and God came down to "bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (*African Heritage Study Bible*, Exod. 3.8). This land of milk and honey represents abundance and is the image most modern religions and/or cultures employ as they look to inhabit some proverbial 'Holy Land' or Eden deemed to be their geographic destiny.

While Native Americans were trying to preserve their lands from the onslaught of colonization, Africans in American sought entrance into the 'holy land'. Newly freed and displaced from their original home, African Americans saw themselves headed to the proverbial Land of Canaan. Through slavery, the slaveholder effectively disassociated African Americans from their original religion and culture and with each successive generation an even larger chasm developed. Through religious indoctrination, African Americans came to see European or

American society as "civilized" and Africa as savage. In *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Floyd gives Sonny an analysis of European indoctrination from an African American perspective:

> Then Floyd started talking about how the white man had robbed the black man in Africa of his heritage and put him into slavery by feeding him all this white religion. He said, 'The black man's got no business with Christianity. They've even got us looking up at some white Jesus. Jesus was black. It says so in the Bible. It says that Solomon was black; it says that Moses was black. But here they've told us a lie. They took the Bible and rewrote it for themselves, telling us that they were white so we'd be looking up to them for being white. If you look up to Jesus and Jesus was white, you got to look up to these white men because they're white. Right? (331-332)

We can clearly discern here the striking parallels between Floyd's message to Sonny and Tosamah's sermon to his followers on the interconnectedness between God and Truth. This underscores the shared experience of African Americans and Native Americans at the hands of their Anglo American colonizers.

This common history developed out of Anglo America's need to create a cheap labor force. Having already displaced both the African American and Native American communities, it now sought to extract the resources from the land. Because labor and capital needed each other, wealth attainment was predicated upon the need for slavery. As William Katz points out in *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*: "For Europeans seeking a source of labor that could not escape, Africans were ideal because they were three thousand miles from home. They could not flee to loved ones, as Indian slaves could. The African man and woman who fled could always be identified by skin color, and black became the badge of bondage" (Katz 28). A closer analysis of

the original group formations in America (white Englishmen, black Africans and red Natives) reveals the creation of the oppressor/oppressed dynamic based upon color, which pitted the ruling class against one conglomerate lower stratum or, as Leslie Marmon Silko pointed out in *Ceremony*, "the colored against the white". According to Theodore Allen, in the "Summary of the Argument of The Invention of the White Race" in *Culture Logic*: "The hallmark, the informing principle, of racial oppression in its colonial origins and as it has persisted in subsequent historical contexts, is the reduction of all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, beneath that of any member of the oppressor group." Floyd makes this parallel between the African and Native American experience to Sonny in *Manchild in the Promised Land*:

> Why don't he (white males) take some of that religion and use it himself, to make himself less mean and stop killing all those people, lynching all those people down there in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama? If there was anything to this white man's religion, he wouldn't be so damn wicked. How can he be so righteous, how can the religion that he's living by be so righteous, if it's going to let him come in here and take a whole country from the Indians, kill off most of them, and put the remainder of them on reservations? (332)

It is interesting to recognize that Floyd's response to Christianity mirrors Frederick Douglass' wariness of religion. Douglass echoed the same sentiment as Floyd, although less vociferously, regarding the Protestant Church and their silence on slavery.

Allen's recognition of a dominant group ruling in "Summary of the Argument of the Invention of the White Race" further validates the shared experience of African Americans and Native Americans. He stressed that we must see the "white race" for exactly what it is, "a ruling

class social control formation" that has entrenched itself in "control of the organs of state power" and can thus dominate the national economy and "limit the options of social policy in such a way as to perpetuate its hegemony over the society as a whole." Katz likewise points out how important it was in the early years of slavery to keep newly enslaved Africans and Native Americans separate: "By emphasizing the actual, exaggerated and imagined differences between Africans and Indians, whites successfully masked the cultural similarities of the two races as well as their mutual exploitation by whites" (Katz 14). For this reason I examine African Americans and Native Americans jointly against the backdrop of European colonialism and oppression.

Douglass' "triple malady" exemplifies the African American/Native American interconnection. Poverty, degradation and ignorance are symptoms of both communities exacerbated by slavery, oppression and exploitation. The differences between the two communities were contrived for the sake of manipulation and control. Let's again quote Floyd: "Look around you. What's it taught Negroes to do? All this Christianity? Nothing, nothing that could benefit them. All it's taught Negroes to do is bow their heads to Mr. Charlie, buy bleach creams, straighten their hair, buy a Cadillac car that they can't afford, and follow some white Jesus to a mythical place called heaven. Ain't this a damn shame?" (Brown 332) We can extract multiple points from this passage. First, Floyd points out the African Americans' recognition of their inferiority. As we have shown, the social control exhibited by Anglo Americans perpetuated a hegemonic structure that enabled "internal colonization," or the training of African Americans and Native Americans to recognize their own inferiority. When blacks buy bleach cream and straighten their hair, they reveal the desire to mimic the physical attributes of

"whiteness[2]". This is the function of a colonized mind in which religion has played a huge role. The noted psychologist and philosopher Frantz Fanon explained it thusly in *Black Skin, White Masks:*

> Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (18)

Sonny recognized at an early age how religion had colonized his sister Carole and how she had become assimilated by the subordinate status she had inherited from her mother: "She (Mama) had Carole going around to all those sanctified churches and all that old crazy kind of stuff. The girl lost all the self-confidence she used to have. Carole used to be smart and never used to be afraid of anything…But now it was too late to do anything about it; she was good and sewed up in that religious bag. She was afraid not to be religious" (196).

To further illustrate the impact that a dominant culture has on marginalized groups, let's examine the African American writers Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon. In her poem, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," Phillis Wheatley rejoices in receiving God's deliverance upon being brought to America and refers to Africa as a "Pagan land" (Wheatey 219). It was through God's "mercy" that she was redeemed from such a place and her "benighted soul" was taught to understand. She ends the short poem by admonishing her black brothers and sisters, "Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain/May be refin'd, and join th'angelic train"

[2] In *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha describes this as mimicry or the repetition of a colonial stereotype by the colonized as an attempt to secure a fixed position.

(220). It is a message that surely would have made Harriet Beecher Stowe proud. In "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly," Jupiter Hammon also extols the virtues of being brought to America to learn "the wisdom of God" through which his mercies allowed deliverance from Africa's "dark abode" (Hammon 166). Wheatley and Hammon clearly show how important religion was in the process of indoctrination, as both reject their blackness for the dominant Anglo culture. By the same token, Virginia jurist William C. Daniell proclaimed in 1852: "Slavery has made the black man in America, in a few centuries, what thousands of years had failed to accomplish for him at home, cultivating the aptitudes of the negro race for civilization and Christianity" (Goldfield 108). It is this idea of "civilization" that has been at the core of our discussion on religious indoctrination in both the African Americans and Native Americans communities. The result of such thinking caused the colonized to see any deviation from Western civilization as ungodly and therefore savage.

Another point to extract from Floyd's sermon to Sonny deals first with African Americans bowing their heads to "Mr. Charlie," a name used contemptuously by blacks who regard whites as oppressors. The origin of the term is in question; however, folklorist Alan Dundes suggests that the term "Mr. Charlie" is born out of the antebellum period. In "Shack Bullies and Levee Contractors: Bluesmen as Ethnographers," John Cowley recounts the 1920's story of the Lowrence family, a group of seven brothers of whom the eldest, Charley, was a notorious contractor of cheap labor, mostly African American, to build levees alongside the Mississippi River in the 1920's (Cowley 153). Various songs about "Mr. Charley" quoted in the article seem to support the idea that the southern bluesmen who composed the songs were in fact referring to Charley Lowrence. This is significant because it takes our examination further into a discussion of land seizure and development and the economic and cultural impact of capitalism

upon African Americans. Coupled with Floyd's comments about blacks following some white Jesus to a mythical place called heaven, we can again see this synergistic connection between religion and land.

Heaven represented the geographic location that blacks sought to attain. Both mythical and ideological, it served as their ultimate goal but did not diminish their desire to possess a tangible land, as represented in Exodus 3:8 and their migration north toward the land of milk and honey." After the Civil War the nation looked to move towards the future. But the South remained entrenched in the past. Goldfield noted that "for nearly a century after the war and until the rest of the nation could no longer ignore the anomaly of poverty, ignorance, segregation, and disenfranchisement on its border, the South remained a regional outlier to the story of national success" (9). Even prior to the Civil War's end, the North, and New York in particular, was progressing towards this mecca of innovation. The department store arrived in New York in 1825 and became "a democratic space, where salesgirls, native-born or immigrant, and shoppers of all varieties mingled" (132). Of course this did not include African and Native Americans. Downtowns developed for commercial and industrial use and the transition was made from natural to man-made environments. As people crowded into large cities, the obvious goal was wealth. The city became the locus for the liberated man or woman and the south was viewed by the north as backwards and even primitive: "If (a person) has talent and ambition, he will surely burst away from the relentless tedium of potatoes and corn, and earn more money in an hour by writing a paragraph exhorting people to go hoe corn and potatoes, than he would be hoeing them for a day" (131).

The perception of the north as a place of great wealth was not lost upon African Americans who toiled over 250 years in the fields and had become repulsed by the idea of the

cotton and tobacco fields. Large cities coincided with their search for a land of milk and honey. The ambitious sought integration into a blossoming economic system and were overjoyed to depart the primitive, slow, unenlightened, antiquated south. This is evidenced in the successive generations of African Americans who migrated either west or to the large cities in the North and became totally urbanized. In *Manchild in the Promised Land,* Sonny is repulsed by his mother's inability to rebel as he has been conditioned to think that his ancestors merely accepted slavery: "She (mama) had all that Southern upbringing in her, that business of being scared of Mr. Charlie. Everybody white she saw was Mr. Charlie" (285). Upon meeting his aunt for the first time, Sonny gives a more detailed impression of how he sees the south:

> But when my long-lost aunt regained her senses and let me out of her bear hug, I wasn't mad any more. I had realized that this was just another one of those old crazy-acting, funny-dressing, no-talking people from down South. As I stood on the other side of the room looking at her, I was wondering if all the people down South were crazy like that. I knew one thing – I had never seen anybody from down there who looked or acted as if they had some sense. Damn, that was one place I never wanted to go to. It was probably eating corn bread and biscuits all the time that made those people act like that. (38)

Here he underscores the division between the southern and northern African American, created by internal colonization.

But if African Americans were stripped of their original culture and God, they developed a powerful counter-culture. In *Black Culture and Black Consciousness,* Lawrence Levine refers

to Robert Park, [3] "Other peoples have lost, under the disintegrating influences of the American environment; much of their cultural heritage. None have been so utterly cut off and estranged from their ancestral land, traditions and people" (Levine 4). In the absence of a monolithic cultural identity, the various languages, institutions and gods brought from African created a hybrid culture tailored to the situation in which they were thrust. Levine states further:

> Black slaves engaged in widespread musical exchanges and cross-culturation with the whites among whom they lived, yet throughout the centuries of slavery and long after emancipation their song style, with its overriding antiphony, its group nature, its pervasive functionality, its improvisational character, its strong relationship in performance to dance and bodily movement and expression, remained closer to the musical styles and performances of West Africa and the Afro-American music of the West Indies and South American than to the musical style of Western Europe. (6)

The work songs sung in the fields, the many spirituals concocted from Christian indoctrination and the development of tales, aphorisms proverbs, jokes, legends and anecdotes were created as a way to "uphold traditional values and group cohesion" (6). Similar to that of the Native Americans, the African American culture was tied to its geographic location and the division created between the southern and northern African American disrupted group cohesion.

To conclude this section we return to Sonny and his disdain for the culture of southern blacks; the predecessor to the black urbanite:

> When I get tired of hearing how bad I was and about the roots and the bad mouth, I took Pimp to the show. On the way to the show, Pimp asked me to tell him about

[3] From Robert E. Park, "The Conflict and Fusion of Cultures with Special Reference to the Negro," JNH, 4 (1919), 116-18.

> roots. I didn't want to tell that I didn't know, because he thought I knew everything, almost as much as God. So I started telling him things about roots and root workers based on the tales I had heard Mama tell about somebody working roots on somebody else 'down home.' I said 'Only people down South work roots, because you can't git roots around here. (Brown 42)

After his visit south to his grandparents, Sonny learned "about the church songs Dad and I used to sing. Grandpa didn't go to church any more, but he knew all about the songs and who sang them at what funeral" (48). He received an education from his grandfather on how the south differed from the north, although he still "couldn't understand why they sang nothing but those sad old church songs. They sure seemed to be some dumb country people to me. They didn't know any boogie songs or jump songs – they didn't even know any good blues songs. Nobody had a record player, and nobody had records. All the songs they sang, they'd been singing for years and years" (49). Returning to New York, Sonny proclaims: "Down South sure was a crazy place, and it was good to be going back to New York" (52). Sonny clearly does not understand black southern culture. Again Levine states that "culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and present" (5). While we can clearly see the development of a new urban culture through Sonny in New York, the lack of sufficient interaction between southern and northern blacks precludes the transmission of traditional cultural values, which becomes problematic with regard to cultural democracy.

3.2 Everybody's Protest Novel

Manchild in the Promised Land is one man's testament of living in extreme poverty, crime and violence. Sonny shows that it is possible for someone to escape the pitfalls of the inner city, but unfortunately he serves as the exception and not the rule. While some can find ways to

transcend this life, for many, escape comes only through the confines of religion, in the bottom of a bottle or within a drug syringe. Others, meanwhile, succumb to the viscous cycle of crime, prison and premature death. Sonny recognized this and realized that he needed to get away. After observing his overtly religious sister, Carole, he comments: “I stayed away from that religious thing and let Carole go on and walk that way if she wanted to. I felt this was something she needed, the way everybody in Harlem needed something. Some people needed religion. The junkies needed drugs. Some people needed to get drunk on Saturday night and raise hell. A lot of people needed the numbers. Me, I needed to get out of Harlem” (211). This could not have been what African Americans were expecting as they headed north for better opportunities. This could not have been the land of milk and honey that was promised to them by God.

House Made of Dawn tells the story of Abel, a young Native American trapped in two worlds. There is first the white man’s world, in whose military he served, fighting along with them against their perceived enemies. Abel assists them in dismantling other cultures while never having been seen as the white man’s equal. He exists only for the purpose of assisting them in their mission of maintaining economic and political hegemony. Then there is the Native American world; a place where rituals and ancient traditions have been violated by European conquests. Abel and his people have been stripped of their sense of place and displaced to governmentally controlled parcels of land where they are left to roam the earth in search of their lost culture. Again, as with the urbanization of African Americans, they escape into religion, alcohol and drug usage. These two worlds weigh heavily on Abel, “Now, here; the world was open at his back. He had lost his place. He had been long ago at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void” (92). In his confusion and constant inebriated state, Abel kills an albino, because, like

most of the characters in *House Made of Dawn,* Abel cannot decide which world to enter fully. Father Olguin, for example, a native Mexican who became a Catholic priest and defended Abel at his trial, explains exactly where his allegiance lies and the psychological trauma that those like Abel, not to mention himself, must face: "We are dealing with a psychology about which we know very little. I see the manifestations of it every day, but I have no real sense of it – not any longer. I relinquished *my* claim to the psychology of witchcraft when I left home and became a priest" (90).

In "Everybody's Protest Novel," James Baldwin articulates his frustration with works such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that lacked insight into humanity. Baldwin saw their aim as an attempt to "reduce all Americans to the compulsive, bloodless dimensions of a guy named Joe" (Baldwin 1703). This aim is to be expected when cultural democracy does not exist - where those whose experience diverges from that of the dominant culture do not have the capacity to express their condition. It is of such works as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that Baldwin proclaims:

> The oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society; they accept the same criteria, they share the same beliefs, they both alike depend on the same reality. Within this cage it is romantic, more, meaningless to speak of a "new" society as the desire of the oppressed, for that shivering dependence on the props of reality which he shares with the Herrenvolk[4] makes a truly "new" society impossible to conceive. What is meant by a new society is one in which inequalities will disappear, in which vengeance will be exacted; either there will be no oppressed at all, or the oppressed and the oppressor will change places. But

[4] (German) A concept of Nazi ideology where the Nordic race, later to be known as the Aryan race, identified themselves as the ideal or pure race.

> finally, as it seems to me, what the rejected desire is, is an elevation of status, acceptance within the present community. (Baldwin 1704)

Finally, then, through the characters in *Manchild in the Promised Land* and *House Made of Dawn*, Brown and Momaday provide the reader with insight into the human condition, thus fulfilling Baldwin's criteria for the protest novel.

Having shown the impact of religion and land on cultural democracy, this thesis will conclude its discussion of land issues in the next chapter, examining the role of Harlem for the African American community and the reservation for the Native American community, and revealing how the maintenance of a capital society and wealth depends upon poverty and resource control through reservations, ghettos and slums. As James Kovel stated in *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or The End of The World?*, "There will be no true resolution of racism so long as class society stands, inasmuch as a racially oppressed society implies the activities of a class-defending state" (131). Chapter 4, then, will examine the measures used to maintain oppression in a class state.

CHAPTER 4

Making a Manchild in the Promised Land

> The Indian world of the reservation exemplifies the fate awaiting the American Negro, who is left stranded and impoverished in the ghettoes, beyond the fringe of absorption. (Cruse 452)
>
> --Harold Cruse

African Americans and Native Americans are the backbone of the American capitalist system. The success of capitalism in America has depended upon the land of Native Americans as a means of production along with the labor of African Americans (and to a far lesser extent Native Americans) necessary to create goods and services for profit. For the distribution of wealth to remain in the hands of the dominant culture, Anglo Americans maintained confined social areas for large concentrations of lower-class citizens. For a capitalist culture to thrive it must have clearly defined class distinctions in order to maintain social control. In other words, the opportunity for wealth can only exist when there is abject poverty because wealth and poverty exist on a continuum in a capitalist culture. Kovel asserts, “Capital’s iron tendency to produce poverty along with wealth and to increase the gap between rich and poor, means that capitalist society must remain authoritarian at the core” (89-90). In its current state, the legal framework of America outlined in the Constitution creates instability particularly among non-white groups who are often the victims of economic, political and cultural exploitation. As Harold Cruse points out in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*: “The American Constitution was written conceived, defended and glorified for the implied social benefits of a group – the white Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, North European American” (394). The Constitution does not “recognize the legal validity or the rights of groups but only of individuals” (317). It therefore becomes necessary in a capitalist society to create social structures and conditions that allow for limited individual mobility. Ghettos, slums, and reservations therefore come to contain the most

impoverished Americans, with little chance of upward mobility, endowed with scant resources generally under authoritarian control. In *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Sonny gives the reader insight into the inner city of Harlem through the voice of a Muslim corner sermon:

> Look at them. Look what they're doing to us. They've got us all bunched up here in some little hole in the wall. That's what this is. This is a hole in the wall on the island of Manhattan, where they stuck the majority of the black people. And they got their white devils to guard us. You see 'em? This is just like being in jail, and, you people think you're free. (346)

Harlem had not always been that way. Prior to blacks migrating north and flooding the inner cities, Harlem was an oasis where the wealthy could escape the streams of immigrants flowing into New York. In the early nineteenth century, New York City was widely regarded as "the dirtiest city in the nation" (Gill 77). It was also highly dangerous because of the city's rampant corruption and overall lawlessness. According to Jonathan Gill:

> In contrast there was safe, calm, green, and clean Harlem, which downtown doctors dealing with nervous or exhausted patients frequently prescribed. Long a destination for old-money families escaping the epidemic season, Harlem now became home to a new class of New Yorkers getting rich through industry and trade and building country estates amid the farms and forests. (77-78)

But after the Civil War, the northern and western United States grew exponentially. According to Henry Louis Gates and Nellie McKay in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, approximately fourteen million immigrants settled in the Northeast and Midwest between 1860 and 1900 (543). New York, home to 500,000 residents in 1850, swelled to three and a half million in 1900. The overcrowding and poverty that existed in the cities meant that diverse

cultures existed together within small, confined spaces. Harlem, for example, saw, “southern Italian and eastern European Jewish immigrants, blacks from the deep South and the West Indies, and Latinos from the Spanish Caribbean” (Gill 131), all vying for space as the advent of the subway brought this diverse body of people to Harlem amongst the “Irish underclass and its German upper class” to create the country’s largest urban center. It would not be long before the various social patterns “caused as much social conflict as they did social stability, especially when it came to competition for work” (140). Not soon after, the rich abandoned the area for the suburbs or the Upper West Side and Harlem was left rife with “poverty, overcrowding prejudice, crime, and disease” (151). At the same time, westward expansion “allowed greater than usual class and culture interaction and assimilation.” That same expansion “practically destroyed other cultures, particularly Native American, and the environments that had sustained them” (543). The influx of immigrants, the push towards greater innovation and technology, the widening gap between rich and poor customary in a capitalist culture and the racism exhibited towards African and Native Americans all had a huge impact upon them as well as their subsequent generations that arose out of the urban enclaves. Reservations became a way for Anglo Americans to segregate Native Americans while also granting them citizenship. Simultaneously, the increasing numbers of African Americans entering Harlem caused Anglo Americans to depart en masse thus transforming Harlem from an area of “old money” and wealth to one of poverty and overcrowding.

4.1 The Native American Reservation vs. Harlem

Colonization, through the eyes of the colonizer, almost always presumes that the colonized subject would be better off in a civilized environment that maintains high moral standards and heightened levels of education and enlightenment. The premise is that colonization

offers civilization in contrast to the primitive, and for those colonized it would "save them from themselves," not to mention the undesirables among the colonizers. Interestingly enough, the colonized never seem to have access to the same opportunities as their colonizers. This is a characteristic of Edward Said's Orientalism. Harriet Beecher Stowe believed that religion was the cure for "poor, oppressed, bleeding Africa". She felt that Africa gave blacks the best chance of success without the prejudices of whites to impede their progress. President James Monroe shared the same sentiment through the stipulations of the Indian Removal Act:

> Monroe laid down principles upon which he thought the new policy could be achieved with honor to the United States and still promote the 'welfare and happiness' of the Indians. Fearing their 'degradation and extermination' if they remained in the East, Monroe proposed that removal might be made honorable to the United States and attractive to the Indians if Congress guaranteed the emigrant Indians a permanent title to their Western lands, organized some kind of government among the removed tribes to protect their territory from intrusion, preserved peace among the tribes native to the West and the emigrant tribes, and continued funding of civilization agents among them to prevent further 'degeneracy'. (Berkhofer 158)

The Indian Removal Act constituted another attempt by Anglo Americans to "civilize" Native Americans, although this time the purpose was for segregation.

By the time the Civil War ended, it had become necessary for the government and reformists to turn their attention to the Native American problem, which had not been resolved with the Indian Removal Act. Land allocated to Native Americans was continually seized whenever it served the capitalist purposes of Anglo Americans and no peace existed between the

two factions. Although any affective uprising on the part of Native Americans ended with the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890, [5] government officials and reformers believed that the only hope in "civilizing" the Native American "lay in detribalizing him as prelude to acculturation and assimilation" (Berkhofer 166). By 1890, these circumstances had produced what reformers and government officials of the day thought would finally solve the Indian problem – allotment of reservation lands combined with American citizenship" (Gill 166).

But the transition to reservation life proved difficult for Native Americans and Benally explains in *House Made of Dawn* just how problematic Abel found it:

> He was unlucky. You could see that right away. You could see that he wasn't going to get along around here. Milly thought he was going to be all right. I guess, but she didn't understand how it was with him. He was a longhair, like Tosamah said. You know, you have to change. That's the only way you can live in a place like this. You have to forget about the way it was, how you grew up and all. Sometimes it's hard, but you have to do it. Well, he didn't want to change, I guess or he didn't know how. (131)

Clearly, survival was predicated on assimilation, yet that did not ensure a life free of poverty. In *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko further describes the difficulties of the reservation:

> Reservation people were the first ones to get laid off because white people in Gallup already knew they wouldn't ask any questions or get angry; they just walked away. They were educated only enough to know they wanted to leave the reservation; when they got to Gallup there weren't many jobs they could get. The men unloaded trucks in the warehouse near the tracks or piled lumber in the

[5] The last of the American Indian Wars fought by American forces against the Lakota Tribe near Wounded Knee Creek on the Lakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

> lumberyards or pushed wheelbarrows for construction; the women cleaned out motel rooms along Highway 66. The Gallup people knew they didn't have to pay good wages or put up with anything they didn't like, because there were plenty more Indians where these had come from. (115)

Overcrowding, limited economic opportunities, crime, and violence were customary for a people stripped of their culture and systematically segregated onto land allotted for the purpose of their "civilization."

African Americans faced similar difficulties in urban America. In "Ballad of the Landlord," the renowned poet Langston Hughes examines life in the inner city, demonstrating how little economic and political power African Americans possessed. The poem begins with the speaker exhorting his landlord to fix the problems associated with his residence: "Landlord, landlord,/ My roof has sprung a leak./ Don't you 'member I told you about it/ Way last week?/ Landlord, landlord,/ These steps is broken down./ When you come up yourself/ It's a wonder you don't fall down" (Hughes 1302-1303). The speaker goes on to express dismay at the fact the landlord requires payment for the residence even though obvious repairs need to be completed. The landlord threatens the tenant with eviction if he does not pay. At the same time, the speaker threatens to "land my fist on you." It is not actually clear in the poem who calls the police, but in the end the speaker is taken to jail: *"Police! Police!/ Come and get this man!/ He's trying to ruin the government/ And overturn the land!*...Precinct Station./ Iron cell./ Headlines in press:/ MAN THREATENS LANDLORD/ TENANT HELD NO BAIL/ JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL" (1303). Clearly we can see the authoritarian impact of capitalism and the power that the government (police) wields in favor of the business sector (landlord) over the civic sector (tenant). This has a significant impact on the economic system's ability to maintain

the gap between wealth and poverty. Also, because the tenant is black, racial prejudice towards African Americans was most likely a huge factor in the decision to sentence the tenant to ninety days in jail without bail. For African Americans, racism and incarceration in urban cities made the "land of milk and honey" the new Jim Crow.

Harlem's identity with the black community is generally thought to have begun around 1904. The advent of the subway system in New York caused speculators to "tear down the dilapidated shacks belonging to Irish, Italian, and Jewish squatters and put up block after block of overpriced row houses and tenements that failed to attract tenants" (Gill 171). Following a nationwide financial crisis that existed from 1904 – 1907, the African American entrepreneur, Phillip Payton, known as the Father of Harlem, seized upon the opportunity to service the large influx of blacks streaming into New York by "either leasing or buying apartment dwellings that could not be rented" (Cruse 19). Former white tenants had either abandoned or been evicted from these properties and Payton and the Afro-American Realty Company acquired and rented them to blacks. Cruse quotes James Weldon Johnson on this point[6]:

> The whole movement, in the eyes of the whites, took on the aspect of an 'invasion': they became panic-stricken, and began fleeing as from a plague. The presence of one colored family in a block, no matter how well bred and orderly, was sufficient to precipitate a flight. House after house and block after block was actually deserted. (Cruse 19-20)

African Americans in the early 1900's saw liberal economic gains coupled with early civil rights politics. The onset of the Harlem Renaissance created great opportunity and a paradigm for future community success. This was the expectation of African Americans as they

[6] James Weldon Johnson, "Harlem: The Cultural Capitol," in Alain Locke (editor), The New Negro, 1925, Albert and Charles Boni, p. 304.

migrated north. As Brown pointed out, “These migrants were told that unlimited opportunities for prosperity existed in New York and that there was no ‘color problem’ there” (vii). Because African Americans had inherited their subordinate status, they embraced the European idea of “civilization” in the urban cities. Native Americans, who had only become recently estranged from the land, were not as eager to accept the Anglo American way of life as their own. If any difference did exist between African Americans and Native Americans, it was on this point. African Americans were forced into governmental dependence whereas Native Americans remained on the fringe of American society and were therefore fitted with the label of “savage.”

Even Frederick Douglass questioned the Native American capacity for civilization. While he was an abolitionist and a proponent of human rights, his conflicting and often contradictory views on Native Americans parallel Harriet Beecher Stowe’s. Where Stowe was fervent in her anti-slavery position, she was also audacious in presuming that freedom for blacks could only be achieved through the very method that indoctrinated them. Douglass, in like fashion, was zealous in his commitment to equality for all (blacks, women, Native Americans and, immigrants) but often spoke for and made suggestions to the government on policies pertaining to Native Americans. Douglass was guilty of “Orientalizing” Native Americans as he saw them as “wild” and savage in contrast to European civilization. Speaking in Scotland on the ills of slavery, Douglass addressed an audience and sought their support on its abolition, “I want him to feel that he has no sympathy in England, Scotland, or Ireland; that he has none in Canada, none in Mexico, none among the poor wild Indians; that the voice of the civilized, aye, and savage world, is against him” (Douglass 474). Further revealing his own “orientalism,” in his letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass commented:

> This black man – unlike the Indian – loves civilization. He does not make very great progress in civilization himself but he likes to be in the midst of it, and prefers to share its most galling evils, to encountering barbarism. Then the love of the country, the dread of isolation, the lack of adventurous spirit, and the thought of seeming to desert their "brethren in bonds," are a powerful check upon all schemes of colonization which look to the removal of the colored people without the slaves. (Letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe)

This was how African Americans grew to see Native Americans who were, as Horace Greeley noted, "to the prosaic observer…a being who does little credit to human nature – a slave of appetite and sloth" (Goldfield 108). In *House Made of Dawn*, Tosamah explains the problems that Abel encounters but endorses the superiority of European civilization. Tosamah comes to the conclusion that assimilation is the only way for Native Americans to survive:

> 'You take that poor cat,' he said. 'They gave him every advantage. They gave him a pair of shoes and told him to go to school. They deloused him and gave him a lot of free haircuts and let him fight on their side. But was he grateful? Hell, no, man. He was too damn dumb to be civilized. So what happened? They let him alone at last. They thought he was harmless. They thought he was going to plant some beans, man, and live off the fat of the land. Oh, he was going to make his way, all right. He would get some fat little squaw all knocked up, and they would lie around all day and get drunk and raise a lot of little government wards. They would make some pottery, man, and boost the economy. But it didn't turn out that way. He turned out to be a real primitive sonuvabitch, and the first time he got

> hold of a knife he killed a man. That must have embarrassed the hell out of them. (131)

Here Tosamah bases Abel's humanity on the criteria of Anglo American civilization. His diatribe prompted Benally to conclude that Tosamah understood neither Abel nor the situation of the Native American on the reservation:

> I got to thinking about it, though, anyway, About *him* (Abel); about him being afraid of that man out there, so afraid he didn't know what to do. That, you know, being so scared of something like that – that's what Tosamah doesn't understand. He's educated, and he doesn't believe in being scared like that. But he doesn't come from the reservation. He doesn't know how it is when you grow up out there someplace. You grow up out there; you know, someplace like Kayenta or Lukachukai…Then you remember something that happened the week before, something that wasn't right. You heard an owl, maybe, or you saw a funny kind of whirlwind; somebody looked at you sideways and a moment too long. And then you know. You just *know*. Maybe your aunt or your grandmother was a witch...You just know, and you can't help being scared. (132-133)

To recap, while Harlem was becoming a thriving black metropolis, the reservation was antithetical to the Native American way of life. It would not be long, however, before both African Americans and Native Americans would feel the isolation and despondency of America's slums and escape would involve more than just migrating.

The Great Depression of 1929 severely impacted the American economy generally, but for the African American community, it was particularly debilitating. The cultural movement and creative intelligentsia spawned by the Harlem Renaissance existed until approximately 1940, but

the economic collapse that threatened its success commenced a decade earlier. As Gill asserts, "In February of 1930, four months after the stock market crash but well before the arrival of the national economic crisis, the *New York Herald Tribune* found that Harlem was 'the poorest, the unhealthiest, the unhappiest and the most crowded single large section of New York City'" (282). As African Americans continued their ascent into the Promised Land, overcrowding continued to surpass that of suburban bound whites. By 1940 over 250,000 Jews, Irish and Italians had made the exodus from the area, leaving central and lower Harlem almost 100 percent African American (Gill 283). As Claude Brown described, "There were too many people full of hate and bitterness crowded into a dirty, stinky, uncared-for closet-sized section of a great city" (viii).

In *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto,* Gilbert Osofsky maintains that opposition to the growing numbers of African Americans in Harlem caused consternation among many local associations of landlords. Many created restrictive agreements outlining their unwillingness to rent to blacks: "The premises, land, and buildings of which we…are the owners…shall not be used as a …Negro tenement, leased to colored…tenants, sold to colored…tenants…or all (other) persons of African descent" (106). So, read one such agreement. Another stated that the parties involved do " hereby covenant and agree (not) to…hereafter…cause to be suffered, either directly or indirectly, the said premises to be used or occupied in whole or in part by any negro, quadroon, or octoroon of either sex whatsoever" (106). It becomes quite obvious that the large numbers of African Americans in Harlem lacked economic leverage. As did the Hayes-Tilden Compromise, which effectively ended Reconstruction in the South, the unwillingness of landlords to rent to African Americans coupled with skyrocketing prices and increased crime neutralized any economic, political and cultural gains that African Americans may have enjoyed

in the early part of the twentieth century. With the elevated cost of living and the historic high rent in Harlem, newly arriving African Americans had few options, and according to Gilbert Osofsky:

> The most profound change that Harlem experienced in the 1920's was its emergence as a slum. Largely within the space of a single decade Harlem was transformed from a potentially ideal community to a neighborhood with manifold social and economic problems called 'deplorable,' 'unspeakable,' 'incredible.' 'The state would not allow cows to live in some of these apartments used by colored people…in Harlem,' the chairman of a city housing reform committee said in 1927. The Harlem slum of today was created in the 1920's. (135-136)

These conditions into which both African Americans and Native Americans were forced have created distressing experiences resulting in the long-term infliction of psychological trauma.

In dealing with trauma, psychologists and doctors such as Judith Herman point out that "traumatized people who cannot spontaneously dissociate may attempt to produce similar numbing effects by using alcohol or narcotics" (Herman 44). In fact, Herman reports that: "traumatized people run a high risk of compounding their difficulties by developing dependence on alcohol or other drugs" (44). The astronomically high poverty associated with slums and reservations limited the economic and political sensibilities of both communities, creating a level of trauma that African and Native Americans needed escape from. For African Americans in Harlem, slavery took on a new form; something akin to urban sharecropping. Blacks worked longer hours for much less pay. According to Gill:

> The average Harlemite made under $18 per sixty-six hour week, compared to whites, who were paid about $23 for a sixty-hour week for similar work during

> the early years of the Depression, according to the New York *Herald Tribune*: For women things were even more bleak, with domestic servants making $15 per week and laundresses making less than half of that, while whites in those position brought home nearly twice as much…In the early 1930's a quarter of all Harlemites were out of work. College graduates were unable to get work even as manual laborers, and after 1933, when Prohibition was repealed and the uptown entertainment industry began its long agonizing decline, overall unemployment reached 50 percent. (283)

Native Americans, on the other hand, were wards of the government. After 1871, the United States assumed total control of Native American life. Children were sent to missionary run boarding schools and given everything from food to clothes and discouraged from communicating with their families and in their indigenous languages so as to eliminate any tribal ties. In *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge Sources of Life*, Beck and Walters state: "Indians were now confined to reservations. They were to be fed, housed, clothed and protected until such time as Congress considered they were able to care for themselves; and a state of enforced welfare dependency ensued" (153). Thus we can clearly see the economic impact that Anglo America held over African and Native Americans and in *Manchild in the Promised* Land, Reno gives Sonny a lesson in economic disenfranchisement:

> I remember Reno used to say, 'Man, I'll never come out of jail owin' any time. They'll just have to keep me until I can walk away clean, not owin' nothin' to nobody, 'cause I don't want to go downtown. Goldberg is never gonna get over me with the whip.' This was the first time I'd ever heard 'Goldberg' used this

> way. I said, 'Who's Goldberg[7]?' 'You know. Mr. Jew. That's the cat who runs the garment center.' 'Oh, yeah.' But I didn't get the connection right away. 'Goldberg ain't gon ever get up off any money. Goldberg's just as bad as Mr. Charlie. He's got all the money in the world, Sonny…He owns the liquor store, he owns the bar, he owns the restaurant across there, the grocery there. He owns all the liquor stores in Harlem, 'cause that's where all the niggers' money goes, and he's gon get all that'. (294-295)

Reno's explanation shows that, like Native Americans, African Americans after the Harlem Renaissance had very little control over the resources of their community. They were forced to stay within the confines of Harlem or risk alienation and oppression if they searched for work in areas other than Harlem. The comparison between "Goldberg" and "Mr. Charley" implies a redirecting of bondage, making the poverty and racism of the ghetto that much more intolerable. Brown explains the anger that consumed African Americans upon the realization of what the promised-land actually was. According to Brown, America was not prepared for this manchild born out of anger and repression: "It wasn't just our parents and Goldberg who weren't ready for my generation. Our parents' coming to Harlem produced a generation of new niggers. Not only Goldberg and our parents didn't understand this new nigger, but this new nigger was something that nobody was ready for" (Brown 298). The lack of understanding or cultural competency on the part of Anglo Americans speaks directly to the need for cultural democracy if

[7] While "Goldberg" was slang for a person of Jewish descent, it must be pointed out that it was not just the Jewish community that departed Harlem when African Americans arrived en masse. Each wave of those once-poor that left Harlem retained ownership of the places where they had once resided. For African Americans in Harlem, Jews represented their economic oppressors controlling the resources of their community. In Watts, for example, Koreans were this representation.

non-white, hyphenated groups are to survive and flourish. It therefore becomes imperative that African Americans and Native Americans have the capacity to shape their own identities.

4.2 Telling Stories

The ability of Claude Brown and N. Scott Momaday to humanize their characters gives the reader insight into the African American and Native American cultures and helps to create dialogue that refutes cultural incompetency and assumptions of homogeneity. The prevailing stereotype derived from early European encounters with indigenous cultures viewed Native Americans as savage and uncivilized. Africans were viewed as animals or "black brutes" only suited for manual labor. After they were enslaved, African Americans were also seen as "oversexed" and prone to criminal tendencies. If you accept these theories derived from orientalist scholarship (which distorts based upon its own faulty assumptions), then it stands to reason that the actions of Sonny and Abel reflect their natures. In both *Manchild in the Promised Land* and *House Made of Dawn*, the protagonists are plunged into environments created by the Anglo American propensity to either segregate or detribalize. Whether putting them in such an environment was a conscious effort, as with reservations, or the result of the Anglo attempt to escape "the invasion" or the "black plague," ghettos and reservations were consistent with the Anglo American historical impression of African and Native Americans as savages lacking humanity. This is precisely the reason that James Baldwin thought that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a poorly constructed social protest novel. Where Stowe successfully created dialogue that engaged Americans in conversation regarding the institution of slavery, the limited humanity developed within her characters made their freedom from bondage a cause synonymous with current day campaigns to eliminate cruelty to animals. We should here note that this inability to empathize with the African American and Native American humanity makes it necessary not just to develop

dehumanizing environments for them, such as ghettos and reservations, but to keep them there with minimal opportunity for escape. This is a function of both colonization and capitalism not to mention religious indoctrination as economic and political sensibilities become stripped when one has been conditioned to accept their dire situation because of the promise of a glorious hereafter.

Claude Brown begins *Manchild in the Promised Land* with a vivid account of what life was like for a thirteen year old black male on the streets of Harlem. Sonny has just been shot and is lying on the floor of a local restaurant. As we discussed earlier, in order for a capitalist system to function properly, it must maintain the gap between wealth and poverty and remain authoritarian at its core. Sonny explains his experience of being shot and the influence that the police held over the situation:

> I could see Turk in the front of the crowd. Before the cops came, he asked me if I was going to tell them that he was with me. I never answered. I looked at him and wondered if he saw who shot me. Then his question began to ring in my head: 'Sonny you gonna tell 'em I was with you?' I was bleeding on a dirty floor in a fish-and-chips joint, and Turk was standing there in the doorway hoping that I would die before I could tell the cops that he was with me. Not once did Turk ask me how I felt. (10**)**

Neither Sonny nor Turk had seen the shooter and neither was guilty of any kind of infraction, but Turk's fear of the authoritarian system makes him more concerned with the police and his association with the victim than with whether or not Sonny lives or dies. Because of the political nature of ghettos, slums and reservations, the inhabitants are similar to captives; unable to escape while being held hostage by various factors. One of these factors is fear, which we earlier

examined in Abel. Judith Herman explains this concept from the perspective of the victim in *Trauma and Recovery*: “Fear is also increased by inconsistent and unpredictable outbursts of violence and by capricious enforcement of petty rules” (77). Sonny explains how this fear gripped those who migrated from the South and how it influenced their expectations:

> Their lives were lived according to the superstitions and fears that they had been taught when they were children coming up on the Carolina cotton fields. It was all right for them down there, in that time, in that place, but it wasn’t worth a damn up on New York. I could understand why Mama couldn’t understand Pimp and his troubles, because Mama had only gone through the fifth grade. Dad had only gone through the fourth grade. How could they understand Pimp when they couldn’t even read his textbooks? Mama and Dad and the people who had come to New York from the South about the time they did seemed to think it was wrong to want anything more out of life than some liquor and a good piece of cunt on Saturday night. This was the stuff they did in the South. This was the sort of life they had lived on the plantations. They were trying to bring the down-home life up to Harlem. They had done it. But it just wasn’t working. They couldn’t understand it, and they weren’t about to understand it. Liquor, religion, sex, and violence – this was all that life had been about to them. (291)

Here Sonny shows us how difficult a transition it must have been for those northbound migrants. They came as newly freed slaves or as one generation removed from slavery. They came as sharecroppers, but most came with little or no formal education. The successive generations in urban society had to adjust to a totally new way of life; with new expectations in an overcrowded, overbearing oppressive system. Again, the world was not ready for this “new

nigger". Yet this was the world into which Sonny was thrust and one that he spent his entire life trying to escape.

The transition for Native Americans was similarly difficult. American citizenship and the allotment of land destroyed the cultural continuity of Native Americans: "Once allotments destroyed the tribal communalism in government and land and forced Indians to cope with life as individuals like all other Americans, then they were considered ready to receive the boon of citizenship" (Berkhofer 177). Full citizenship, granted by Congress in 1924, merely extended legal power by the government over Native Americans and through time, just as with African Americans, Native Americans were divided either by the complexities of assimilation into American life or isolation within traditional indigenous culture. We have examined this in Tosamah's depictions of Abel as uncivilized and ungracious toward the benefits of the white man's world. Abel, however, was gripped with a fear that left him incapacitated. After being released from prison, he finds his world shaped by an episode of police brutality:

> 'Who's your friend Benally?' And he stepped in front of him and held the light up to his face. I told him his name and said he was out of work; he was looking for a job and didn't have any money. Martinez told him to hold out his hands, and he did, slowly, like maybe he wasn't going to at first, with the palms up. I could see his hands in the light and they were open and almost steady. 'Turn them over,' Martinez said, and he was looking at them and they were almost steady. Then suddenly the light jumped and he brought the stick down hard and fast. I couldn't see it, but I heard it crack on the bones of the hands, and it made me sick. (Momaday 153)

The police officer, Martinez, had broken more than Abel's hands:

> He couldn't forget about it…He didn't say anything – and even when it happened he didn't say anything; he just doubled over down there against the wall and held his hands but he couldn't forget about it. He would sit around, looking down all the time at his hands. Sometimes I would say something, and it was like he didn't hear me, like he had something bad on his mind…And even when he got drunk it was different somehow. He used to get drunk and happy, and we would laugh and kid around a lot, but after that night it was different. (154)

The breaking of Abel's spirit serves as a paradigm for the Native American community and everything that they have endured since their original contact with Europeans. The abject poverty experienced on the reservation is an enormous factor when considering the Native American substance abuse rate, which is higher than the national average. Detribalization and forced assimilation into Anglo American culture have had wide-spread detrimental effects upon the Native American people.

For the African Americans who migrated north, escapism became synonymous with alcohol, violence and sex. Sonny explained how alcohol became a religion to his father:

> Even though Dad didn't care for preachers and churches, he had a lot of religion in his own way. Most of the time, his religion didn't show. But on Saturday night, those who didn't see it heard it. Sometimes Dad would get religious on Friday nights too. But Saturday night was a must. Because it always took liquor to start Dad to singing spirituals and talking about the Lord, I thought for years that this lordly feeling was something in a bottle of whiskey. To me, it was like caster (sic) oil or black draught. You drink it and the next thing you know, you're doing things. (Brown 28)

Alcohol became a way of life for Sonny as well. He was introduced to "King Kong" at an early age: 'Mama said, "Ain't no six-year-old child got no business drinking that King Kong.' Dad said, 'I was drinking it when I was five, and I'm still here working hard and steady five and six days a week" (29). Alcohol was a way to cope in hard times. For Sonny, "whiskey was one of my best friends."

Abel's dependence upon alcohol, meanwhile, severely impacted his ability to make astute decisions. Our first introduction to Abel shows us the severity of his dependence. As Francisco, Abel's grandfather, picks him up from the bus station Francisco is overwhelmed with grief when he sees how Abel's spirit had been broken:

> He heard the sharp wheeze of the brakes as the big bus rolled to a stop in front of the gas pump, and only then did he give attention to it, as if it had taken him by surprise. The door swung open and Abel stepped heavily to the ground and reeled. He was drunk, and he fell against his grandfather and did not know him…Francisco's crippled leg nearly gave way. His good straw hat fell off and he braced himself against the weight of his grandson. Tears came to his eyes, and he knew only that he must laugh and turn away from the faces in the windows of the bus. (Momaday 8)

The reader soon learns that Abel is returning from a foreign war. While Abel may suffer from some sort of posttraumatic stress disorder, reconnecting to Native American life is difficult for him. He has resided within two worlds and cannot connect to either. On a rainy night in August, one in which the "wine rose up in his blood," Abel murders an albino. He refers to him simply as the "white man." Incidentally, this same albino had defeated Abel in a ceremony at the Feast of Santiago. This moment showed Abel how disconnected he had become from his culture and how

a “white man” could easily shape the traditions of native culture. While the albino was not actually a white man, per se, it was the embodiment of whiteness that affected Abel. After serving a prison term for murder and being a victim of police brutality, Abel became even more despondent:

> He went downhill pretty fast after that. Sometimes he was here when I came in from work, and sometimes he wasn’t. He was drunk about half the time, and I couldn’t keep up with him. I tried to get him to slow down, you know, but he just got mad whenever I said anything about it, and it made him worse. Right away his money ran out, and he started hitting me up for a loan every night, almost…And he would just blow it in on liquor right away…The Relocation people got him a job with the schools, taking care of the grounds and all, but he showed up drunk a couple of times and they fired him after the first week and a half…You know, if he could just have held on the first time, to that first job down there on my line, he might have been all right…I could kind of keep an eye on him down there, you know, look out for him, and that was good. I guess he needed somebody to look out for him. Nobody but Milly and me gave a damn what happened to him. (Momaday 142-143)

Here Momaday shows us the relationship between poverty and substance abuse. Social indicators such as housing, income, and poverty must be taken into account when assessing substance abuse. Claude Brown likewise explains how it affected African American urban life:

> It was still something unusual back then. In some cases, the lack of money had already killed most family life. Miss Jamie and her family, the Willards, were always up tight for money because she spent the food money for playing the

> numbers and stuff like that. This was the sort of family that had never had any family life to speak of. But now, since drugs demanded so much money and since drugs had afflicted just about every family with young people in it, this desire for money was wrecking almost all family life. (189)

Here Brown explains how the influx of more powerful drugs in the inner city, those with a greater high offering a greater chance of "escape," increased crime. A need for more money to finance "habits" further disenfranchised those living in such an environment. It is important to point out that "numbers was like a community institution. Everybody accepted it and respected it. This was the way that the people got to the money" (191). For a community deficient in economic resources, numbers running served as a low risk-low reward way of financing dreams in the Promised Land. But as Sonny noted, "It seemed like drugs were coming in so strong with the younger generation that it was almost overshadowing numbers" **(**191). This devastation of the community was not lost on Sonny: "Harlem was a community that couldn't afford the pressure of this thing, because there weren't many strong family ties anyway. There might have been a few, but they were so few, they were almost insignificant" (190).

Clearly we can see how the migration of African American and Native American peoples has assisted in disconnecting them from their traditions. As of yet, the promised lands sought have not yielded what was originally anticipated. That is not to say that both communities have conceded their culture without a struggle. The importance of retaining their culture has not been lost upon African Americans and Native Americans. As Lawrence Levine proclaimed in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*: "Culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and present. Its toughness and resiliency are determined by a culture's ability to withstand change, which indeed may be a sign of stagnation not life, but by its

ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation" (5). The ever-changing landscape of the American capitalist system and the creative responses of the African American and Native American communities will be examined in the next chapter as we move our focus towards a twenty-first century cultural democracy. But for now, let us realize that the importance of these works by Claude Brown and N. Scott Momaday's cannot be overstated, particularly when examined within a society that assumes uniformity in the behavioral patterns of those who comprise non-white hyphenated groups. The paucity of cultural competency on the part of Anglo Americans can only be countered through the words and works of those who are oppressed. As Paulo Freire states in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (Freire 49). Indeed, the oppressed must work to free themselves, and works such as *Manchild in the Promised Land* and *House Made of Dawn* reflect the impact that culture has on economic and political democracy.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

> Was this really a bona fide artistic movement or was it simply a fortuitous gathering of individual talent with little more in common than the color of their skin and the neighborhood in which they were more or less forced to live for a time? (Gill 281)
>
> --Jonathan Gill

The above question by Jonathan Gill regarding the Harlem Renaissance is an excellent complement to the question posed by James Bau Graves in the Introduction: What does your community need to keep its culture vital and meaningful? This thesis has shown how the cultural loss of both African Americans and Native Americans has impacted their economic and political progress in America. A lack of cultural democracy forces people to accept a theology that denies their culture's existence and causes them to accept that they may be sub-human. Native American culture loss was predicated upon the seizure of their land and was maintained through the religious zeal of Anglo Europeans who could not fathom the thought that Native Americans had a thriving culture. Beck and Walters' quote of Luther Standing Bear is apropos: "The White Man excused his presence here by saying that he had been guided by the will of his God; and in so saying absolved himself of all responsibility for his appearance in a land occupied by other men" (145). Native American cultural identity's inextricable link to land became even more apparent as they were cast onto reservations and forced into accepting a culture contrary to their cosmogony. European religion encouraged individualism over the group and as Silko proclaimed, "Christianity separated the people from themselves" (68). This idea of the Native American as "an individualistic American" coincided with and thus accelerated a developing capitalist system.

While the physical and mental annihilation of the Native American was thorough, as this thesis has shown, it was by no means complete. Indigenous cultures have continued to resist. Native Americans have never fully abandoned their culture and as Beck and Walters point out: "The People resisted attempts to change their ways of life and their ways of sacred worship. Politically, tribal communities had a more difficult time resisting than they did silently, inwardly, and with their spirit and prayers. Throughout the ordeals of two centuries, some people remained certain of the strength in their traditional sacred values" (165). Momaday likewise revealed how the Tanoan people were influenced by Christianity but still prayed to the old deities of the earth. In *House Made of Dawn*, Tosamah explained the ways of his grandmother: "My grandmother had a reverence for the sun, a certain holy regard which now is all but gone out of mankind. There was a wariness in her, and an ancient awe. She was a Christian in her later years, but she had come a long way about, and she never forgot her birthright" (116). That Native Americans did not fully relinquish their culture was a blow to the American governments' economic development plan because, as Duane Champagne acknowledged in *Social Change and Cultural Continuity Among Native Nations*, there was a "general absence of individual capitalist entrepreneurs on Indian reservations" (56). This, in a sense, defeated the purpose of the reservation where many businesses are run by non-Native Americans. For most "Native reservation communities do not support individual capitalist activity, accumulation of wealth, and a central life focus on production and market enterprise" (56). While this has proven a factor in maintaining poverty on the reservation, it does present the possibility for tribal governments to protect and preserve the political sovereignty of the Native community.

Since African Americans were brought thousands of miles from their homeland to labor for Anglo American capitalist ventures, their experience necessarily differs from that of Native

Americans. But both share status as an oppressed conglomerate subject to the will of a dominant white social group. African Americans were integrated into the American system and developed their own identity out of a separate and unequal existence. They have also fought to retain their culture as they strive for economic and political progress in America. As with Native Americans' spirituality, African Americans carried their religion with them through the Great Migration. Karenga thus points out that: "the essence of a people's religion is rooted in its own social and historical experiences and in the truth and meaning they extract from these and translate into an authentic spiritual expression which speaks specifically to them" (212). Because African Americans' belief system developed from Judeo-Christianity, it is sometimes seen as "white religion in black face" however, this constitutes a misinterpretation because despite its Anglo American exterior it remains rooted in the black experience, one that encompasses both submission and protest. Its foundations include both the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon and the secret meetings early slaves held to discuss escape, rebellion and how to maintain African culture. Thus the spirit of protest never died. Even in the extreme poverty of Harlem, Sonny was introduced to black social protest through a conversation with his friend Billy:

> I said to Billy, 'Come on in this bar and I'll buy you a drink.'…'Yeah man. I don't need alcohol; I don't need drugs; I don't need anything any more. When I came out of Kentucky about a year ago, I didn't know what I was going to do, Sonny. I didn't know if I was going to go back on drugs, start drinking wine, or what. But I found out that I didn't need anything but this.' He took something out of his shirt. It looked like a little metal triangle on a chain. He said, 'Do you know

> what this is?'…'This is the symbol of the Holy Land and a symbol of our religion.' (237)

Here we see that Billy has given up alcohol and drugs. As we discussed earlier, substance abuse is a characteristic of poverty and Silko points out in *Ceremony* how for Native Americans, "liquor was medicine for the anger that made them hurt, for the pain of the loss, medicine for tight bellies and choked-up throats" (40). This same pain reverberated throughout the African American community and for Billy to realize the association between substance abuse and his personal experience with poverty shows how important cultural democracy is for progression. Nowhere is this more evident than in New York where the Harlem Renaissance was arguably the epitome of economic, political and cultural progression for blacks in America.

As New York City became the cultural capital of Anglo America, Harlem became the cultural capital for African Americans. In this regard Cruse states: "Southern Negro migrations, war economics, etc., made Harlem a new Promised Land for the black worker and former "peasant" from both the South and the West Indies. But Harlem also fostered something else…a cultural movement and a creative intelligentsia" (Cruse 22). The Harlem Renaissance was significant because this creative intelligentsia effectively developed black economic and political sensibilities around cultural democracy. The publication of poetry, books and novels, as well as the production of plays and other theatrical works, coincided with strong political and economic messages from W.E.B. Dubois, Noble Drew Ali and the Moorish Science Temple, and Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Sadly, the Great Depression exposed the cultural weakness of the Harlem Renaissance and, ultimately nullified the economic and political gains. According to Cruse, the African American intellectual of this time period had not developed a cultural philosophy and therefore was unable to "grasp the radical potential of

their own movement." The Harlem Renaissance ran parallel to a "white American cultural resurgence" (22) and was funded by such white patrons as Mabel Dodge and Carl Van Vechten. For Cruse, the greatest flaw of the Harlem Renaissance was that while it developed African-American music, theater, arts and politics, it embraced an imported Russian Communism that placed more emphasis on artists' capacity to grasp its ideology than to understand and embrace their own culture. Moreover, "The black bourgeoisie was unprepared and unconditioned to play any leading sponsorship role in the Harlem Renaissance – this class was and still is culturally imitative and unimaginative" (26). While the African American community has enjoyed a number of successes after the Harlem Renaissance, most have involved integration and few have matched its economic, political and cultural magnitude.

5.1 Towards a Twenty-First Century Cultural Democracy

The "happily-ever-after" conclusion of both *Manchild in the Promised Land* and *House Made of Dawn* finds that both Sonny and Abel escaped. They "made it." They were able to lift themselves up from poverty, substance abuse, racism and horrendous environments to which so many before and after them succumbed. This is the stuff of social protest novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that leave the reader feeling as if some moral wrong were corrected. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that this is the "moral" either Brown or Momaday intended. The larger question remains, "To what did Sonny and Abel escape?" Neither will gain individual freedom within the context of a flourishing cultural collective. But both have been fortunate enough to realize that their individual humanity is simply the necessary first step in the building of a fair, equitable and transparent civic society.

House Made of Dawn ends with Abel reflecting on his past and what that means for his future: "There was a moment in which he knew he could not go on" (182). For as long as he

could remember, Abel had existed within two worlds. Only at this point does he recognize that he must make a conscious effort to live in one world and embrace his traditional past. At last the house of the sun or the house made of dawn made sense to him. As his grandfather had always tried to teach him and his brother:

> They must learn the whole contour of the black mesa. They must know it as they knew the shape of their hands, always and by heart…They must know the long journey of the sun on the black mesa, how it rode in the seasons and the years and they must live according to the sun appearing, for only then could they reckon where they were, where all things were, in time. (173)

Abel then recognizes the significance of the "race of the dead" as he takes his place alongside the Dawn Runners: "He was running and there was no reason to run but the running itself and the land and the dawn appearing" (185). The running symbolized the Native American culture: always moving and in direct contrast to European colonizers who tried to reduce it to stasis on the reservation. But though Abel escaped from the prions of identity-erasure, this need for perpetual motion only underscores the absence of culture that flourishes free from restrictions and dominant ideologies.

From the onset of *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Sonny directly and poignantly inquires of the reader, "For where does one run to when he's already in the promised-land?" Unlike the Native American, the African American yearns to be still. The subordinated class status that African Americans had inherited meant that their journey was to stop once they reached the "promised-land." Native Americans, on the other hand, were more inclined to roam. The confined boundaries of reservation life disconnected them from themselves. According to Frederick Douglass, "This black man – unlike the Indian – loves civilization." Sonny's flight

from Harlem is bittersweet because, again quoting Douglass, "individuals emigrate – nations never." In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, George Harris and his family never return to America from Liberia. Sonny's family and friends still exist within the confines of the ghetto so he is never truly far away: "There are so many things about Harlem that have changed, and they don't seem possible for Harlem. I suppose no one who has ever lived in a Harlem of the world could ever imagine that it could change so drastically and yet maintain so much of its old misery" (415). As we saw earlier with Abel, an introspective Sonny recognizes that many of his youthful decisions were based on fear:

> When I moved up on Hamilton Terrace, I suppose I still had my fears, but it was something. It was a move away from fear, toward challenges, toward the positive anger that I think every young man should have. All the time before, I thought I was angry. I guess I was, but the anger was stifled. It was an impotent anger because it was stifled by fear. I was more afraid than I was angry (427).

Sonny's escape was predicated upon an innate need to find challenges that would constantly push and motivate him to greater heights, and hopefully this would inspire those around him. Although he was able to leave Harlem, Claude Brown never escaped. He became a professional lecturer involved in the criminal justice system and its impact on primarily African American males. The majority of his work, including his second book, *Children of Ham*, focused on Harlem and the conditions of poverty, substance abuse and crime.

If the 1920's saw the making of Harlem, the slum, then the 1950's saw the beginnings of the Anglo American return to a gentrified Harlem. Thus after returning to Harlem four years later, Sonny realized: "It seemed as though most of the old tenements have gone. I can hardly recognize Lenox Avenue any more. A whole section of Lenox Avenue where there used to be a

lot of drug dens - from 132nd Street to 135th Street – is gone. Now they've got big apartment houses. Only now does it seem to be becoming more of everybody's Harlem" (421). Recognizing once again that Harlem held prime real estate, Anglo Americans had begun to repurchase property, earlier abandoned due to the "invasion" and "black plague", and have today brought Harold Cruse' words to fruition: "The Indian world of the reservation exemplifies the fate awaiting the American Negro, who is left stranded and impoverished in the ghettoes, beyond the fringe of absorption." The lack of economic and political control that Native Americans possess on the reservations is indicative of "everybody's Harlem" where gentrification and corporate entities have pushed out small black businesses and the Anglo American few control the economic resources of the African American many, who for the most part, are still mired in high levels of poverty. What communities such as Harlem and the Native American reservation need to remain vital is the capacity to control their cultural resources so that they may also control their economic and political resources. Thus, we must work toward that cultural democracy which will encourage the process and empower its results.

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