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**Loss of Identity: Slavery and Land-Stealing. An Approach to African  
American and Native American Literature**

oskîsik  
kohkominaw tipiskâwi-pîsim  
nisitohtam  
mitêh pakosêyitamowin  
kikiskisomik  
ita kê-tipêyihâtakosiyân  
êkwa kapê  
ta-wîcêwisk

(The eye of  
Grandmother Moon  
So attuned  
To the heart's longing  
Reminding  
Of inherent belonging  
And how  
She'll always see you through.)

Heather Clear Wind. *Eye of Grandmother Moon*

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**Abstract:**

To build one self's identity is not certainly an effortless process. It is greatly shaped by our interaction with both our every-day life, i.e. how we tackle the issues which arise from it, and the people who surround such reality (Davis and Gandy 369). This could confirm the idea that identity is a key feature which all humans possess. Moreover, it is proved that identity results vital as well amongst communities which have been oppressed for long, such as Native Americans (Wexler 267) and African Americans (Loyd and Williams 30). Building up on this thread, the reality that these two communities have had to endure has made the process of creating said identity more demanding and challenging. Not only this, but also that their existent identity started to gradually vanish. In the United States, for a few centuries, African Americans were used as slaves and Native American lands were stolen. These two historical events were effected by colonizing forces, always subject to the white man. The way in which those two communities could reflect said reality was partly thanks to literature. This is the reason why I treat literature as a mirror of history in my research. In this work, it is my aim to establish the connection between slavery and land-stealing and their effect on the identity of both African American and Native American communities. The sources that I will utilize are literary texts written by individuals who belong to these two communities: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, *Speech at Lancaster*, and *Life of Black Hawk*. The first two narratives demonstrate how slavery was an act which caused enslaved African Americans to feel that their identity was disappearing. Moreover, the female point of view present in the second narrative gives us hints of how a double oppression regarding gender and race functions. The last two are written by Native Americans who also exhibited the negative effect of land-stealing on their identity. Thus, I argue that owing to these two historical processes the identity of these people was indeed put at risk and almost disappeared for a long time.

**Key words:** Loss of Identity, Literature, Slavery, Land-Stealing, The White Man.

## 1. Introduction: Literature and Its Connection with Human's Past History. An Approach to the Aim of My Analysis

Even though it may sound redundant, it tends to be believed that history is the only field which accurately reflects the history of the human race. We can always hear the sentence *We need to learn from history not to make the same mistakes* every time a war, amongst others, arises. Not long time ago Russia against Ukraine, as an example. Another instance would be when the USA Supreme Court banned abortion. Various Prime Ministers the world over described it as a step backwards (Farrer), using it as a reference to going back in history. And it is true. History not only provides us with vital information so as to discover what has happened before us, but it also makes us realize and makes it clearer that we should not be falling in the trap of erring in the same events.

This notwithstanding, history is not the only subject which echoes past history. Literature could be considered another one (Gil-Curiel 258; Patrick et al. 25). The literature that has been written in a specific country, in a particular time, and in a particular occurrence is in every sense shaped by what is occurring in said area at that specific time (Patrick et al. 25). Along with this, it is because literature focuses on people's past and experiences that it preserves its importance, as Patrick and colleagues argue (26). My work will try to illustrate this.

Back to the main idea, therefore, literature should be regarded as a mirror of history. Some are the cases which demonstrate it. After America was *found*<sup>1</sup> in 1492, abounding were the literary texts which talked about the finding of the new land for a long period of time. Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca is an instance of this. His works concentrated on describing the first encounters that occurred with the Native inhabitants so that the European reader could imagine how the new territory looked like, as *Our Life among the Avavares and Arbadaos* (Cabeza de Vaca). Moreover, some others were interested in writing on Indigenous<sup>2</sup> tribe's languages, such as Roger Williams with his *A Key into the Language of America* (Williams). These two authors did not belong to the same period, what indicates the existent interest in the *New World* that dominated throughout different centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> Found appears in italics as there is evidence of Viking voyages to the Americas in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Ebenesersdóttir et al.).

<sup>2</sup> In this study I interchangeably use the terms Indigenous, Natives, and Native Americans.

When the term Social Darwinism was first coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Herbert Spencer, the scenario was the same. During the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the literary movement Naturalism was greatly shaped by said scientific belief, and the books written by all Naturalist writers had the notion of Social Darwinism at their core (Bruni 3). Arthur E. Jones Jr. also addressed the vitality of Social Darwinism in the Naturalist movement, stating that its influence was unquestionable (qtd. in Bruni 15). *Ethan Frome*, written by Edith Wharton, is a representation of what I have just mentioned. The main character, Ethan, is incapable to accommodate in his environment. This leads him to being in a constant conflict between his community and him. I should not forget to mention that determinism, a main point of Social Darwinism, also plays a decisive role in this novel (Rio).

Alongside the former historical events, African American slavery and land-stealing<sup>3</sup> to Native American People have also been part of human history. I will take these two events as the object-to-study for the essay. The two have been closely related to each other and to the country that I chose as a focus, for their development started around the same time: as soon as the United States of America began to be looted by the white man<sup>4</sup>, around the 17<sup>th</sup> century (“Slavery in America”). Not only did the white man treat the African American population in a deplorable way, but he behaved likewise with the people who were already inhabiting said New World: the Indigenous. Although Native Americans became partly enslaved, too, (Collins 18; Seaman 2), one of the major actions that the white man could do against them was to steal their lands, as Dua and Lawrence explain (123). It ought not to be forgotten that the sense of being a nation of the Native Americans was based and built upon the notion of land (Dua and Lawrence 123-124). This historical events were reflected in literature, just like the ones mentioned previously.

Taking everything into consideration, therefore, it is the aim of this essay to analyze how the historical events related to African American slavery and the stealing that the white

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<sup>3</sup> Even though there may be some other ways of naming it, I find the phrase *land-stealing* the most accurate one to describe the process that the white man carried against the Natives when stealing their lands. It is, however, challenging to set the starting and ending point of this whole process. As a way of setting some dates, between 1776 and the present day it is estimated that more than one billion acres of land were stolen (Haselby)

<sup>4</sup> I have deliberately chosen the term *the white man* because it is a phrase which not only appears in the texts that I am going to be taking into study, and moreover in both African and Native American literature (Douglass; Jacobs; Black Hawk), but it is also a highly used terminology when having a look at texts written by the Native American community (“The Treaty of Lancaster”; Riel; Pontiac; “The Memorial to Sir Wilfrid Laurier”).

man did to the lands of the Native Americans were reflected in their literature. Furthermore, the essay will also explore how these historical circumstances led to the gradual loss of identity within these groups in the mentioned framework. There will be two writers per each group. Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass are the African American authors selected, analyzing former's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and latter's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. When it comes to the Indigenous authors, Canassatego and Black Hawk<sup>5</sup> are the authors that I have chosen. Former's *Speech at Lancaster* and latter's *Life of Black Hawk* will be studied.

With regards to the structure of the essay, I will do it in two halves. The first half will be devoted to African American literature. Here, I will be doing a brief introduction setting a context so as to better understand what will be explained and analyzed in the following lines. Later, each author will be taken into focus and the evidence taken from their readings will be linked to my main hypothesis: that their identities were gradually disappearing because of slavery. The second half, on the other hand, will be utilized for the exploration of Native American literature. Just like in the first half, there will be a brief introductory section to set the context. After it, in the following sections the two authors will be analyzed. At the end of the essay, there will be a concluding section in which I examine everything that has been said throughout this text.

The present study has been motivated because of two reasons. The first one to note the various mistreatments that the white man has done over other races based upon racist, xenophobic, and colonialist beliefs. Secondly, to acknowledge the job of these non-white authors, as they risked themselves to produce this literature, even though they knew what the final result of writing these narratives could be.

This being a work of literature research that falls within the field of Anglo-American Studies, I have decided to use the reference style used in MLA's 9<sup>th</sup> edition.

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<sup>5</sup> Though the original name of Black Hawk was Ma-Ka-Tai-Me-She-Kia-Kiak, I have decided to refer to him as Black Hawk for reading and fluency purposes throughout the text. Both names appear in his literary text that I will analyze, so I assume that he was called both ways interchangeably.

## 2. African American Literature: Slavery as a Repressing Tool for the African American Community

### 2.1. Brief Introduction: Contextualization

That African American people were enslaved for centuries ought not to be argued<sup>6</sup>. Alongside slavery, there have been some other ways of oppression which are also present even nowadays. As Lozada et al. discuss, the fact that we still regard African American people as fiery, perilous, and angry all the time invites a statement such as the one made before: that said oppression still exists (13). This notwithstanding, the situation that African American people lived one hundred years ago and the one in which they live nowadays has greatly changed. Among many other factors, the Civil Rights Movement is the most crucial. Thanks to it, during the 1960s, the African American community was benefited with basic rights of which they had been deprived before (“Causes and Effects of the American Civil Rights Movement”). Nevertheless, as some studies up to now display, more efforts need to be done to end racial inequality (“On Views of Race and Inequality”).

Following the aim of this work, I will analyze the aforementioned oppression and how it was displayed in literature by African American writers. Along with this, I will link the oppression that they suffered to the loss of identity that they also had to endure. In a more general level, the whole African American community suffered that loss of identity. However, here, I will focus on two African American authors: Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass.

Before delving any further, another aspect with regards to one of the authors should be remarked. The fact that one of them is a woman, Harriet Jacobs, can be regarded as some convenient information. It shows how a *double oppression* works. This is, what it meant to not only be an African American person but to also be a woman, and vice versa. What I have just mentioned could be considered as a minority within a minority. Douglass, on

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<sup>6</sup> Its historical, social and cultural transcendence was and still is so big that defining slavery in the United States can be taken for granted. Nonetheless, I find it responsible to specify that when I talk about slavery here I refer to the legal institution that permitted the enslavement of primarily Africans and African Americans in the United States. This process happened between 1776 and 1865, with the end of the American Civil War and two years after the emancipation proclamation of 1863.



the other hand, was not affected by this phenomenon. Said double oppression, moreover, indeed shapes how the story is narrated as I will demonstrate some lines later.

## 2.2. Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass is the first African American author to study. He wrote *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (Douglass) in 1845. The time of the publication also coincides with the passing of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment that took place some years later, and which put an end to slavery. Therefore, the public and social discussion about finishing with slavery was a recurrent issue before the passing of such law. The fact that this book was published is a signal of that.

I will now proceed to address again the main thesis in this work: how identity was vanished among the African Americans because of slavery. The white man possessed many tools to carry said action. Age was one of them. Slavery may be thought to be an action that was only directed to adult people: the youngest population, because they are still in a developmental phase were not enslaved, we may think. In the slave trade that happened in the United States of America, this was not the case. Already since they were born, children were made aware of their racial condition and how their race was going to shape their lives. They suffered the appalling consequences of being enslaved from the very first day. Douglass tells the reader in his narrative: “My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant- before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom ... to part children from their mothers at a very early age” (Douglass 1171). These words display one of the many outcomes of what being African American meant during the slavery period in the United States.

As well as being separated at birth, African American mothers were taken to another farm to be sold after giving birth. Douglass explains: “[I]ts mother is taken from [the child] and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off” (Douglass 1171). Along with this, Douglass also writes: “I have no accurate knowledge of my age... By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs” (1171). All of the aforementioned instances undoubtedly played a role in eliminating the notion of identity amongst the youngest African Americans. Since their very first days, they did not have the chance to meet one of their parents, and they had no knowledge of their age. This not only led them to living in a constant mental anguish but it also made them realize, little

by little, of the reality that they had to live. As Douglass explains, “[T]his separation is done ... to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child” (1171).

As I have explained before, children and slave mothers were always separated at birth. However, it needs to be remarked that Douglass, as he himself explains in his autobiography, had the chance to meet her a few times. This notwithstanding, it was a mere chance nature, for: “She was hired ... about twelve miles from my home” (Douglass 1171-1172). For these meetings to occur, the mother had to visit him at night by walking from where she was working: “She made her journeys to see me in the night” (1172). In his book, it might be concluded that every time Douglass and her mother had the opportunity to see each other, it became an occasion in which both could share their emotions and turn it into a profitable occasion. But this was not the case. As Douglass states in his work, there was a lack of communication between the two of them: “Very little communication ever took place between us” (1172). He goes on to conclude that all they did was lie down together, and she “g[o]t [him] to sleep” (1172).

What I have just explained, however, should not come as a surprise. Enslaved African Americans were hardly ever allowed to say a word at any given circumstance when being in their slave owner’s surroundings, so gradually they started to learn that being silent was the best option. There is an instance of the aforementioned example in Douglass’s text, when he says: “To all these complaints, no matter how unjust, the slave must never answer a word” (Douglass 1178). Furthermore, every time they spoke their mind on how their owners were treating them, the punishment was none other than getting handcuffed and chained, as he explains on page 1179: “This is the penalty of telling the truth”. From the reading I also conclude that the white man’s strategic design to keep African American population silent, without a voice, contributed to their gradual loss of identity.

The specific situation in which the youngest African Americans had to live was already a sign of the little mercy that the white man showed towards them. Taking this fact into consideration, therefore, it ought not to be difficult to imagine how the older people were treated. One of the events, among many others, that the adult African Americans were made to endure was their deprivation of free time<sup>7</sup>. After their working time, they headed home. Here, it could be supposed that they used that little time to rest. Nonetheless, many of them had some chores to do and, along with it, they had to get ready for the following

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<sup>7</sup> Free time refers to the time that they did not spend working.

day. It is also remarkable how they were not even provided with the facilities needed so as to carry such activities, hence their taking more time. Douglass tells the reader:

When their day's work in the field is done, the most of them having their washing, mending, and cooking to do, and having few or none of the ordinary facilities for doing either of these, very many of their sleeping hours are consumed in preparing for the field the coming day. (Douglass 1175)

The aforementioned situation helps me to conclude that slaves' lives were lives destined to restless labor and fatigue. This idea seems to be reinforced after reading the following: "From the rising till the going down of the sun, [Mr. Severe] was cursing, raving, cutting, and slashing among the slaves of the field" (Douglass 1176). Mr. Severe was the slave owner of the farm in which Douglass was raised and that consequently he uses as a setting to narrate his story. Back to my main thesis, the previous lines indeed illustrate the burden that African Americans had to bear every day and all day long. Even while they were working, their owner had the right to molest them by causing cuts, for instance, on them. The situation was the same even if it was during their resting time. As I commented before, the only thing that they could do against this situation was to persist, resist, and remain silent. All the aforementioned instances reinforce my thesis statement. To deprive a community, in this case African Americans, of its free time and cause their lives to become frenetic played a vital role in that their notions of self, which started to vanish.

Another major cause for the identity of African American slaves to perish was that they were never regarded as human beings with their feelings and emotions. Instead, they were considered numbers. They were objectified and conferred one specific function: work for the white man. This notion is displayed in Douglass' work, in instances such as "He owned ... about thirty slaves" (Douglass 1173); or in "[He] kept from three to four hundred slaves" (1174); or "He was said to own a thousand slaves" (1179).

### 2.3. Harriet Jacobs

When discussing Harriet Jacobs and her work *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, I will be focusing on two main aspects. First of all, I study how the identity of African American population was trying to be vanished by the white man, just like I have analyzed this same topic in Douglass' text. Secondly, and this is what differs from Douglass, I also analyze what it meant to be both an African American and also a woman. This is, in Harriet Jacobs I observe the consequences of belonging to two minorities at the same time: one related

to her race and the other related to her gender. Jacobs was aware of this issue, as I will demonstrate.

Just like with Douglass, many elements throughout the text take me to consider that identity was being consciously removed from African American population. The first one is that the lives of slaves were always subject to two aspects: being bought and being sold. Their lives were worth nothing, and rather than being considered humans, they were nothing but mere objects on the eyes of white men. In the work, instances that reveal these circumstances are abundant: “She was a little girl when she was captured and sold to the keeper of a large hotel” (Jacobs 911); or “My lover wanted to buy me” (913); or “[T]rusting in time to be able to purchase some of her children” (911). This last textual reference is an example that exhibits how slavery also worked within the family.

In Douglass’ work, I explained how African American children were separated from their families, especially mothers, after being born. This last example not only reinforces the veracity of the fact that children were separated, but it also reveals what happened after said separation. As the text clearly discloses, families tried to buy their own children. This was the case in Jacobs’ family. Jacobs explains the reader the following: “[My father’s] strongest wish was to purchase his children... but, ... he never succeeded” (911). All what I have just mentioned, again, reflects the hideous reality that the African American community had to endure throughout their lives. Moreover, it was sometimes the case that slave children would also be separated even if they have been living with one of their relatives for some time: “[My grandmother’s] children were divided among her master’s children” (911). Their lives were filled with desperation. It is my understanding that Jacobs’ text, as I also observe in Douglass’s, invites an interpretation of these measures and attitudes as an organized and purposefully designed strategy to dislodge African American identity, whether collective or individual.

As I have already stated before, slaves were objectified by the whites. They were always dependent to their owners. Jacobs tells us in her narration: “[A]ccording to Southern laws, a slave, *being* property, can *hold* no property” (Jacobs 912). This is why the only thing that they could do was to obey their masters’ words and demands: they had no liberty to do any other thing. Along with this, and as I have discussed with Douglass, they did not even have the chance to speak their mind and tell the truth. They had to stay silent and

without agency. Silence was the norm amid slaves. Jacobs, in her narration, demonstrates my statement:

He sprang upon me like a tiger, and gave me a stunning blow. It was the first time he had ever struck me; and fear did not enable me to control my anger. When I had recovered a little from the effects, I exclaimed, "You have struck me for answering you honestly". (Jacobs 915)

I will now focus on the second aspect that I underlined in Jacobs' narrative: how the aforementioned double oppression emerges as a shaping force in her narrative. Jacobs is aware of the fact that because she is a woman she is not born in the same condition as if she had been born a man. With difference to Douglass' text, moreover, not only is there more women, but every woman also has an active role within the narrative. It can be concluded then that they are not mentioned haphazardly. One evident example is Jacobs' grandmother, who can be considered one of the main characters. Jacobs mentions her both at the beginning, "I had also a great treasure in my maternal grandmother" (Jacobs 911), and at the end "[T]ender memories of my good old grandmother" (931). Alongside the grandmother, there are more women characters, such as her mother's mistress and Mrs. Flint, Dr. Flint's wife. And, again, it is not by nature chance that Jacobs names them in the work. Their presence is crucial in order to better understand the text. For instance, it is essential to know her mother's mistress' good behavior with her: "My home was now to be with her mistress ... I loved her; for she had been almost like a mother to me" (912) and the jealousy of Mrs. Flint towards her: "[Dr Flint's] wife's jealousy had given rise to some gossip in the neighborhood" (918).

Following with the theme of the female point of view, it should be highlighted that it is in this book that the character of mistress<sup>8</sup> is mentioned, in contrast to Douglass' text, in which this role does never appear. This, nonetheless, should come as no surprise, for it reinforces the idea that I have previously commented: the writer's gender shapes how this story is narrated. The word mistress appears virtually all over the work. Already in the first page, Jacobs writes: "[A]s she grew older ... her master and mistress could not help seeing it was for their interest to take care of such a valuable piece of property" (Jacobs 911). It is interesting to see both genders sitting next to each other. It looks like an effort of the author to equal both genders. The mistress also appears at the end of the work: "I

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<sup>8</sup> In this narrative mistress does not refer to the woman who the married man has sex with, but to the wife of the master.

had never seen the husband of my young mistress” (927). It is clear therefore that my previous statement regarding gender is fulfilled.

Finally, and regarding the double oppression that I have mentioned at the beginning, the writer is fully aware of the fact that, as well as being a woman, being an African American woman too contains a higher influence on how her life is shaped comparing it to if she was only an African American man. Three are the examples which demonstrate this in her writing. First, when she defines herself: “I was a poor slave girl” (Jacobs 918). In contrast with Douglass, who barely talks about his gender in his narration, Jacobs clearly wants to make the reader remember that her race, mixed with the gender, participates in said shaping. The second example that I have chosen is the following: “Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women” (922). Again, this last instance undoubtedly reinforces the point that I have highlighted here: that endurance was a greater demand for a female slave. Finally, the third example, which is the clearest instance, appears already in the title. While Douglass does not mix his gender and race in the title of his narration, Jacobs does put the focus on them: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. It is clear, thus, that said double oppression is a notion that Jacobs wants to display in her narration.

Considering what I have stated in this half of the analysis, both Jacobs’ and Douglass’ works try to tell the reader of the appalling consequences that slaves had to endure only because of their race. Everything that I have discussed played a role on their identity, and in a more general level, in the African American community.

### **3. Native American Literature: Land-Stealing as a Way of Repressing the Native American Community**

#### 3.1. Brief Introduction: Contextualization

As I have explained before in the work, Native Americans did also become enslaved along with the African Americans. Nevertheless, the issue of slavery tends to be mentioned only regarding the latter (Carocci and Pratt 2) as the numbers for the two communities vary. Nonetheless, the situation for the Indigenous people was not better than that of the African American people, for their lands were stolen as a consequence of white man's expansion in America. To start with, it should be regarded as a significant act when some property is taken away from its possessor. However, said stealing becomes even more significant when taking into consideration the meaning that the land has to the Indigenous people. Like Dr. Leroy Littlebear explains, "The land is a source of identity for Aboriginal People" (qtd. in "Learning from the Land"). This aforementioned identity, therefore, comprises many fields in the lives of Native Americans, such as, their language, their learning process from the world, their survival, and more ("Learning from the Land"). As Lawrence and Dua also reflect, removing Natives from their lands results in confiscating their identity (qtd. in Armstrong). The white man, it needs to be stated, was aware of this.

Following with the thesis of my work, thus, I will be analyzing the impact that the stolen lands had over the Native Americans at the time that the white man started to steal them. At the same time, I will link this stealing to the loss of identity that they had to experience while this process occurred. To test my hypothesis, I will be exploring Indigenous literature. By analyzing two different narratives from two different Native American authors, I will explain how Indigenous people's identity and sense of belonging was gradually vanishing. These authors are Canassatego and Black Hawk.

Before delving any further, I find it necessary to highlight that even though these two authors belong to different centuries, Canassatego to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Black Hawk to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the main concerns observed in their narratives are virtually similar, as I will demonstrate. This reinforces the thesis of this essay, this is, that the stealing of lands had an extraordinary impact on the lives of the Indigenous people, beyond the mere factual consequences derived from the situation.

### 3.2. Canassatego

Canassatego will be the first author that I study. The narrative that he produced and that I will examine is his *Speech at Lancaster* (Canassatego), as I have explained at the beginning of my paper. This speech that he gave was part of the Treaty of Lancaster. Said treaty is considered to be of vital importance because it constituted a betterment towards protecting certain areas of land against the English conquer (“The Great Indian Treaty”).

Abundant were the actions that the white man performed in order to achieve his main goal, this is, to make Indigenous identity steadily perish. I will now address the first one. Because the lands that the Native Americans owned started to be looted and stolen by the colonizing countries, it was these countries which started to have the total control over these lands. This is what Canassatego’s narration informs. The land which is described is Lancaster, already explicit in the title, and it became under English dominion. The English, nonetheless, not only had the sole ambition of stealing their lands, but they also wanted to manipulate the Indigenous community in the area. The way to do so was to make such community believe that they were the mightiest figures above them, and that they should show respect and obedience to them. There are diverse instances of this in Canassatego’s narration. For instance, when he says: “Brother *Onas* has convey’d our Complaint to the Great King [of England]” (Canassatego 12). Or when he states that: “That War had been declared between *the Great King of England*” (35). Besides, at the end of his speech, he says: “[T]hey are your Brethren, and belong to the Great King” (37). The colonizers were proselytizing and spreading Christianity and the Christian faith amongst the Native Americans. Consequently, their system of beliefs and their worldview was being modified.

It was not their own figures anymore, from their past traditions that were regarded as the most powerful, but figures that the white man was introducing amongst them. Not only this. It also happened that the white man was imposing a new recipient for their experience of the divine. It is also very symbolic how those changes on their worldview are perceived on a linguistic level. For instance, when Native Americans accommodate how they will refer to the King of England. They started to use the same phrase that the English, their colonizers, would use: “Great King”. This process reveals that the Natives, because they were being dominated by other cultures, started to behave in the same way as their rulers.



It is essential to stress the relevance that spirituality has amongst the Indigenous communities. Even today, different spiritual customs are practiced by several Indigenous communities (“Indigenous Spiritual Practices”), and the Native American population finds that spirituality is a very important ingredient in their lives (Fleming and Ledogar 47). The colonizing countries knew that spirituality was a delicate issue. Being conscious of this fact, the colonizing countries found a convenient strategy to exercise control over the Natives in the imposition of a new system of beliefs through the spreading of Christianity among the different tribes. In Canassatego’s narrative, this case is thoroughly depicted, as I have shown.

Little by little, the Native Americans started to be greatly manipulated by the white man, who was in charge of the colonizing countries. This whole process of stealing their lands and later creating new figures to praise was the scenario for Indigenous to feel struggling and conflicted even in their own lands. Canassatego talks about this in his speech:

[T]he Governor of New-York, who ... had not a good Understanding with our Brother Onas, advised us not to sell him any Land, for he would make an ill Use of it ... [H]e advised us ... to put it into his Hands; and told us, he would keep it for our Use ... and not part with any of it. (Canassatego 13).

In this fragment I spot how Canassatego describes a scenario in line with the observations that I have done before. A politician from the state of New York told Canassatego’s community that if they gave him their pieces of land he would use them properly, and he would not consider selling them. This community agrees to do so, so the Governor is given these lands. The community, I find it necessary to highlight it, decides to give him the lands because they truly believe in his words. At the same time, it cannot be forgotten that the Natives started to see the white man as a figure of authority, as I have explained with my analysis of the phrase “Great King”. Albeit the Native’s good intentions and the trust that they had towards the politician, some lines later Canassatego explains the outcome:

[W]e trusted him, and put our Land into his Hands ... but, some Time after, he went to England, and carried our Land with him, and there sold it to our Brother Onas, for a large Sum of money. [Brother Onas] told us we had sold the ... Lands ... to the Governor ... and that he had bought them from [the Governor] in England. (Canassatego 13)

This passage reflects the manipulation that, in a general level, the Native Americans had to endure while seeing how their lands were being stolen. The aforementioned scenario could also be considered as a humiliation towards Native communities. In the passage,

not only does Canassatego display how the Governor did not keep his word, but also that later he ended up selling those lands to Brother Onas, the person that Canassatego's community was supposed to sell them to in the first place. From the previous passage, I also find that it is essential to highlight how Canassatego adds the word "our" before mentioning the word "land". This is a sign that reflects the relevance given to the lands by Indigenous communities.

That humiliation is accompanied by the general mistreatment that the Indigenous people had to experience. This also plays a vital role on the process of authoritative exercise that the colonizers were operating on the Native Americans. Canassatego, one more time, shows this in his narration. The Natives were the people who made use of the lands before the white man started to arrive in America, and Canassatego explains this in his speech: "[T]he lands to belong to us long before you knew any thing of them" (Canassatego 11). This notwithstanding, the white man thought that it was because of the technology that he had brought to the New World that the Indigenous were still surviving. This is displayed in the speech:

Some of [the English] young men would, by way of Reproach, by every now and then telling us, that we should have perished if they had not come into the Country and furnished us with Strowds and Hatchets, and Guns, and other Things necessary for the Support of Life. (Canassatego 12).

This fragment discloses, again, the way in which the white man mistreated Indigenous communities and the bad behavior that he implemented in his ruling strategies towards them. This fragment, at the same time, can be considered as another example of humiliation. They were being told that even though they had originally enjoyed the lands for a long time, it was thanks to the arrival of the colonizers that they had the tools to make an efficient exploitation. Everything that I have explained until now played a decisive role in the loss of identity of both the writer's identity and, in a broader field, amongst all Native American people.

### 3.3. Black Hawk

Black Hawk is the second author that I study. The work that I analyze is his *Life of Black Hawk* (Black Hawk). As I have previously stated, the main concerns in Canassatego's

narrative are also the main interests in my study, and they are comparable to the ones that I found in Black Hawk's narrative.

In Black Hawk's selected text, I also observe a sharp and definite manifestation of the ramifications and effects of the statement that I have been exploring all throughout my study: the vanishing condition of Native American's collective identity as a consequence of the colonizing process, specifically in connection to the specific procedure examined here, the appropriation of their lands by the colonizers.

To start with, the repetition all over the work of the word "land" is a testimony of how those lands were a vital part for their way of life and their identification as a community. There are instances of the use of this word already in the opening of the book: "The Ossages, in consequence of their great loss in this battle, became satisfied to remain in our lands" (Black Hawk 22). And also in the closing of the story: "[B]ut the settler on our frontiers and on our lands, seem never to think of it" (142). Along with it, it should be also highlighted that in both instances next to "land" the author uses the possessive adjective "our". This, one more time, should be regarded as a reminder of how crucial the lands were for the Native Americans.

The white man contained different resources to dissipate Native American identity. The first resource is the multiplicity of different processes of conquer and dominion. Black Hawk's text is set in Saint Louis, in the banks of the Mississippi river. This piece of land was conquered and subjected to many different nations in those days. It was first taken as a dominion by the French, and after having been passed on to the Spanish Viceroyalty, it ended under American dominance ("A Brief History of St. Louis"). The British were also common incomers around the area ("A Brief History"). It is because of this reason that, all over the book, we encounter this sort of phrases: "I concluded to take a small party ... to see our Spanish father" (Black Hawk 25); or "Your English father has found out that the Americans want to take ..." (41-42); or "[S]aid our American father would treat us well" (26); and "[T]ook them prisoners ... to our Spanish father" (23). What ought to be highlighted from the previous instances is that the word "father" appears as a recurrent notion. Moreover, "father" does not appear on its own, but next to the country which was in possession of that piece of land. What I have just mentioned should be regarded as a clear sign that the Natives of said land believed that the countries which ruled over them were the mightiest. "Father" should be considered as a term that Black Hawk uses in order

to display might and obedience towards these sovereignties. The same thing happened with Canassatego, but instead of using the phrase “father”, he utilized “Great King”.

Connected to the previous lines, I find it vital to stress the issue of spirituality, just like I have done with Canassatego. The Indigenous began to regard the figures that the colonizing countries introduced them as the most powerful. This is, the white man produced a shift on the system of belief of the Indigenous communities. The Natives did not anymore worship figures of their own, but those that the white man imposed on them. The following line is an example of it: “[H]ead men were called upon to go to Washington, to see their Great Father” (Black Hawk 36). With this instance, Black Hawk displays my statement. He uses the word “father” in order to show loyalty and respect towards said figure. At the same time, adding the adjective “great” next to it causes that said respect is greater and entails power and might with it.

Another factor which caused the progressive disappearance of a strong communal identification among the Indigenous people was the legal and power superiority that the colonizers had over them. Thanks to it, they could, again, subjugate the Natives. The Indigenous communities, therefore, were in a scenario in which their only possibility was to seek a deal with the country that they thought was the best option for them. Black Hawk alludes to this throughout the narrative in various occasions. One of the first instances is displayed at the beginning of the narration (Black Hawk 27-28). Black Hawk tells the reader about an American chief who was killed “by one of [Black Hawk’s] people” (27). To seek peace between the two parties, and to help the killer avoid jail, the Native community of this area accepted to give the Americans some land. The Natives, having fulfilled the request, were supposed to get that person back in their community. Nevertheless, Black Hawk describes the following some lines later:

When the business was all arranged, they expected to have their friend released to come home with them. But about the time they were ready to start, their friend was let out of prison, who ran a short distance, and was *shot dead!* This is all they could recollect of what was said and done. (Black Hawk 28)

The aforementioned lines display how, even after having treated with the colonizing country and having fulfilled their word, the white man did nothing but utilize and manipulate the Indigenous in the way that he wanted. In this example, authority is also implemented thanks to the privilege of having a better technology. What I have just explained, again, is another way that the white man had in order to contribute to the

vanishing of the Indigenous people's identity. This is so for they did not know when the white man was going to keep their word, so they were in a constant state of agony for being able to even feel confident in their own land.

As I have explained before, the Indigenous people were not sure if the white man was going to keep their word, and that made them be doubtful all the time. Nonetheless, it was not necessary that there was a deal between the two for the Natives to feel struggling. Sometimes, the white man would carry an action against them without any previous expectation or reason. This is also contemplated in the book:

[M]y boy went out, as usual, to hunt. Night came on, and he did not return! I was alarmed for his safety, and passed a sleepless night. In the morning, my old wowan went to the other lodges and gave the alarm and all turned out in pursuit. There being snow on the ground ... found he was on the trail of a deer. (Black Hawk 47)

This is, thus, the scenario presented. An individual belonging to Black Hawk's community went to hunt as per usual. However, they realized that he had not returned by the time which he should have arrived, so in the following morning they decided to go and find him. Some lines later, the final result is explained:

Their tracks led across the river and then down towards the fort. My friends followed them, and soon found my boy lying dead! He had been most cruelly murdered! His face was shot to pieces-his body stabbed in several places-and his head scalped! His arms were tied behind him. (Black Hawk 47)

The outcome reinforces one more time the point that I have previously argued. The white man misbehaved with the Indigenous communities from the moment in which they began to steal their lands. Moreover, this caused that the Indigenous in those territories would feel in a struggling situation as they could not anticipate or reason the actions that the white man was causing against them. In the passage before, Black Hawk represented these circumstances with an explicit story in which the colonizers kill a Native American for no apparent reason.

These aforementioned lines reinforce the thesis of this analysis. The fact that the white man was stealing and taking possession of the lands that the Natives had enjoyed before was causing a loss of identity on them. Additionally, they were not only being mistreated but also killed for no reason. This process of deceit also appears in Canassatego's narrative, as I have formerly displayed. The white man manipulated the Indigenous in order to get lands from them and later sell them without not telling them anything, which, in my reading, is a parallel representation of those circumstances that the Native

Americans were suffering as a consequence of the pernicious strategies that substantiated the colonizing project.

Taking into consideration this second half of the work, therefore, both Black Hawk and Canassatego display their concerns on their narrations. They show the reader how Indigenous' identity was disappearing because of land stealing. Furthermore, such concerns are similar in the two narrations even though they were written in different centuries, what means that the white man's behavior remained unchanged.

#### **4. Conclusion: Our Past and Our Future. Where Are We Headed?**

With this work it has been my aim to demonstrate the appalling reality that both the Native American and the African American communities had to endure in the process of colonization and expansion carried by the white man in the United States of America. Two were the main actions that the white man executed against these populations: slavery and the stealing of lands. While the African Americans were the ones who suffered the first, the Native Americans had to endure the second one. The aforementioned reality, at the same time, was the main reason for the gradual loss of identity that these two communities experienced. In order to examine the previous thesis, I decided to use literature as a source of analysis.

As I have displayed in the first half of the essay, slavery did indeed make an impact on African Americans' lives. Thanks to Douglass' and Jacobs' narratives, I have been able to explain how becoming enslaved (even from birth) caused an identity crisis in the community, and their identity would vanish little by little. In both these jobs the authors write about how slavery was part of their lives since their first day on earth, as mothers and children were separated on the day in which the mother gave birth. It was from this moment onwards that the African Americans really started to face the challenges of being enslaved. They had no rights and were merely seen as objects, and the only rule that they had to follow was that of remaining silent and passive. They had no right to protest, and if they did, they always got a fierce punishment. Furthermore, their lives were always subject to the consequences of being sold and being bought. As I have previously described and eventually explored in these texts, these facts operated in a negative way on their definitions of self, both individually and as a collective, erasing and/or transforming their identities.

Alongside this, I have also displayed how a double oppression was at work at the time in which these narrations are set. After examining Jacobs's writing, I have observed that she exhibited a clear awareness of the fact that she suffered two different kinds of oppression. In her text, the reader can acknowledge how she notifies one type of oppression, being African American, and then a second type of oppression, being a woman. Jacobs reveals how this double oppression determined her life in a greater way than what she imagines that could have happened if she had been an African American man. As I have stressed, some instances demonstrate this in her book. Among others, she already includes her

gender in the title, which Douglass does not, and she talks about how being enslaved is definitely worse for women than for men.

Moving on to Indigenous literature, in the second half of the study I have shown how the Native American population also experience the progressive disappearance and assault on their identities. In this case, it was owing to the stealing of lands that the white man carried against the Indigenous communities. In order to build upon this argument, I have used two narratives produced by two different Indigenous writers: Canassatego and Black Hawk.

Both Canassatego's and Black Hawk's narratives are a demonstration of the mistreatment and humiliation that the white man carried against the Indigenous communities. The colonizing countries, additionally, manipulated these communities in the operational way that they found more beneficial for their own interests. In the two narratives I found different textual instances referring to the consequences of this fact that I have tried to explore and expose. Among others, how these authors divulge examples of how the white man killed Indigenous individuals without any specific reason, or tricked them to think that it was to the white man who the Natives should sell the lands. Furthermore, colonizers modified the worldview enjoyed by the Native Americans, imposing a new system of beliefs and a new faith that established new hierarchies and presented them as power figures, symbols to praise, instances of might and authority. This, one more time, had an impact on the identity of the Native communities.

Finally, it needs to be remarked that the concerns in the two narrations are nearly alike, though they were not written at the same time. Canassatego's narration is from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Black Hawk's book from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is a clear sign of how the white man misbehaved with the Native Americans, a process which has occurred for a long period of time in history.

I should also take into consideration that it was the non-white communities that the white man utilized for his own interests. In my analysis, I have displayed how it was not the white people who were used to work the lands and being constantly mistreated, nor were they stolen the territory where they had lived in long before. In fact, they were acquiring those lands without consent. The fact that this happened like this ought to make us consider the reason behind. I believe that the only explication possible is because the white community was aware of the dehumanization that they were causing against the



African American and Indigenous communities. And, of course, they did not want that the people with their same skin color suffered said anguish. However, from what I have explained it seemed that they had no interest in ending it. To my mind, two are the reasons behind it. First of all, the white man did not want to finish with these processes because of their racist and superiority beliefs. Secondly, because there was a great number of people who were becoming wealthy out of this situation. In Jacobs's narrative, for instance, this is represented through the figures of the master and the mistress.

Before ending my work, I would like to use the following lines in order to discuss the future of these two communities. The reality that these two communities had to endure at the time of these narratives has little to do with the present situation. This betterment is owing to different reasons. Firstly, racist, xenophobic, and colonial beliefs are not anymore notions that are sustained. They are indeed ideas which have become antiquated. Secondly, strong and numerous working groups, many of them funded by public organizations, are working hard in order to show that the white man's racist past is something that should not be repeated. Their work is fundamental. Thirdly, much of the information that has been hidden until nowadays pertaining to our racist past, with examples such as the Residential Schools, is coming to light. This information displays the atrocities that we committed and no white person wants to feel reflected on it. That this information sees the light is vital as well.

Last year I went as an exchange student to Canada. This country, until not a long time ago, has also dealt with a racist past towards both African American and Indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the situation has greatly improved. The Government, helped by different working groups, is making a massive effort so as to tackle every single situation in which both African American and Native communities are not in an egalitarian situation. Along with the government, it is also thanks to the society that people's views are shifting little by little. In a world which is becoming more homogenous than ever, there is no use in discriminating because of the color of our skin. A lot of work and effort still needs to be done, for racism does not end from one day to another. Nevertheless, as I mentioned before, it is crucial to have optimal public laws which sustain equality and address the cruelty of the white man in the recent past history. This is something that we, as citizens, need to ask to our Governments.

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