

POWER OF THE SOUTHERN MELTING POT: ANALYSIS OF JOEL CHANDLER
HARRIS'S UNCLE REMUS AS SOUTHERN FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL
APPROPRIATION

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I address the controversy of origins surrounding Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* collections. Based on James O. Young's definitions of appropriation, I establish Harris's work as evidence of cultural content appropriation of European, African, and Native American folklore. Harris specifically appropriates European and African folklore to further his own Post-Civil War psyche, attempting to preserve the ideal Southern past. Such preservation efforts are literally significant for they provide examples of appropriation that are done not out of an attempt to oppress European and African culture, but to integrate it into the developing Southern culture. The visible Native American appropriation, however, stands as evidence to the use of appropriation as a method of taking power and oppressing a minority group.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I seem to see before me the smiling faces of thousands of children...And out of the confusion, and while I am trying hard to speak the right word, I seem to hear a voice lifted above the rest, saying: "You have made some of us happy" Phantoms! Children of dreams! True, my dear Frost; but if you could see the thousands of letters that have come to me from far and near, and all fresh from the hearts and hands of children, and from men and women who have not forgotten how to be children, you would not wonder at the dream. And such a dream can do no harm.

Joel Chandler Harris dedication to Arthur Burdette Frost

Joel Chandler Harris's dream has resonated for generations after its creation, with his most famous and infamous work being the *Uncle Remus* stories. Written in the latter half of the nineteenth century, *Uncle Remus* is a series of nine short story collections, detailing the adventures of Brer Rabbit and his friends, narrated by Uncle Remus, an aged slave on a Southern plantation. Despite the stories' generally positive message that the weak, but clever, can outwit the strong, Harris's works have received a variety of criticism and even protest. Many critics in the last four decades have found Harris's works to promote racism and slavery, overshadowing the stories' positive message of brains over brawn. Live action reproductions of Harris's

collections, such as Disney's *Song of the South* (1946), have only increased public disapproval of the *Uncle Remus* tales.¹

Even though Harris's works are controversial, critics cannot deny its influential nature. Despite the controversy, or maybe because of it, Harris's collections have survived over a hundred years. It is the stories' resilience that speak of their hidden value. While racism is present in the texts, it is the underlying messages and cultural reflections in the stories that make them worth studying. By adopting Reed Dasenbrock's ethical intentionalism, I argue that we can acknowledge the racist language and tone, but identify them as symptoms of unconscious meaning, as defined by E.D. Hirsch. Through such a step we can move forward with interpreting the stories as Harris wished them to be seen, as attempts to preserve Southern stories, and to add to the Southern Folklore genre. Most interesting, however, is that ultimately, in Harris's attempt to preserve, he preserves not only Southern culture but also the reflections of African, European, and Native American folklore, evidence of cultural appropriation.

Currently, criticism on Harris's work is divided into two major areas of debate: racism and origins. Critics tend to debate one or the other, arguing about the presence or lack of racism or the potential origins of the *Uncle Remus* tales. Both areas are rife with controversy, yet it is not necessary for a reader to choose to focus either. In fact, I plan to address both areas because when viewing Harris's work as a whole, the racism and origins of the tales, we are able to see that Harris's works are extensive examples of cultural appropriation.

In the racism debate, Opal Moore and Donnarae MacCann offer the most potent attack on *Uncle Remus*, fighting against the reinstatement of Harris's works in children literature. Moore and MacCann refer to *Uncle Remus* as a travesty, claiming that "[t]he larger-than-life, shuffling, sho-nuffing, grinning image is the sugartit appeasement from which America has refused to be

weaned” (96). More subtly, Robin Bernstein argues that Harris’s racism is subliminal. Through examining children’s innocence and the physical relationship between the Little Boy and Uncle Remus, Bernstein argues that “[i]ntimacy does not mitigate subjection, but instead constructs it at the deepest levels” (94). The intimate touching between Uncle Remus and the Little Boy were meant to “tenderize” and “romanticize” the relationship between slaves and masters. Referring to how Uncle Remus cuddles the Little Boy, Bernstein argues Harris creates a romantic image of slavery that was meant to contrast with Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In fact, according to Bernstein, Harris’s initial collection was set up to work as an inversion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, adopting the physical relationship between Uncle Remus and the Little Boy as a way to reflect Uncle Tom and Eva’s relationship. *Uncle Remus* becomes a source of a subliminal method for bolstering the “Lost Cause,”² and, with it, racism.

Taking an opposing stance, Dennis Brestensky believes that Uncle Remus represents a subversion to slavery through his position of storyteller and teacher: “Since the white boy has the role of student and since he is dependent on Remus for information, Remus gains some stature” (54). While Moore and MacCann view Uncle Remus’s position as a negative stereotype, Brestensky shows Uncle Remus as holding a position of power which makes him an admirable man. Similarly, Lyle Glazier believes that Uncle Remus is an autonomous person who subverts the system of slavery. Glazier argues that “he [Harris] and all White people were hoodwinked...He [Uncle Remus] never let on that he might be having his own private joke at the expense of the White reporter sympathetically but somewhat patronizingly taking down his nonsense” (71, 79). Glazier’s approach adds to the argument that Uncle Remus represents a break from racism rather than an addition to it. Wolfe, however, believes that “the Negro slave,

through his anthropomorphic Rabbit stories, seems to be hinting that even the frailest and most humble of ‘animals’ can let fly with the most blood-thirsty aggressions” (34).

I argue, instead, that Harris’s racism is present, but unconscious. In his introductions, Harris’s language and tone quickly suggest a condescension in his treatment and discussion of slaves and their descendants. As a result, it is impossible to ignore the racism present in *Uncle Remus*. Harris was a product of his generation and racism was rampant. Even those who actively campaigned for African American rights possessed a condescending tone, including Charles Sumner and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Charles Sumner, an abolitionist, Massachusetts’s Senator, and slaves’ rights activist, wrote several letters collected in *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, which exhibit a condescending, racist tone in the context of slaves and Blacks. Despite being an abolitionist, Sumner represents a clear example of how racism permeated both sides of the race rights argument. Similarly, Harriet Beecher Stowe, famous for her abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, uses racial stereotypes in her work, which emphasize the child-like mentality of darker-skinned slaves versus the higher intelligence of lighter-skinned, mixed-blood slaves. As with the case of black rights activists, Harris’s racism was not a conscious goal of his work, but an unconscious meaning that is weaved into his collections alongside his consciously intended meaning. This unconscious racism, once identified, should not detract from Harris’s overall purpose of creating folklore collections to preserve Southern culture in the *Uncle Remus* tales. I argue that by adopting Reed Dasenbrock’s ethical intentionalism, we call for a “good-faith” reading of Harris’s work.

A good-faith reading insists that critics treat works as they would wish their own works to be treated, implying the golden rule. According to Dasenbrock, “[n]o one can fully accept such a theory [as anti-intentionalism] because no one is prepared to have such a theory applied to

works written by people whose selfhood matters to us, especially ourselves” (105). It seems fair to say that Harris deserves the same good-faith reading as Derrida. Moore and MacCann are guilty of treating Harris’s work as Derrida treated others. By using such terms as “sugaritit appeasement,” they verbally attack Harris, ignoring his consciously intended meaning and treating him as a nonhuman. It is easy to assume that they would not appreciate such language from anyone discussing their own work. Once Dasenbrock’s ethical intentionalism is adopted, we can then move forward to tackle the issue of racism in Harris’s work. No matter how we wish to interpret the presence of racism, it does exist in *Uncle Remus*, and it is important to begin separating Harris’s consciously intended meaning from his unconscious and symptomatic meaning, as defined by E.D. Hirsch. To best examine Harris’s work for his consciously intended meaning and unconscious and symptomatic meaning, we must first understand Hirsch’s definition of the terms. According to Hirsch, authors have several layers of meaning. On the basic level, there is meaning, which is “what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence” (Hirsch 8). Meaning can only occur when the author intends there to be meaning; for examples, a computer cannot pump out random words that accidentally create a sentence and that sentence has meaning. Meaning can only occur when there is intent; however, there are several forms of meaning. Meaning never changes and is always what the author intended it to be when the work was written.

Keeping in mind a good-faith reading, we must interpret the different layers of meaning that Harris created. The best place to start meaning interpretation is with verbal meaning, or “meanings which can be conveyed to other by the words he [the author] uses,” which is the surface level meaning (Hirsch 18). It conveys the author’s consciously intended meaning. If a man says he likes the color red, the verbal meaning is that he likes the color red, which is his

consciously intended meaning. He wishes to express his enjoyment of the color red. However, humans are rarely ever just “surface level.” In addition to verbal meaning, works can possess unconscious meanings that can be interpreted through symptoms. Unconscious meaning “refers to those meanings which are not attended to by the author but which are nevertheless present in another region of his mind” (Hirsch 51-52). Symptoms are involuntary signals from the subconscious that appear to manifest the unconscious meaning, allowing it to be interpreted. Hirsch compares symptoms to a fever, which is an involuntary indication of disease (52-53).

Harris’s tone and depiction of his narrator is often pointedly condescending and racist. In the short paragraph that begins *The Tar Baby and Other Rhymes of Uncle Remus*, Harris offers a condescending explanation as to why the book is in rhyming form rather than the tradition narrative. He claims it is for “the purpose of presenting and preserving what seems to be the genuine version [orally transmitted slave folklore]” (ix). Rather than Harris taking credit for his book being written in “the simplest form of narrative verse,” Uncle Remus, his titular character, is given full responsibility (ix). Harris blames the “somewhat monotonous character of the verse” on Uncle Remus, who “sets himself to produce new stories in a form that would seem alien to his [Uncle Remus] methods,” and, therefore, “it is inevitable that his efforts should move along the line of least resistance, which in English is the iambic four-beat movement....” (ix). Although disguised within his explanation for why the book is written in a simple rhyming scheme, Harris is implicitly disparaging Uncle Remus’s intelligence. The disparaging of Uncle Remus’s intelligence, is not, however, a consciously intended meaning. Harris wishes to explain briefly to his readers as to why the book is written in verse. Yet, just as the mother detects her child is lying through his stammering, we can interpret Harris’s unconscious meaning of racism

through his symptomatic condescension. It becomes clear that Harris feels that he is superior to his Negro narrator even if he does not explicitly say so.

Harris's condescension becomes more apparent when he informs his readers that even though Uncle Remus has been educated, at least partly, "it is natural that he should pay small attention to the misleading rules of the professors of prosody, who seem to not have the slightest notion of the science of English verse" (ix). Harris continues by adding that "[h]is [Uncle Remus's] instinctive love of melody, and his appreciation of the simplest rhythmical movement, would lead him to ignore syllables and accents and to depend wholly on the time-movement...." (ix). These last two lines suggest that Uncle Remus is far too simple and loving to properly understand more complicated patterns of writing, especially in poetry. It is strange criticism, for Harris both excuses Uncle Remus's ignorance by blaming Uncle Remus's nature and environment and suggests that such issues are inevitable because of who Uncle Remus is. Like the first example, however, we view a distinct conflict between his verbal meaning and his unconscious meaning. Verbally, Harris explains Uncle Remus's educational shortcomings, but the condescension seen in terms like "it is natural" and "instinctive love" are symptoms of his unconscious racism. Harris expresses his superiority through his condescension towards his own creation. It can be interpreted that Harris feels that Uncle Remus is intellectually inferior due to his race.

The implicit racism of Harris does not merely pertain to Uncle Remus. In *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, Harris spends a lengthy introduction defending his use of the "Negro dialect" as well as his place as a folklorist and the authenticity of the stories as "Negro stories." He tells readers, "Nevertheless, if the language of Uncle Remus fails to give vivid hints of the really poetic imagination of the Negro; if it fails to embody the quaint and homely humor which

was his most prominent characteristic; if it does not suggest a certain picturesque sensitiveness...my attempt may be accounted a failure” (viii). Although Harris’s verbal meaning appears positive, specific word choices suggest another truth. Harris does not view “Negroes” as equals in literary intelligence but rather “quaint and homely” with “picturesque sensitiveness.” Such vocabulary suggests that Harris views Uncle Remus and other slaves as mentally inferior, representing a simpler way of life, primitive and innocent in nature. We are only able to interpret these racial beliefs by applying Hirsch’s idea of symptoms and unconscious meaning. If we were to take the words at face value, we could not claim it is racist. Only when we view the vocabulary that is symptomatic of Harris’s racist subconscious can we recognize and prove Harris’s unconscious racism.

While we, in our era, find his tone offensive, he would have argued he is paying “Negroes” a compliment. In fact, he dislikes those he deems as hurting the preservation of the “quaint Negro dialect.” Harris argued that his works strive to “preserve the legends themselves in their original simplicity...” and are “different also from the intolerable misrepresentations of the minstrel stage” (*Uncle Remus* vii-viii). Unfortunately, even when defending “Negro culture,” Harris exhibits symptoms of racism. He refers to the “Negro” legends as creations of simplicity, labeling the legends as child-like or uncivilized in comparison to English literature. It is also crucial to acknowledge Harris’s description of the minstrel stage, which were known for presenting “black face” shows that mocked the slave dialect. His description exhibits Harris’s extreme dislike of “counterfeit” representations of “Negro” culture and dialect. Verbally, Harris continues his defense of the “Negro dialect” by immediately talking about the “quaint” and “picturesque” nature of the “Negro dialect,” which, despite his best intentions, sounds condescending. Since we are to read this part as a defense of “Negro culture,” it is only fair to

recognize that his condescension is unconscious. The pairing of his defense and racist condescension provides evidence that Harris's racism is a symptom of his unconscious meaning. His condescension is not his consciously intended meaning, but rather a manifestation of his culture and subconscious.

Rather than disliking slaves, Harris expresses an affection for them. He admits that in some of his tales "it has sometimes happened that digestion was sacrificed to sentiment..." meaning that he sacrifices literary style for authenticity and sentiment (*Uncle Remus and his Friends* iv). Ultimately, we should acknowledge Harris's unconscious racism, but race is only one area of discussion. Harris's visible racism is well established. Yet it is the origins debate on which I choose to focus.

Even during his life-time, Harris's contemporaries attempted to identify the folklore influences outside slave stories. In their 1892 article A. Gerber, F.M. Warren, S. Garner, O.B. Super, and T.B. Henneman chose to trace elements of Harris's work back to "the Old World." Each critic takes a turn in this article stating his opinions and attempting to identify Harris's sources. Their essays appear to be the first wave of criticism on Harris's work. Warren closely identifies *Uncle Remus* with *Roman de Renard*, a now eight-hundred-year old French folktale, which he claims was changed during its immigration to the States. Because of the use of the wolf, Super argues that the stories are most likely of European descent. Super says, "I suppose we cannot assume that the negroes of the Georgia coast, or of Louisiana, knew anything about wolves by actual experience. That the wolf should be prominent in the European tales is quite easily understood" (xlii).

In an unusual interpretation, Nina Mikkelsen's 1983 article traces the sources of Harris's folklore. She touches upon the 1888 theory that the tales were influenced by the Jataka tales –

tales that belong to the Buddhist belief – as well as Harris’s own belief that they were African in origin. Mikkelsen, however, argues that the tales reflect more of Harris's beliefs than those in other folklore. This opinion is supported by Eric Montenyohl, who puts forth the idea that Uncle Remus is another version of a popular newspaper character from Harris’s time known as Old Si.

The one influence that is rarely ever challenged is the influence of African folklore. Harris clearly states that his works are to preserve the stories of the South and the slaves. Since first-generation slaves were Africans taken to the United States by force, there is no surprise that the slaves stories would reflect African tales. Yet Africa is a vast continent with thousands of different cultures. Glazier argues that Harris’s work most clearly reflects the Bantu tribe. William Bascom, on the other hand, analyzes the story, “The Rabbit and the Moon,” as a version of several African tribes. Bascom argues that the *Uncle Remus* story reflects tales from the Hausa, the Bushmen, and the Hottentots. Aside from providing tribal stories for comparison to the *Uncle Remus* story, Bascom becomes one of the first critics to mention the Native American connection. While he does not fully address this new and highly controversial connection, Bascom acknowledges the similarities between John R. Swanton’s recording of a Louisiana Chitimacha tale and the *Uncle Remus* story.

The presence of Native American reflections has been met with resistance. Currently the only complete article dedicated to examining Harris’s work as an appropriation of Native American stories is by Jay Hansford Vest. Vest argues that at least a third of Harris’s work reflects the tales of the Indians, including his own tribe, the Saponi-Monacan. Initially, Vest claims that the Saponi-Monacan storytelling, although oral, has been well-maintained and monitored, enabling stories to be dated. His stronger argument is his Nature argument, in which he points out the flaws in believing the Harris stories are African due to the landscape of the

stories. Enumerating several environmental elements that exist only in the United States, Vest argues that it would be impossible for African slaves, who were unfamiliar with the American terrain, to create stories that possess it. Vest's Nature Theory holds value, but it is not new since Super made a similar claim back in the late 1800s.

While critics in general do have valid arguments when considering the racism and origins of *Uncle Remus*, I feel that their focus is too narrow. On the subject of racism, critics seem eager to either condemn or rescue Harris. I believe that it is important to acknowledge the racism in the text and recognize it, not as malicious propaganda, but as a reflection and symptom of Harris's time and beliefs. By acknowledging the racist language and tone, I am neither condemning nor excusing Harris's racism. It is merely another element to interpret in the *Uncle Remus* collection. By acknowledging the racist elements, I believe we can then move forward and examine his stated intent. In my research, I have not found a satisfactory or even complete interpretation of Harris's stated intent. Rather it seems to be a given that Harris was trying to preserve the Old South, or the Lost Cause, with no explanation of how he does or his level of success. In this regard, Harris's work seems to have been taken for granted with readers assuming that his work is a piece of Southern folklore. Following the Civil War by several decades, Harris's tales do not promote the overt masculinity of the early nineteenth century, seen in works such as James Fennimore Cooper and other authors working to create an American identity. Instead, Harris's brains over brawn theme suggests an adoption of older beliefs and, therefore, a different type of Southern American folklore.

It is Harris's preservation of old beliefs and ideals that is key to his work. Like the racist elements, the origin of Harris's tales is a well discussed area. It is important to recognize that Harris did not know the sources to all of his stories. The first collection includes stories Harris

recalled hearing from the slaves on his employer's plantation. Collections that followed were a compilation of stories Harris heard and ones that were sent to him by fans. Harris informs readers that, "the first book [*Uncle Remus*] made the second [*Nights with Uncle Remus*] a necessity; for, immediately upon its appearance, letters and correspondence began to pour in upon the author from all parts of the South" (*Nights* xi-xii). With such an influx of stories, Harris did his best to verify the ones he used. Unfortunately, as Harris admits, "the writer has, nevertheless, found it a difficult task to verify such legends as he had not already heard in some shape or other" (*Nights* xiv). The tricky part of oral traditions is that since they are passed on orally with no clear records, it is difficult to assess their origins. Through textual comparison, historical and cultural location, and the use of the Nature Theory, it is possible to identify reflections of potential influences, such as African, European, and Native American. Many critics have satisfactorily proven the reflections of African folklore. I argue, however, that Harris's work is not a mere appropriation of one culture but of three. Although some critics argue against the idea of Native American influences, including the Harris himself, history provides evidence that intermingling and communication occurred between slaves, whites, and Native Americans. Such communication and interactions would naturally lead to an exchanging of stories and histories.

The true uniqueness of Harris's work lies in how he used the appropriated stories. *Uncle Remus* represents Harris's attempt to preserve the idealistic South through the preservation of plantation and slave stories, resulting in his addition to Southern folklore. Like many Southern folklore of his era, Harris's stories have a distinct fascination with the Civil War. In the second chapter, I will address Harris's Post-Civil War psyche as it appears through his appropriation of European and African stories. Initially, I will present the reflections of European and African

influences that can be identified and then demonstrate how they tie to Harris's visible Post-Civil War psyche. Harris's unwitting appropriation of the Native American stories, however, speaks to another cultural phenomenon. Rather than purposefully using the Native American stories as he does the European and African, Harris's dismissal and diminishing of Native American culture reflects the attitude of Americans in the southeast after nearly a century of Indian removal. Contrary to Harris's own beliefs, in the third chapter, I will establish recorded historical interactions between Native Americans and slaves before providing clear parallels of several *Uncle Remus* tales and Native American stories. The significance of the Native American presence and Harris's and critics' denial of it points the larger cultural and physical eradication of Native Americans in the southeast. In the fourth concluding chapter, I will explore brief discussion of history of Indian removal and controversy proceeding and during Harris era. Given the environment of the time surrounding the Native American issues, it become clear that Harris's appropriation of Native American stories is another step in claiming the American South and erasing Native Americans. Combined with the appropriation of European and African stories, Harris's work becomes literary evidence of the cultural South with layers of meaning and interpretation.

CHAPTER II

EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN ORIGINS IN THE POST-CIVIL WAR PSYCHE

Part of the struggle with analyzing Harris's works is that many of the collections are written in Gullah, a common creole language that "the lowcountry of South Carolina and Georgia developed" (Joyner 14). It is the Gullah of Harris's work that sparks controversy about race and accuracy. Whether or not Harris's work properly represents Gullah, I do not know and will not attempt to make claims about one way or another. Yet, no matter the success of his Gullah usage, Harris does employ a very common and influential language. Joyner claims that Gullah had great influence upon the English language and vice versa, especially the Southern dialect (14-15). On this visible level, Harris's work shows cultural appropriation of the African slaves. Cultural appropriation is a difficult subject for discussion because it calls for recognition of borrowed and even stolen cultural items: "Cultural appropriation is particularly controversial since, in the contemporary world, individuals from rich and powerful majority cultures often appropriate from disadvantaged indigenous and minority cultures" (Young ix). James O. Young dedicates his book to examining cultural appropriation, at times defending it as often unobjectionable in the arts. His approach adds to the controversy, because it can be seen as insensitive to the original owners of the appropriated culture. Young touches on an important issue of why appropriation is a difficult subject. To appropriate means "the making of a thing private property...; taking as one's own or to one's own use" (Young 4). When a majority culture appropriates art, stories, and traditions of indigenous, minority cultures, they are

privatizing the culture and using it for their benefit. The surge in reclaiming appropriate culture is, in part, an attempt to take back the culture for the indigenous and minority culture's own use. The desire to gain control and benefit from appropriated culture explains why people are so adamant about Harris's work representing only one minority culture. To admit that Harris's work reflects multiple cultures results in the ownership being spread among multiple groups. For some this spreading may diminish the gain of reclaiming Harris's work. Instead of recognizing the hybridity of American and Harris's culture, people are focusing on the loss of privatizing culture. This section of my paper will argue against this fear by proving the true hybridity of the *Uncle Remus* collections, identifying at least three recognizable cultural sources for the tales: European, African, and Native American.

According to Young, cultural appropriation may be difficult because of the various types of cultural appropriation that may occur. Easiest to identify is *object appropriation*, which "occurs when the possession of a tangible work of art...is transferred from members of one culture to members of another" (Young 6). An example of object appropriation would be the transferal of Egyptian artifacts to a European museum. Another more common example is tourists buying a piece of art created by a local artist, such as when tourists visit a Native American reservation and buy jewelry or sculptures. The other forms of cultural appropriation are intangible. Young tells readers that there is *content appropriation*, the "significant reuse of an idea first expressed in the work of an artist from another culture," such as a song, story, or poem (6). A subcategory of content appropriation is *style appropriation*, which occurs when an artist does not recreate a work, but borrows stylistic elements. The example Young provides is of non-African -Americans who compose their own jazz or blues (6). Similarly, *motif appropriation* results from an artist being inspired by a different culture and incorporating motifs from that

culture without direct reuse or style imitation (7). The final type of appropriation is *subject appropriation*, or when “artists appropriate a subject matter, namely another culture or some of its members,” but “no artistic product of a culture is appropriated” (7). Subject appropriation is a commonly discussed topic in literature. It brings forth the question of whether a writer can write about or from the perspective of a culture or race that is not his own. Can a white man write from a black woman’s perspective or can a black woman write from a Native American’s perspective?

In the case of Joel Chandler Harris, we witness several forms of cultural appropriation. On the surface, Harris performs subject appropriation, telling the majority of his stories from Uncle Remus’s and other slaves’ perspectives. The illustrations in the books, however, do not appear to be appropriation as they were drawn for Harris’s book to his specifications³. Largely, cultural appropriation is seen in Harris’s work on the intangible level. Stylistically, Harris appropriates the prose narrative form for his tales. Prose narratives as a form are significant in the African and Native American cultures:

Prose narratives are purely fictional narratives that should be entertaining as well as rhetorically viable to attract audiences. Although most of these narratives are classified as morality and character building tales in that they convey specific messages to the listeners, and some of them serve etiological purposes, they are often not taken as seriously as myths, and their narratives contexts are not as somber as those mythologies.... In the context of prose narratives, the audience is invited to listen and participate by adding pieces, singing if there happens to be a song in the narrative, and prompting and correcting the narrator as needed.f (Kizza 98)

The stories told by Uncle Remus follow closely the prose narrative definition. His tales, directed at teaching the Little Boy and the Second Little Boy, have moral endings mixed among humorous and ridiculous events that could not possibly happen. Due to the absurdity of some of the events, readers and the boys are not to take the stories too seriously. The narrative framework of the stories also includes prompting and interjections from the Little Boy, the Second Little Boy, other slaves, and, occasionally, Uncle Remus when he is not telling the tale, replicating the important role of prose narrative audiences.

Yet the most recognized cultural appropriation that occurs within Harris's work is content appropriation. Borrowing from European, African, and Native American stories, Harris reworks the tales to fit his agenda of preserving the ideal South and plantation. Despite his claims to be merely a transcriber, Harris does take creative liberty with the organization, presentation, and sequence of the tales. His creative license must be taken into account, for it results in minor discrepancies between the tales and their original sources. Louis Rubin, Jr., claims Harris "pretend[ed] that he wrote without artifice of art, and that he had done little more than transcribe the Negro folktales that won him worldwide acclaim. Yet he once showed Ray Stannard Baker the drafts of sixteen introductory passages to a single story" (790). John Stafford points out that the various forms of the same story found in the different collections reveals that Harris willingly reworked his tales (95). For those still unconvinced, I want to acknowledge the wide variety of versions that exist among the original sources. William Bascom provides a multitude of versions of "Moon Splits Hare's Lip," many of which come from the same tribes. In Bascom's essay the Bushman tribe alone has fourteen versions of the story. Variations of folklore is common even among members of the same group due to folklore's oral nature. By taking into consideration Harris's own tweaks and edits as well as the natural diversity of oral

folklore, we must recognize that differences between Harris's tales and the original folklore does not discount the potential sources.

The visibility of European, African, and Native American cultures in Harris's work varies in level. Among the three, European culture is the most limited. The European and white American influences are best seen in the illustrations [Fig. 2.1-5]: Harris's animals all wear clothing worn by Americans and Europeans of the era. These clothes include sack suits, tail coats, dress shirts, camp dresses, day dresses, and work dresses. In most of the illustrations of Brer Rabbit, he wears either a sack suit or tail coat. Following the proper American and European manners, Brer Rabbit and the other male characters are generally depicted as wearing coats when in the presence of female characters, while they are coatless with their sleeves rolled up when among only men. As these clothes are obviously European and American styles, readers can view the clothing as a method of cultural appropriation of European traditions and as a visual method of turning the African and Native American characters into white Southern characters.

Following the suggestion of F.M. Warren in his 1892 article, I researched Reynard the Fox and other fables. Reynard the Fox, a fable character originally written down by Jean de La Fontaine, is a trickster character originating in France. Known for his clever and sly behavior, Reynard closely resembles Brer Fox in Harris's stories. Although most reader think of Brer Rabbit as the trickster among the *Uncle Remus* tales, Brer Fox is also portrayed as a trickster. It is Brer Fox who creates the Tar Baby and tricks Brer Rabbit into becoming stuck in the Tar Baby. While ultimately Brer Rabbit continually gets the better of Brer Fox, Brer Fox' failure does not diminish his tricky behavior. Since Reynard the Fox was already a prominent European figure, it makes sense that his adaptation would be inferior to the American trickster, Brer Rabbit. The similarity and alteration in Reynard the Fox to Brer Fox can be seen in the *Uncle*

Remus story “How Brother Fox Failed to Get His Grapes” and *the Reynard the Fox* story “The Grapes Hang High for Reynard the Fox.” In the original Reynard story, Reynard’s family is hungry. They have had a long winter and his children complain about eating bugs, including worms and beetles. Deciding to search for food, Reynard goes to Farmer Josh’s field and discovers Fox grapes; after several unsuccessful attempts to eat the grapes, Reynard gives up, claiming the grapes were probably sour anyway.

Similarly, Brer Fox attempts to eat grapes that hang too high and fails. The difference between Reynard and Brer Fox is the involvement of Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit out of jealousy that Brer Fox “wuz all primp up, too, mon, en he look slick en shiny lak he des come outen de sto’,” tricks Brer Fox into jumping into a tree for grapes (*Nights* 86). Unfortunately for Brer Fox, there is a wasp’s nest in the tree and Brer Fox ends up stung until he “wuz dat swell up twul little mo’n he’d a bus” (*Nights* 90). The stories, while different in the details, clearly reflect each other, the major difference being the presence of Brer Rabbit.

Rabbits, although existing in Europe, are not seen as tricksters. They are generally associated with religion. According to Susan Davis and Margo Demello, “Early European cultures believed meeting a hare would bring misfortune, because hares were thought to portend madness. (The expression “mad as a March hare” refers to the ‘madness’ displayed by a male rabbit when sexually aroused)” (133). In Europe rabbits were either feared for representing Satan, the underworld, and madness or were associated with women. Davis and Demello claim that when rabbits were associated with women, they were tied to women’s “fertility, sexuality, fecundity, the moon and rebirth on the one hand, and innocence, passivity and virginity on the other (134). In fact Europeans, did not view the rabbit as trickster, but “as a foolish, arrogant, or cowardly animal, who relies on his speed, not his intellect, to survive” (147). The European

view of rabbits stands in contrast to Harris' Brer Rabbit, who is, while arrogant, rarely cowardly and who maximizes his survival through use of his intelligence. When taking the different interpretations of rabbits into account, we can view the Reynard the Fox story and the Brer Fox story through the lens of cultural appropriation. Harris's appropriates Reynard the Fox and his story of the grapes, making the European character fall victim to the cunning of the American Brer Rabbit. Reynard the Fox was alone when he attempted to eat the grapes and thus gives up, but Brer Fox is goaded by Brer Rabbit into continuing to jump for the grapes until he reaches them. Not only does this change alter the message of the story, but it takes ownership, making the story American, rather than European.

Among the few European tales reworked in Harris's collections is also "The Wolf and the Seven Kids" by the Brothers Grimm. The Brothers Grimm tale is reflected Harris's story, "The Fire-Test," which tells of the time when Brer Rabbit leaves to find food and warns his children not to let anyone in because Brer Fox and Brer Wolf were about. Soon after Brer Rabbit leaves, Brer Wolf appears and sings, "I'll stay w'en you away, / 'Kaze no gol' will pay toll!" (*Night* 251). Recognizing that the voice was not beautiful enough to be their father, the little Rabbits laugh and send Brer Wolf away. Yet Brer Wolf returns again and again, a total of four times, until the fourth-time Brer Wolf has learned to sing so well the little Rabbits think he is their father. Upon letting Brer Wolf in, the little Rabbits are eaten. When Brer Rabbit returns home, he is dismayed and angered. He goes to Brer Tarrypin for help and Brer Tarrypin calls together all the animals and has them dig a pit. Within the pit, they build a fire, much of the work being completed by Brer Wolf, who has volunteered. With the pit and fire made, Brer Rabbit and Brer Tarrypin have each animal answer whether or not they had eaten the little Rabbits then jump over the fire. All of the animals make it across, except for Brer Wolf, who is so heavy from

eating all of the little Rabbits that he falls into the middle of the fire (*Night With Uncle Remus* 248-54).

For those who are familiar with the Grimm story of “The Wolf and the Seven Kids,” the similarities are vivid. The Grimm story tells of an old nanny-goat with seven kids, who leaves them one day to fetch food. She warns them not to open the door because a wolf is about. Like Harris’s tale, soon after the nanny-goat leaves, a wolf appears and tries to get in. The kids recognize that the wolf’s voice is too rough, saying, “You are not our mother. She has a soft gentle voice; but yours is rough, and we are quite sure that you are the wolf” (63). So, the wolf leaves, eats a piece of chalk to quiet his voice and returns. This time the kids see his paw and know it is not their mother, resulting in the wolf running to a baker and covering his paws with dough and flour to make them white. When the wolf returns to the kids, they are fooled and let him in. The wolf eats all of them but the youngest, who had hidden himself well. Searching for the wolf, the nanny-goat and last kid find him sleeping under a tree. They cut him open, freeing the kids who are alive, fill him with stones, and sew him shut. Later the wolf wakes very thirsty and goes to the river to drink. The weight of the stones cause him to fall over into the water and drown (63-66).

As with the Reynard and the grapes story, Harris has taken liberties with this European folklore, but the content is the same. A wolf eats the children of another animal and ends up punished for it. Both stories show how determined the wolves are, returning repeatedly to try to trick the children. It is important that both stories also start with the fact that the children recognize the wolves’ voices. The Grimm Wolf may have used chalk to defeat this obstacle, but it still strongly ties Brer Wolf and Grimm Wolf together. In addition, even though Brer Rabbit does not rescue his children and the wolf burns rather than drowns, Brer Wolf and the Grimm

Wolf face the same fate. Their greed weighs down their bellies causing them to die for their crimes.

Another more world famous fable can be found in Harris's collection is the Tortoise and the Hare. Renamed "Mr. Rabbit finds his Match at Last," Uncle Remus tells the Little Boy of how Brer Rabbit challenged Brer Terrapin to a race after Brer Rabbit boasts how no one can catch him (*Uncle Remus* 87-92). Following the *Aesop's Fable*, Brer Rabbit loses to Brer Terrapin. This particular story can be found in de La Fontaine's collection of Reynard the Fox fables and many other sources⁴. As the story is one of the most well-known fables in the world, it is unsurprising that it should make its debut in America among the *Uncle Remus* tales. A mild difference between the original version of the tale and Harris's tale is that Brer Rabbit only loses the race, while the Hare runs himself to death.

Other European stories share traits with the *Uncle Remus* stories, including "How the Hired Man Learned a Lesson," a de La Fontaine story, and several German tales, which depict Fox and Wolf's complicated relationship⁵ (Larned; Ranke). These stories, similar in many ways to Harris's works, provide support that certain European beliefs and traditions are appropriated into *Uncle Remus*, including the warning against lazy workers seen in "How the Hired Man Learned a Lesson" and "Death and the Negro Man," suggesting that "How the Hired Man" may be an analogue for Harris's story. The similarities between the stories fall short of being conclusive reflections, however, as the stories' plots and characters do not correspond closely enough to argue direct influence as seen with the grape story. It can, however, be argued that the similarities are evidence of the universality of folklore, but, since it is established that Reynard the Fox influenced Harris in the grape story, it is fair to say that Harris may have been influenced more subtly in other stories. In the case of European appropriation, I argue that Harris

appropriates characters like Reynard the Fox to tie his work to the classics of Europe and to create new, uniquely American stories, in which the American rabbit is superior to the European fox.

The European influence, only mildly acknowledged by Harris in passing, provides insight into Harris more than anything else. Although folklore does possess a certain level of universality, the distinct similarities between Harris's story and Reynard the Fox prove a more direct influence, which would not naturally exist in African tales. Unlike other critics, however, I am not arguing to view these stories as reflecting only one culture. Instead, I believe it is a far better approach to view Harris's work as an appropriation of multiple cultures.

Through Jay Hansford Vest, we can see how the Nature Theory can be applied to Harris's work. According to Vest, the Nature Theory calls for the animals and natural environment of the stories to be analyzed. Since folklore reflects the physical location in which it is told, including the naturally occurring vegetation and fauna, we can deduce the cultural influences. Aside from Harris's own claim that his stories possess African origins, we can identify specific characteristics that signal the stories' origins. More specifically we can use the Nature Theory to solidify Harris's claims as well as justify the reflections of Native Americans. It is due to the Nature Theory that Super argues that the stories are European in origin due to the presence of the wolf, which is not naturally found in African. Unfortunately, Super did not address the presence of wolves in North America.

Not only does Super fail to acknowledge the American wolf, but he neglects to address the European view of wolves. European folklore paints a clear picture of wolves as evil and carnivorous creatures, who prey on animals and humans alike. They are often the antagonists of stories or, when paired with a European fox-trickster, fools who are abused. Harris's Brer Wolf

is also often abused at his own expense, but rarely due his nature being “evil.” Rather, Brer Wolf often suffers due to his friendship with Brer Fox, hinting to the trait of loyalty rather than complete idiocy⁶. The similarities and differences between Brer Fox may be an unconscious result of Harris’s Euro-American heritage. As a white American, especially one who delighted in folklore, Harris would have been aware of European folklore and the European perspective of wolves. Therefore, it is no surprise that Harris would have unconsciously incorporated characteristics of the European wolf in addition to his own interpretations. In any matter, Super’s point about the Nature Theory is valid, even if not correctly applied, and does illuminate important characteristics of Harris’s stories which point toward cultural appropriation.

While the Nature Theory is borrowed from Vest, I will apply it to support not only the Native American reflections but the African as well. North American animals are predominant in the *Uncle Remus* collections. Yet a few animals in the stories reflect an African environment. Most notably, Mr. Lion, who appears in eight of the stories, is the most non-American animal. Despite belonging to the African environment, Mr. Lion is still referred to as the King of the Creatures in Harris’s tales. Along with Mr. Lion, Harris includes characters such as Brer Elephen and the Doodang. Like lions, elephants do not naturally exist in North America, but Brer Elephen finds his home in three stories. The Doodang, a strange fictional creature, appears to be a compilation of rhinoceros, elephant, and alligator, all three animals which exist in Africa. Not only is the Doodang an odd combination of African animals, but its description and habitat, a swamp, make it seem very similar to a mythological creature cryptozoologists call emela-ntouka. Emela-ntouka, according to cryptozoologists, lives in lakes and swamps in the Congo and remote parks of Africa. Another mythological African creature that the Doodang resembles is the chipekwe, which supposedly lives in the lakes and swamps of Angola and Zambia.⁷ The clear

similarities between the Doodang and the African mythological creatures supports the idea that the Doodang is an African creature, supporting the conclusion that the stories reflect African tales. Some critics may mention that Harris also includes Brer Tiger, which is not an African creature, and that lions and elephants are also seen in European folklore as a result of colonization of Africa and India. Yet these points do not detract from the Nature Theory support. Even when the African animals are seen in European folklore, it is due to cultural appropriation, and their origins are African.

In the case of Brer Rabbit, the Nature Theory must be put aside. Rabbit-tricksters are a reoccurring character in both African and North America. One of the most popular tricksters referred to from Africa is Cunnie Rabbit, who Vest points out, “is really not a rabbit at all” (25). In fact in *A Ring of Tricksters* by Virginia Hamilton, a collection of trickster tales from North America, West India, and Africa, Cunnie Rabbit appears as a water deerlet, or a small gazelle. Cunnie Rabbit’s name is misleading, similar to how the rabbit-trickster, Bobtail, of Vest’s tribe is misleading (20). Despite this one confusion, numerous tales involving a trickster rabbit do appear in several different African cultures, including the Bantu, the Hausa, the Bushmen, and the Hottentots. Contrary to Vest’s claim that he three latter possess “the only African rabbit motif formally manifest[ed] in the Remus collections,” Immaculate Kizza’s and Pattie Price’s books offer examples of trickster hares. Kizza’s book, *The Oral Tradition of Baganda of Uganda: A Study and Anthology of Legends, Myths, Epigrams, and Folktales*, details the oral folklore of the Baganda, one of the Bantu speaking tribes. In her collection, she presents four hare-trickster tales, which prove the existence of the African rabbit motif among the Baganda. Like Brer Rabbit, the Baganda Hare often tricks others as a method for survival, seen in his escape from his friend Fish and punishing Leopard for his greed (Kizza 161-65). Hare also

displays the Baganda preference of intelligence over strength (Kizza 168-72). While these stories do not appear retold in Harris's work, they do offer evidence to the existence of a Brer Rabbit-like trickster in Africa.

More importantly the tribes that possess the Hare-trickster are from the regions of Africa in which the slave trade occurred:

Of those Africans who arrived in the United States, nearly half came from two regions: Senegambia, the area comprising the Senegal and Gambia Rivers and the land between them, or today's Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Mali; and west-central Africa, including what is now Angola, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon. The Gambia River, running from the Atlantic into Africa, was a key waterway for the slave trade; at its height, about one out of every six West African slaves came from this area. (Pruitt)

The Bantu, the Bushmen, and Hottentots people can be found in Southern Africa, such as Angola. Angola and other West African countries were key to the African slave trade due to their geographical location. In modern Nigeria, the Hausa may be found, which was part of "the Bight of Biafra...an inlet of the Atlantic on Africa's western coast that was a hub of extensive slave-dealing operations" (Pruitt). Despite concerns that not all African cultures possess a trickster rabbit, the fact that the four African cultures that possess a trickster-rabbit were part of the slave trade offers support that their tales likely made it to America.

Price's 1938 book, *Bantu Tales*, provides a possible source for one of Harris's tales. Lyle Glazier uses Price's "The Tale of the Animals at the Well" as an analogue for Harris's "The Wonder Tar-Baby Story." In the Bantu story, the animals have gathered at a well, which dried up due to the summer heat, and are trying to call forth water. Thanks to the Tortoise they are

successful and the Bantu Hare tries to reap the benefit when he did nothing to help with the dry well (Price 22-31). The Tortoise, a clever animal, catches the Bantu Hare sneaking a drink by spreading gum onto his back. Glazier argues that the Tortoise's use of gum from a gum-tree to catch the Bantu Hare is an analogue for the Tar-Baby story. This approach is interesting, but, through careful comparison, I argue that this particular Bantu tale is better reflected in "Brother Rabbit Ties Mr. Lion."

In the Bantu tale, Jackal stands guard over the well to prevent the Bantu Hare from drinking. Yet the Bantu Hare tricks Jackal by offering him a sweet drink, which the Bantu Hare claims, "knocks people flat / Unless they are tied to something" (Price 25). Unsurprisingly, Jackal is duped and tied up, allowing the Bantu Hare to drink freely. The same events occur the next night, but this time it is between Lion and the Bantu Hare. Tricking another through the use of a sweet drink is a motif that Brer Rabbit also uses in "Why Brother Wolf Didn't Eat the Little Rabbits." In this story, Brer Rabbit offers Brer Wolf a sweet drink, which is later revealed to be molasses. When Brer Wolf becomes enamored with the drink, Brer Rabbit tells him it is fox blood, resulting in Brer Wolf hunting Brer Fox rather than Brer Rabbit's children, after whom Brer Wolf has been lusting. "Brother Rabbit Ties Mr. Lion" displays even stronger connections to the Bantu tale. Told by Aunt Tempy, rather than Uncle Remus, the story starts with Brer Rabbit being bowled over by a strong wind. Running to escape the wind, Brer Rabbit passes Mr. Lion, who inquires where Brer Rabbit is going in such a hurry. Brer Rabbit says, "'Run, Mr. Lion, run! Dey's a harrycane comin' back dar in de timbers. You better run!'" (*Nights* 328). Scared, Lion laments that he is too heavy to run and too big to lie low as Brer Rabbit suggests, and finally decides to hug a tree. Afraid he will let go, Mr. Lion accepts Brer Rabbit's offer to tie Mr. Lion to the tree. Only after Mr. Lion is secured does Brer Rabbit reveal that there is no

hurricane and Mr. Lion has been tricked. Angry, Mr. Lion roars until all of the animals come and ridicule Mr. Lion.

At first glance, this story already has many parallels to the Bantu story. The Jackal and the Bantu Lion are afraid of being knocked down and, therefore, allow the Bantu Hare to tie them up. Mr. Lion, afraid of the same thing for a different reason, allows Brer Rabbit to tie him to a tree. The result for the Bantu animals and Mr. Lion is that they are found and ridiculed for falling for the rabbits' trick. One final piece of information provided at the end of Aunt Tempy's story solidifies my claim that Harris's story directly reflects the Bantu. Curious as to Brer Rabbit's motivation, the Little Boy asks why he tied up Mr. Lion. Uncle Remus answers for Aunt Tempy, saying, "One time long 'fo' dat, honey, Brer Rabbit went ter de ranch fer ter git a drink er water, en ole Mr. Lion tuck'n druv 'im off, en frum dat time out Brer Rabbit bin huntin' a chance fer ter ketch up wid 'im" (*Nights* 329). Just as the Bantu Jackal and Lion were trying to keep Bantu Hare from the water, Mr. Lion had previously scared Brer Rabbit from water. Harris's version may be altered in its sequence of events, but the larger details of the story remain parallel.

Another reflection of African tales can be seen in "Brer Rabbit has Trouble with the Moon." In a close comparison to several African and Native American tales, William Bascom shows how closely Harris's tale reflects different African tribes' tales. In "Brer Rabbit has Trouble with the Moon," the Moon is staying low on his own farm, sick from shining every night for Mr. Man. The animals start to wonder why they are seeing the Moon less and less each night, so Brer Rabbit goes to investigate. When he finds the Moon, Brer Rabbit sees the Moon is not well and offers to help. The Moon says,

I wanten sen' word ter Mr. Man dat I ain't feelin' right well. I been shinin' fer 'im at night, an' done cotch col' fum bein' out in de night a'r so much, en' ef I don't put out my light, an take a recess, I'll be in a mighty bad way. I wanten take a holiday, but ef I don't sen' Mr. Man word, he'll be skeer'd ter death....I'm gittin' weak fer ter be mo' strong; I'm gwine in de shade fer ter git mo' light! (*Uncle Remus and the Little Boy* 39)

Running back to the house of Mr. Man, Brer Rabbit tries to convey the Moon's message. Brer Rabbit tells Mr. Man, "'I'm getting' weak; I got no strenk; I'm gwine what de shadders stay'" (*Uncle Remus and the Little Boy* 40). Unfortunately, Mr. Man did not understand Brer Rabbit's version of the message and sends Brer Rabbit back to the Moon with the message that "Seldom seed an' soon forgot; when Unk' Moon Dies his foots gits col'!" (*Uncle Remus and the Little Boy* 40). The Moon is enraged by Mr. Man's message and strikes Brer Rabbit in the face, splitting Brer Rabbit's lip. In retaliation, Brer Rabbit jumps into the Moon's face and scratches it, creating the craters we see.

In Harris's tale, it is important to notice three things. One, the Moon is ill and desires to rest, explaining the real moon's monthly cycle; two, Brer Rabbit, with the best of intentions, gets the message wrong and returns to the moon; and three, the Moon is enraged and strikes Brer Rabbit. Those three important events occur in several African tales. Hans Abrahamsson write a Hausa tale in which Moon also splits Hare's lip. Moon, rather than being sick, is dying, but promises the people that "Moon dies and becomes alive again, so will you die and come to life again" (7-8). This message is transmitted to man through Hare, who makes a mistake and tells man, "Moon dies and comes to life again, so you will die" (7-8). Much like Brer Rabbit, Hare forgets the Moon's exact words and conveys a slightly different meaning. A large difference though is that Hare's message results in death coming to man, while Brer Rabbit's message

results in Mr. Man appearing unconcerned about the Moon's health. The Moon in the Hausa tale punishes Rabbit for his poorly completed job by striking Hare with an ax, splitting his lip, and Hare attacks the Moon's face. Although Brer Rabbit is hit by the Moon because the Moon is angry at Mr. Man and Hare is punished for his own mistake, the stories clearly are parallel, with Harris's tale appearing to reflect the original Hausa story.

Abrahamsson summarizes several Bushman tales of Botswana, which follow the same story. Moon is dying and wishes to tell man that like she dies and lives again so will man. Moon, once again, uses Hare to convey the message, but Hare fails at his task and conveys that man will die and stay dead (30). Two differences are that the Moon originally gave the task to Tortoise, yet he was too slow, and, in several of the Bushman versions, it is Man that splits Hare's lip, not the moon. In the case of these versions, the fact that man attacks Hare for delivering an undesirable message reflects Harris's version in a way that the Hausa story doesn't. Because Hare in the Hausa story delivers an incorrect message, it is understandable that the Moon is upset. Yet in the Bushman versions where man attacks Hare and in Harris's story, Brer Rabbit appears to represent "don't kill the messenger" for delivering unfavorable news. The Hottentot tribes possess almost the exact same story, with the exception that the Moon hits Hare with a stick rather than with a fist, ax, or stone ("Moon" 344-49). It is suggested that Hare may have deceived man or conveyed the message incorrectly on purpose as a malicious act. No matter the version, Harris's Brer Rabbit and Moon story clearly reflects the story of the Hausa, Bushman, and Hottentot.

The influence of African tales on Harris's work is clear. Aside from Harris, multiple critics previously mentioned have written books and essays which align *Uncle Remus* stories with African folklore. Yet the mere presence of the European and African tales is not the only

significance they possess. The manner in which Harris uses the European and African tales is crucial. During the post-Reconstruction era in which the South faced severe economic and political issues, Harris weaved these tales into stories that clearly promoted the ideal South, focusing on the “Happy Slave” and the prosperous plantation. By specifically appropriating the European and African tales into his collections among his promotion of the Old South, Harris furthers his Post-Civil War psyche. By incorporating European and African folklore, Harris validates and adds his version of the idealized past, supporting his Post-Civil War psyche.

The study of folklore is often more complicated than non-folklorists realize. “Folk-lore”⁸ is a generally new term, first coined in the late eighteenth century. Originally a German word, *volks*, the term folk-lore was first used in 1846 by Thoms in England (Dundes 1). The most popular definition of folk-lore arose in the nineteenth century:

a study...which collects and compares the similar but immaterial relics of old races, the surviving superstitions and stories, the ideas which are in our time but not of it. Properly speaking, folklore is only concerned with the legends, customs beliefs of the Folk, of the people, of the classes which have least been altered by education, which have shared least in progress. But the students of folklore soon finds that these unprogressive classes retain many beliefs and ways of savages.... The student of folklore is thus led to examine the usages, myths, and ideas of savages, which are still retained, in rude enough shape, by the European peasantry. (Lang 11)

Still used today, this definition isolates folklore as the product and possession of lower class individuals. Alan Dundes informs us that, per the nineteenth century beliefs, there were three groups of people: Savage or Primitive, who were pre-non-literate, such as Natives Americans and slaves; Folk or Peasant, who were illiterate, rural, and lower stratum, such as poor farmers,

and civilized or elite, who were literate, urban and upper stratum (4). Aside from the racist and elitist tones in the definition, this definition has been the basis for defining folklore. Even today some folklorist still use Lang's definition when handling South American natives.

Since Southern folklore is a subcategory based on geography, folklorists must first define what geographical boundaries make up the South. The imaginary boundaries have led to a variety of questions. Some argue that southern Florida and Texas are not part of the Southern folklore boundary, while others wish to exclude Kentucky, Maryland, West Virginia, and Missouri, believing that the Southern boundary should be based on the Confederacy (Burrison 23). The most inclusive boundary is depicted by Richard Pillsbury in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* presented in John A. Burrison's book (Fig. 1.1). The boundary is defined as the areas that formed distinctly southern culture due to the plantation system with its enslaved labor force, with the Mason-Dixon line as its upper limit, east Texas as its western limit, the east coast as its eastern limit and midland Florida and Louisiana as its southern limits (Burrison 24). The map is further divided into transitional areas and sub-regional boundaries, but these subdivisions are not important to my paper as Harris's state of Georgia lies in the middle of the Southern cultural boundary. Furthermore, the sources that Harris cites in his introductions, the Sea Islands and North Carolina, also lie within the geographical area.

With these boundaries in mind, we can visualize the landscape of Southern folklore. Burrison says, "The physical isolation of farms and plantations of the frontier and antebellum South, and the impoverishment of the post-Civil War South, supported a mindset that put a premium on the ways of the ancestors" (19). By this Burrison indicates that the South was a ripe location for the creation and support of a distinct folklore. Charles Joyner supports this idea by saying,

Southern folklife involves everything southerners do, think, hope, and fear in our short existence on this planet. It has been a means of preserving the memorable experiences of southerners. It has been a means of protesting – humorously, bitterly, or militantly – the hard life imposed by nature, or society, or by the inhumanity of some men towards other men; a means of commenting on manners and morals, on the trivial and the transcendental in groping of southern men and women for a life of meaning and dignity. (12)

Southern folklore, for some, becomes a point of pride and cultural record, as Bascom argues it should be. Reflecting the Southern beliefs, Southern folklore possesses six identifiable qualities, which fulfill all four of Bascom's functions. Burrison and Joyner explain that Southern folklore possesses an appreciation of rural and farming traditions, a support of domestic traditions, an emphasized importance of food and proper Southern behavior, a clear stance on racial relations, and a reflection of a Post-Civil War psyche. While Harris's works possess all six qualities, it is the reflections of a Post-Civil War psyche that become illuminated by Harris's appropriation of European and African stories.

The Civil War, the bloodiest war on American soil, remains a haunting part of Southern history. Burrison says, "This episode, which I rarely heard mentioned up North, is still, a century and half later, a traumatic experience for some southerners, spoken about as if it occurred only yesterday" (29). Costing lives, land, money, and pride, the Civil War remained present in the minds of Southerners like the Union soldiers during Reconstruction. Even those who did not fight in the Civil War carried the psychological burden of the war. Harris was no exception.

The South, surviving Reconstruction, became politically savvy, but economically broken by the 1880s (Cash 145-46). Poverty weakened the South and so they turned to industrialization combined with a sight on the past. W.F. Cash claims that

[t]he sociological and psychological consequences...[were] the turning back of the South on the road to aristocracy, and the beginning of decay, in planter and the superior sort of yeoman, of the actual content of the pattern at the same time when the legend of its full and inalienable inheritance was being finally elaborated To have any fair chance of coping with the new exigencies, that is, these Southerners were almost irresistibly summoned back upon the old backcountry heritage which had been progressively falling out of view in the last decades prior to the war. (149-50)

Seen through Harris's subtle and detailed descriptions of plantation labors and racial hierarchy, his infatuation with the pre-Civil War past appears. Harris, like his fellow Southerners, idealized a past which had long passed away. The presence of European folktales assists in Harris's contemplation of the idealized past. As Americans are mostly descended from Europeans, Harris, like his peers, would have been acutely aware of his European roots. Although early nineteenth century Romantic writers attempted to create a separate "American" identity that painted Europeans as either bestial or archaic, Harris's works shows a more idealist approach to his European past.

Like many Southerners during the Reconstruction, Harris struggled with the concept of Southern identity. As a whole the South had been emasculated and degraded in their eyes, with their economy destroyed through war and emancipation. Harris's abandonment of the early nineteenth century "masculine" man and the qualities associated with him in exchange for cleverness reflects the Post-Civil War psyche's return to the past. Europe, being the ultimate past

of America, holds the origins of the aristocracy, which the Old South arguably possessed. The existence and pride of the Southern aristocracy can be seen in the pre-Civil War novel, *A Golden Christmas*, in which William Gilmore Simms creates Southern identity out of his aristocratic characters' European heritage. In Simms's book, his characters are distinctly proud of their European bloodlines, especially as aristocrats, to the point that it is destructive. While Simms's book calls for an end of destructive pride of bloodlines, his work still denotes the importance of European heritage in the South. Although Harris does alter the European stories to make them more "American," seen through Brer Rabbit's domination of Brer Fox, he still enacts the Post-Civil War psyche's inclination to the distant aristocratic past.

Miss Sally helps emphasize Harris's obsession with the aristocracy. Miss Sally represents the proper Southern woman. Unlike the Second Little Boy's mother, who effectively feminizes her son, Miss Sally breaks the Northern stereotype of Southern women: "Throughout the 1890s, northerners praised the southern man's chivalry and his keen recognition of women's submissive nature" (Silber 175). Yet through Uncle Remus, Harris makes clear that true Southern women, while proper, are not submissive:

"Talk 'bout yo' smart wimmen folks! he exclaimed. "Dey ain't na'er men in de worl' what kin hol' a candle ter yo' gran'ma; an' des es you see 'er now, dat des de way she been sence she wuz a gal. She know what you gwineter say long 'fo' you kin git de words out 'n yo' mouf; she kin look right thoo you an' tell you what you thinkin' bout. You may laugh all you want, but ef youer feelin' bad she'll know it. When Miss Sally goes an' dies, dey won't be na'er nudder somebody fer ter take her place. Dey ain't no two ways 'bout dat." (*Told* 156)

In his exclamation, Uncle Remus validates the old plantation system by expressing deep loyalty, affection, and respect for his mistress. He is also subverting the Northern stereotype of Southern women by setting Miss Sally up as the true Southern woman, a woman who cannot be replaced or reproduced. This subversion coupled with the presence of European folklore illuminates Harris's focus on the European and aristocratic past, a past which Harris captures and manipulates.

His purposeful appropriation of the slave folklore further enforces his Post-Civil War psyche. Part of capturing the ideal past was idealizing the slave system. As previously mentioned, Harris was infatuated with slaves and their culture. He had found minstrel shows and other exhibitionist events of slave language and culture to be insulting for their "inaccuracy." Quick to condemn the "unauthentic," Harris compiled the *Uncle Remus* stories with the intent to preserve. Yet his desire to preserve the slave tales stemmed not only from his affection towards slaves, but also to his Post-Civil War psyche. Many in the South were not sure how to move forward in the new economy where slave labor did not exist. Emancipation caused a collapse not only in the economy but in the social structure. Southern states began to create laws to implement the pre-Civil War system of slavery under a different name, causing confusion and resentment among blacks and whites. It is no surprise then that writers who possessed the Post-Civil War psyche would idealize the slavery system. Harris, criticized for his idealization of the slavery system, incorporates the African tales not as an attempt to preserve Africa, but to preserve slavery and the plantation. The mere presence of the African tales written as slave stories enforces Harris's goal of preserving the past, slave system and all. Much as Miss Sally helps reinforce Harris's fixation on the aristocratic past, Uncle Remus, the conveyer of the slave

stories reinforces Harris's attempts to glorify the plantation system in a world where such a system is lost.

Uncle Remus, the smiling, loving, and loyal slave, best exemplifies Harris's idealized past. Contrary to Hugh Keenan's view that Uncle Remus and the Little Boy's relationship represents a mending of the North and South, I contend that Uncle Remus's role appears to be the idolic image of the past (58). So having seen the Little Boy's parents grow up, then the Little Boy and the Second Little Boy, Uncle Remus never seems to age. Even though the books are written decades after the Civil War, the world of Uncle Remus still exists in an eternal pre-Civil War world in which slavery not only exists but is enforced and supported. In "Brother Rabbit's Barbecue," Uncle Remus seeks out Miss Sally when he cannot find the Little Boy and fears the Little Boy is playing with the Faver boys, low bred and poorly behaved children. His presence and questioning of Miss Sally upsets her and she quickly puts Uncle Remus in his place: "So do I! exclaimed the lady. 'You'd be in the cotton-patch instead of lazying around here doing children's work.'" (*Seven* 20). Although this instance is a rare conflict between Miss Sally and Uncle Remus, it shows the hierarchical difference between Uncle Remus and Miss Sally. Even though Miss Sally grants Uncle Remus special treatment, he is still a slave, and, therefore, her inferior. This instance perfectly illuminates the Post-Civil War fear of blacks not knowing their place in society due to their freedom. Incorporating such conflicts, especially in a children's story, reflects Harris own anxieties and suggests that Harris's attempts to preserve slave tales is also an attempt to preserve slavery. Instead of resisting or hating the system he exists in, Uncle Remus supports it.

The infatuation with the Southern past and Uncle Remus's role as its representative are expressed further in "A Story of War." Harris begins the story by telling readers why a woman

named Miss Theodosia Huntingdon of Burlington, Vermont, moved to the South. Her first and foremost reason is to be near her brother, who “astonished his acquaintances by marrying a young lady, the male members of whose family had achieved considerable distinction in the Confederate army” (*Uncle Remus* 203). The marriage between Miss Huntingdon’s brother, a Yankee and Uncle Remus’s master, and a southern woman sets up a romanticized tone, which became popular during post-Reconstruction. Nina Silber details the growing romanticism of a northern man marrying a southern woman, healing the wounds of the Civil War. Silber writes, “[I]n the bonds of matrimony, there seemed to be hope that northerners and southerners would learn to come together. Here was a sign that what could not be accomplished through investments or through constitutional amendments might be accomplished through love” (40). Adopting the popular motif into this story endears Harris’s work to northern readers as it also undermines the northern ideals of the new Union.

In the story, Miss Huntingdon visits her brother, who proudly talks of how Uncle Remus is a warrior. Mr. Huntingdon instructs Uncle Remus to tell the tale and he does, describing how Ole Miss, Miss Sally and Master James’s mother, was home with the children while her husband was at war. Two Union soldier came to the house and looked around as the women ignored them until they left. Later Uncle Remus went to look after his stock, when he saw blue gun smoke and realized a Yankee was shooting at boys coming up the road. When the Yankee sighted on Master James, who was walking his little sister Miss Sally home, Uncle Remus shot the Yankee. Miss Sally and Ole Miss helped save the Yankee’s life but he lost an arm. Once finished with his story, Miss Huntingdon asked how Uncle Remus could shoot a man who fought for his freedom. Uncle Remus tells her, “w’en I see dat man take aim, en Mars Jeems gwine home ter Ole Miss en Miss Sally, I des disremembered all ’bout freedom en lammed aloose”

(214). He continues by explaining that Miss Sally cared for them until he was well and then points to Mr. Huntingdon, saying “en now dar he is” suggesting that the man he shot was Mr. Huntingdon, his new master. Miss Huntingdon is horrified but Uncle Remus has the last word, he says, “I gin ’im dem.... en I gin ’im deze (holding up his own brawny arms) En ef dem ain’t nuff fer enny man de I done los’ de way” (214).

Uncle Remus’s story exhibits several crucial southern elements. In the choice between freedom and family, Uncle Remus chose family, protecting his masters over the Yankee soldier who would have freed him. In fact, not only does Uncle Remus save his masters but he adds to their family, bringing the Yankee soldier in, leading to Mr. Huntingdon’s marriage to Miss Sally. Instead of ending the Southern plantation, he extends it. The cost of Mr. Huntingdon’s arm is Uncle Remus’s continual loyalty, which he provides through his physical strength and keeping the family together. Starting with the romanticized tale of the northern man and the southern woman, Harris creates a preset idea of how the tale will end. Maintaining the notion that love will conquer and unify difference, Harris molds the tale so that it not the South joining the North in the new world, but the North joining the South in the idealized world. This story and Uncle Remus himself resist the Northern desire for the South to admit defeat because the Northerners believed “the northern victory would not be secured until southern whites acknowledged that they had been thoroughly and soundly beaten” (Silber 41). Harris’s work rallies against the call for submission with Uncle Remus as the center of his resistance.

Woven into “Two Little Tales, as Told by Old Uncle Remus” is a subtle reference to Uncle Remus’s continual role as protector of the Old Southern ways. Harris writes, “The old man was smoothing out a piece of dingy red cloth on his knee.... It seemed to be a red-velvet skull cap, and it was surmounted by a small yellow tassel” (*Seven* 15). The Little Boy watches

Uncle Remus and does not recognize the hat so he asks what it is: “‘Hit look like it mought be a skull cap,’ replied the old negro cautiously, ‘en den agin hit look like it mought be some er deze yer military fixin’s...I bin had it now gwine on fifty yer er mo’” (*Seven* 15). Uncle Remus’s hesitant response signifies the importance and danger associated with the hat. A skull cap would be a religious hat, but traditionally does not have a yellow tassel, which suggests that the second possibility that Uncle Remus lists is the true answer; the cap is a military fixing. During the Civil War, the Union had a division known as the Zouaves, skilled French-trained fighters, who wore red hats with yellow tassels. If we interpret the hat as a souvenir from a Zouave soldier, then it suggests that not only was Uncle Remus in the Civil War, but that he fought for the South, further placing him not only as a man, but an ideal southern slave. Harris’s idealized sentiments of the Old South fit in well during his time. The 1890s saw “a burst of nationalistic inquiry and enthusiasm” as well as “resurgence in southern communities of lost cause celebrations” (Silber 161,163). Following the trend, Harris carefully created Uncle Remus and his world as one that existed outside of the Civil War and even the post-Civil War era.

By creating a narrative frame work that vocalizes the fears and nostalgia of the Post-Civil War psyche, Harris creates an association between the tales he preserves and the Post-Civil War psyche. The tales he chooses to present are not random, for they are tales which represent the slave culture. It becomes clear that the slave stories in addition to the European and the narrative frame are evidence of Harris’s Post-Civil War psyche.

Harris, despite not fighting in the Civil War himself, fills his texts with the post-Civil War psyche. He idealizes a nonexistent southern past using Uncle Remus as his idol. The battles never truly disappear from the text as Harris records the tale of Uncle Remus as a rebel soldier, the use of Zouave’s cap, and other military inspired stories.⁹ He also expresses the deep-

felt alienation of Southerners to the new generation, offering the hope that the new generation can be saved with the proper education¹⁰. Yet the crucial part of Harris's Post-Civil War psyche is his incorporation of European and African folklore as validation for and addition to his version of the idealized past.

CHAPTER III

THE NATIVE BRER RABBIT

The most challenging connection for critics to see in the *Uncle Remus* collections is the Native American link. This connection exists in multiple forms. The white-Native American connection is well detailed in the bloody history of Native American wars and removal. Unfortunately, the history between slaves and Native Americans has been largely neglected. It becomes necessary to prove that Native Americans had clear interactions with slaves. To begin with, it has been firmly established that Cherokee, Seminole, Choctaw, and Chickasaw tribes actively participated in slave trade and eventual emancipation. Barbara Krauthamer dedicates her whole book to the examination of Choctaw and Chickasaw Indian masters and African-descended slaves from the eighteenth century until the end of the U.S. Civil War. The *Cherokee Phoenix*, a secret newspaper used by the Cherokee nation to send news and spread resistance during the nineteenth century removal, mentions “[o]ne chief . . . has a dozen slaves...” (1). In another *Phoenix* article provides a census from eight Cherokee districts, including three districts with slaves (race is not specified) and five districts that list “male negroes” and “female negroes.” The number of “negroes” in those five districts totals to 601 and the number of slaves totals to 337 (1).¹¹ Although these statistics and the connection between slavery and Native Americans does not necessarily equate to a cultural sharing between Native Americans and slaves, such a connection exists. The *Cherokee Phoenix* presents extracts from Jno L. Allen, a sub-agent of the Chickasaws. He claims, “All the arts necessary for farming use, stocking plows,

halving axes, hoes, making slides, truck wheels, draw bars, gates, &c. is generally confined to the common Indians and slaves” (1). In this extract, Allen informs readers that the art of farming is shared among Indians and slaves, suggesting that an exchange of knowledge did occur between the two groups.

In two of his introductions, Harris also admits there may have been interactions between slaves and Native Americans, although he does not accept it. The *Uncle Remus* introduction addresses suggestions by Professor J.W. Powell: “[H]e [Powell] is of the opinion that they are borrowed by the Negroes from the red-men” (*Uncle ix*). Harris dismisses this view because another researcher found tales similar to South American Indians, which Harris claims came from Africa originally. Yet he addresses the issue a second time in *Nights with Uncle Remus*. He says, “It has been suspected by even Professor J.W. Powell, of the Smithsonian Institution, that Southern negroes obtained their myths and legends from Indians; but it is impossible to adduce in support of such a theory a scintilla of evidence that cannot be used in support of just the opposite theory, namely that Indians borrowed their stories from the negroes” (xxviii). Oddly enough, Harris insists upon authenticity of his African tales so vehemently that he even discounts South African tales, seen in his discussion of a collection of Kaffir¹² tales by Theal. Theal argues that his stories are authentic Kaffir tales because they were told by and written by Kaffir natives. Harris quickly points out that “[i]t is more likely that his carefulness in this respect has led him to overlook a body of folk-lore among the Kaffirs precisely similar to that which exists among the negroes of the Southern States. If comparative evidence is worth anything, – and it may be worthless in this instance, – the educated natives have ‘cooked’ the stories to suit themselves” (*Nights xvii*).

Despite Harris's adamant belief that Indians took from slaves, he does concede, "The Creeks, as well as other tribes, were long in contact with the negroes, some of them were owners of slaves, and it is perhaps in this way that the animal stories of two races became in a measure blended. The discussion of this subject cannot be pursued here, but it is an interesting one. It offers a wide field for both speculation and investigation" (xxxix-xxxii). Based on such concession and the historical evidence of Native American and slave interaction, it is fair to claim that there is a presence of Native American folklore in *Uncle Remus*, whether Harris knew it or not.

Jay Hansford Vest details the accounts of Indian enslavement in Virginia. Starting in the 1600s, Indian children brought to the College of William and Mary for education were sold as slaves, and Indian prisoners from a Powhatan uprising were kept by the English as servants (27). As the result of Bacon's Rebellion, Indians who committed acts against the English and were captured in "war" were made into slaves legally by the Virginia General Assembly in 1676 (27). The practice of using war against Indians to gain Indian slaves existed in South Carolina during the same time and eventually became part of the Carolina domestic economy in the 1700s (28). More interesting still, Vest notes that a minimum of 5,500 Indians were enslaved in the Carolinas and they "melted into the black population" (28). The reason that Indian slaves "melted into the black population" in not only South Carolina, but Virginia as well, is due to laws that bound Indians to black slaves. In 1705 "the Virginia assembly decreed that 'the child of an Indian and the child, grand child [sic], or great grand child [sic] of a negro shall be deemed, accounted, held and taken to be a mulatto'" (29). This decree was later adopted by both South and North Carolina. Under the laws of enslavement, any black or mulatto person became enslaved. Vest says, "Thus, at this time no one could claim a Native American racial heritage, and if they

attempted to do so they were labeled mulatto or black by the state,” leading to their enslavement (30). Such laws and attitudes led to not only high numbers of Native American slaves, but high levels of interactions between Native Americans and African slaves as well as interracial coupling among the slaves.

The Seminoles of Florida provide an example of slave and Native American interactions. During the early 1800s free blacks and fugitive slaves ran to Florida from South Carolina and Georgia. Once in Florida, they found sympathy and aid from the Seminole tribe. These blacks became known as the black Seminoles in the twentieth century (“Who Were the Black Seminoles”). Although considered negroes by the nineteenth century standards, the black Seminoles are historically included because of “the occasional historical incidence of intermarriage between blacks and Indians; the black Seminoles’ adoption of Seminole cultural practices; and, perhaps most importantly, the ongoing political and social participation of black Seminoles in the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma” (“Were They Indians”). Although the black Seminoles did remain separate among the Seminole tribe, they were largely accepted, even defending the Seminole tribe during the three Seminole wars (“Black Seminoles”). After the second Seminole war, the Seminoles and the black Seminoles were moved together to Oklahoma, where they were under the rule of the Creek tribe (“Black Seminoles”).

Considering the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek involvement in the slave trade as well as the existence of Indian slaves in Virginia and the Carolinas and the black Seminoles, it becomes impossible to ignore the interactions between African slaves and Native Americans. The interaction between slaves and Native Americans existed for more than fifty years, allowing for substantial exchange of culture.

Since Harris openly states that a large number of his fans sent him tales from Virginia and the Carolinas, it is fair to say that Native American tales existed in those sent. Due to the lack of accurate records, it is not possible to confirm the racial heritage of those who were slaves in Virginia and the Carolinas or where the stories sent to Harris actually came from. For the sake of this paper, only the tribes known for participating in the slave trade have been included, not only for their recorded interaction with African slaves, but also due to their closer proximity to Harris himself.

One of Harris's stories, "Why the Guinea-Fowls are Speckled," proves the intense and extensive cultural mingling that occurred between whites, Africans, and Native Americans. Uncle Remus tells the Little Boy that one day the Guinea-fowls are talking to Sis Cow when Mr. Lion appears. Sis Cow is terrified of Mr. Lion, who loves cow meat more than anything. Yet Sis Cow holds her ground as Mr. Lion sneaks closer and closer. The Guinea-fowl seeing Mr. Lion become scared and run around until they see how brave Sis Cow is. One Guinea-fowl becomes brave and runs between Sis Cow and Mr. Lion, flings up dirt and runs back. He did this several times until Mr. Lion became blind and angry, lunging at Sis Cow. Taking advantage of his blindness, Sis Cow lowers her horns and gores him. With Mr. Lion dead, Sis Cows offers to repay the Guinea-fowl for helping her and they, who at the time were blue, ask if she could help them blend in more to nature. Sis Cow has them fetch a bucket, which she fills with her milk and then uses her tail to sprinkle milk onto them, giving the Guinea-fowl speckles (193-98).

This story closely resembles the Choctaw story, "Why the Guinea-Hen is Speckled." Tom Mould records an almost identical story in his collection of Choctaw tales:

A man had a cow, which he left in the pasture while he went off hunting.

During his absence, the cow had a calf and a wolf came up and wanted to get it. The wolf walked around and round the cow but the cow kept facing him.

An old guinea hen, seeing what was going on, came there and began walking back and forth between the cow and the wolf until such a dust arose that the wolf could not see the cow and the latter ran her horn through him and killed him.

At that time the guinea hen was dark blue in color, but the cow was so grateful to it that she sprinkled it with milk, making it speckled as it is today. (198)

With the exception that the wolf is exchanged for a lion and the Choctaw tale possesses a calf, the two stories are identical. No matter the predatory animal, the stories are essentially identical in content. However, upon further research, I found that guinea-fowl are not native to North America, once again invoking the Nature Theory. The story, once again with minor changes, appears in the Swahili culture, another Bantu tribe. A children's book by Barbara Kuntson details the events, mirroring both the Choctaw and Harris's version. Thanks to the knowledge of the extensive interaction between Africans and Natives Americans, we can assume that the story was most likely African, but was adopted by Harris and the Choctaw. With this in mind, it is also fair to assume that if African tales were adopted by Native Americans and whites, then African slaves and whites most likely adopted Native American tales. Cultural exchange and appropriation is a two, or in this case, a three-way street.

By providing this example of the existence of cultural exchange between slaves and Native Americans, I am establishing precedent that Native American and African tales were exchanged. If we can identify African stories among Native America, it is only fair to assume the reverse occurred. Some may use this example to question the authenticity of Native American stories, but such claims are dismissive of a nation of cultures. While Africans retained

their own stories, they were in a foreign land. After generations some alterations or loss of stories would not be surprising. However, Native Americans still lived among their own people, providing a continual and long term source of stories. Tom Mould defends the origins of the Choctaw stories eloquently:

Once the first Europeans began exploring the continent, bringing with them weapons, disease, manufactured goods, and Christianity, it was believed that all this [Choctaw culture] was forever destroyed.

True, much did change with the European invasion, but life had been changing before then, too. The changes that occurred before the fifteenth century may not have been as dramatic as after, but it is important to note that there *was* change. Culture is dynamic. Its survival depends on its perpetual capacity to change.

Stories, like all aspects of culture, are always changing too. Their oral nature makes them all the more dynamic. So when we look at the stories in this collection, even the first ones recorded in the middle of the eighteenth century, we do not find *the* original story – there is no such thing. And conversely, stories that include obvious reference to the Bible are not inauthentic; they merely highlight the influences that have shaped that version. Despite the bias of collectors and the obvious influence of outside cultures, all the stories in this book are authentic. (i-ii)

Mould argues that the authenticity of the Choctaw stories should not be questioned just because they have obvious influences from other cultures. The stories in their roots, messages, and design belong to the Choctaw and have changed with time as all oral traditions do. In preceding chapters, Mould even makes a claim to Harris's work, saying, "Such tales inspired Joel Chandler Harris to write his stories of Uncle Remus" (194). Recognizing the controversy, Mould says,

“Questions of the origin of these tales are hotly debated and have been resolved” (194). Yet Mould points out that oral tradition is dynamic and ever changing but still authentic. Just as we accept that the African and European tales are authentic but altered, we must accept the same for the Native American stories.

Focusing on Brer Rabbit, several stories in which he appears closely resemble Native American tales. “How Mr. Rabbit Lost His Fine Bushy Tail” appears in *Uncle Remus* and details how Brer Rabbit lost his tail due to a trick played on him by Brer Fox. Being the arrogant rabbit, Brer Rabbit always boasted about his tail to Brer Fox, who grew tired of the bragging. One day Brer Fox walks by Brer Rabbit with a line of fish over his shoulder. When Brer Rabbit inquires how Brer Fox caught so many fish, Brer Fox says that he goes to the creek at sun down and sticks his tail in the water until sun up, pulling out arms full of fish. Brer Rabbit, eager for arms full of fish, goes to the creek and does as Brer Fox says. As Brer Rabbit sits with his tail in the water, the temperature drops and, when day light comes, “[h]e make a pull, en he feel like he comin’ in two, en he fetch nudder jerk, en lo en beholes, whar wuz his tail?” (*Uncle Remus* 126).

This story mirrors both a Cherokee and a Choctaw tale. The Cherokee story begins: “When the world was young, Rabbit has a long bushy tail. It was longer and bushier than Fox’s tail. Rabbit was very proud of his tail. He constantly told the other animals how beautiful his tail was. One day Fox tired of hearing Rabbit brag about his tail. He decided to end Rabbit’s boasting” (Mooney 129). So Fox goes to the lake with four fish, cuts a hole in the ice, and ties the fish to his tail. When Rabbit comes by, he asks Fox what he is doing and Fox tells Rabbit he is fishing. Fox continues to tell Rabbit that he plans to fish for a week, then trade the fish to the Real People for beautiful tail combs, of which there is only one set left. Since Rabbit’s tail was longer and more beautiful than Fox’s tail, Rabbit believed he could catch enough fish in one

night to buy those combs before Fox. Once Fox leaves to rest for the night, Rabbit drops his tail into the water and stays there all night. In the morning, Fox returns and Rabbit finds he is frozen in place, resulting in Fox pushing Rabbit and Rabbit's tale popping off (Mooney 129-30).

The Cherokee tale and Harris's story are nearly identical with the exception that Brer Fox does not push Brer Rabbit. Despite the universality of folklore, these two tales are far too similar to be merely an accident. Even the Choctaw version remains extremely close to Harris's story, despite obvious difference. According to the Choctaw story:

A rabbit wanted to catch a fish, it was said.

And there was a frozen pond.

The rabbit broke the frozen ice and hung his tail into the water and sat, it was said. And then something came and nibbled. He thought it was a fish, but it was an alligator who had bitten his tail off.

That's why the rabbit has a short tail. (Mould 202-03)

Although this version lacks the presence of Fox, the main elements of the frozen pond and Rabbit fishing with his tail remain. I would not argue that the Choctaw version is as influential as the Cherokee, but the similarities do suggest at least a mild influence on the *Uncle Remus* version. In addition, the Choctaw story of how Bear lost his tail resembles the Cherokee and *Uncle Remus* stories of how Rabbit lost his tail:

A bear once met a fox with a fish in his mouth and said, "How did you get the fish?"

The fox directed him to a certain big lake, which was frozen over because it was winter, and told him to cut a hole in the ice, stick his tail down into the water, and when he felt a fish bite it jerk suddenly and pull the fish out.

The bear did as he had been directed, but he did not feel a bite for a long time.

Meanwhile, however, ice began to form about his tail, and presently, when he became restless, he pulled against it and thought that a fish was biting. Consequently he jerked suddenly but his tail was so firmly frozen in that it came off, and that is why bears do not have them. (Mould 2020)

Possessing both the frozen lake and the mischievous fox yet again, the tale of how bear lost his tail closely resembles Brer Rabbit and Cherokee Rabbit's stories. Even though the story focuses on Bear, the tale adds support for Native American influences on Harris's stories due to its nearly exact plot line and characters.

Four more stories about Brer Rabbit appear in the *Uncle Remus* texts which reflect Native American tales. The first is another "why something is the way it is" story, "Why the Alligator's Back Is Rough." According to Uncle Remus, the alligator used to have a smooth back and would lie on the shore unseen. One day Brer Rabbit is running from Dog, when he comes across Brer 'Gater. Brer Rabbit complains to Brer 'Gater about his troubles and Brer 'Gater laughs. Brer 'Gater claims he never has trouble. No one bothers him and he catches all the food he wants. Laughing at Brer Rabbit, Brer 'Gater mocks Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit, angry, hides near Brer 'Gater from Dog, but keeps an eye on the alligator. In time, Brer 'Gater falls asleep and Brer Rabbit gathers broom-grass, placing it on Brer 'Gater's back and setting it on fire. Brer 'Gater awakes, screaming "trouble," and runs in the water to put out the fire (*Nights* 141-46).

The Choctaw possess a story which details nearly the same events. Alligator used to be smooth and hide in the lake that the animals lived near. He would sleep on the bank, looking like a log, and the children would play nearby. When they got too close, Alligator would snatch

the children up. Soon the animals began to ask where their children were disappearing to. Monkey, having watched the lake from a tree, went to Rabbit and told him what he saw. Both were too scared to approach Alligator, so they waited until he was asleep. Rabbit ordered the animals to grab anything that burned and place it on Alligator's sleeping back. Then Rabbit ran, retrieved some fire, and set Alligator's back on fire (Mould 204-05).

Unlike the previous tale, this one is not identical to Harris's story. Several key differences are visible. First, Brer Rabbit acted alone and did it out of spite more than the safety of other animals. Second, Brer 'Gater only hints that he eats the other animals that come near him, listing creatures like shrimp, fish, and crab (143). Even with these differences though the stories are startlingly similar. In both stories, it is Rabbit who sets the alligators back on fire for punishment. Since Brer Rabbit also is said to keep an eye on Brer 'Gater repeatedly after they talk, I would suggest that Brer Rabbit also saw Brer 'Gater as a threat as well as one who hurt his ego.

Another reflection of Native American culture in Harris's work can be found in "Brother Rabbit and Mr. Wildcat." "Brother Rabbit and Mr. Wildcat" details Brer Rabbit's escape from death once again when he is captured by Mr. Wildcat:

Brer Rabbit, he 'uz gallin-up down de road, en ole Mr. Wildcat, he 'uz layin' stretch' out takin' a nap on a tree-lim' hanging' 'crosst de road. He year Brer Rabbit come a-lickity-clickitin' down de raod, en he des sorter fix hisse'f, en w'en Brer Rabbit come a-dancin' und' de lim', all Mr. Wildcat got ter do is ter drap right down on 'im, en dar he wuz. Mr. Wildcat hug 'im right up at 'im, en laugh en w'isper in he year. (*Nights* 286-87)

Brer Rabbit, as expected, begs for his life and, when Mr. Wildcat asks why he should spare Brer Rabbit, Brer Rabbit offers to help Mr. Wildcat catch a turkey. Turkeys being Mr. Wildcat's

favorite food, he agrees. Mr. Wildcat lies in the middle of the road, pretending to be dead, as Brer Rabbit calls for the turkeys. When they come, the turkeys observe Mr. Wildcat for a long time until Mr. Wildcat gets impatient and tries to grab one. Stiff from lying still so long, Mr. Wildcat fails and eventually gives up (288-91).

Similar events occur in the Cherokee story “How the Wildcat Caught the Gobbler.” According to the Cherokee story, one day Wildcat caught Rabbit, who begged for his life. Rabbit promised to show Wildcat to where a drove of Turkey was. Agreeing, Wildcat followed Rabbit to the place and Rabbit instructed Wildcat to play dead and not move no matter what. Crumbling rotten wood over Wildcat, Rabbit staged it so it looked as if Wildcat had been dead a long time. After preparing Wildcat, Rabbit went to find the Turkeys and told them that their enemy Wildcat was dead and they should dance over him. Coaxing them, Rabbit led the Turkeys to Wildcat and began to make a beat and sing. Once the turkeys were comfortable, they began to dance and crowd Wildcat. It was then that Wildcat sprung up and caught a Gobbler (Mooney 269-70; Schmid 139-40).

Aside from the different endings, these two stories coincide. In both versions, Rabbit trades the lives of the Turkeys to save his own life, leading Wildcat to the birds. Not only that but it is Rabbit’s idea for Wildcat to play dead and Rabbit convinces the Turkeys to draw near to their enemy. The variation in the endings is not unexpected. Harris’s tale promoted intelligence over strength. For the Wildcat to ultimately fail follows Harris’s style and formatting. Brer Rabbit and the Turkeys, who are both intelligent and innocent in this story, are spared death, while Wildcat, the antagonist, fails in his efforts. The endings’ differences also can be accounted for by the standard deviation that occurs among all spoken lore. By focusing on the overall content of the two tales we can again identify the Native American influence in Harris’s work.

A third version of the story, found among the Creek tribe, confirms the Native American influence. In “The Rabbit and the Wildcat,” the wildcat is extremely hungry and about to “raid the Indian village below Windy Rock, to see what she could find there, when she stumbled over a sleeping rabbit (Hulpach 117). Wildcat wakes Rabbit as she holds him down with her paw on his back. She proclaims that she is going to eat Rabbit and he begs for his life, promising better food, the Turkeys. As in the previous versions, Rabbit offers to lead Wildcat to the Turkeys and then proposes that she lies in the road, pretending to be dead. When Rabbit approaches the Turkeys, he claims he killed Wildcat and they do not believe him. ““Seeing is believing,”” said their chieftain. ‘Come and show us’” (118). Challenging their bravery, Rabbit offers to show them and then says, “But if you’re afraid, you should not go any farther” (118). Unwilling to be viewed as cowards, the Turkeys approach Wildcat as Rabbit walks away to a safe distance. Wildcat waits then snatches the fattest turkey and runs up into a tree. The Turkeys declare vengeance on Rabbit. When the Turkeys catch up with Rabbit, they tear off his tail and keep it as a trophy. Rabbit learns to enjoy his tail being short, for it makes it easier to run, but blames Wildcat for “leaving him in the lurch” (120). To punish Wildcat, Rabbit lies to her, telling her a mustang, who is only sleeping, is lying dead. Convincing Wildcat to tie the mustang to her tail so she can drag it home for dinner, Rabbit helps her tie the mustang to her. Soon as Wildcat begins to pull the mustang wakes up and Wildcat screams in fright, resulting in the mustang running for its life, dragging Wildcat behind him (117-20).

Once again we see the similar story line in the Creek version of Rabbit and the Wildcat. Like Harris and the Cherokee’s tales, Rabbit is caught by Wildcat and fearing for his life. He trades the Turkeys for himself, convincing the Wildcat to lie down and play dead. In the Creek version, like the Cherokee, Wildcat is successful in her mission, a mild difference from Harris’s

telling. In this version, however, the story does continue to show the punishment Rabbit received for being treacherous and the punishment Wildcat received for abandoning Rabbit. Yet, the punishment of the Wildcat by Rabbit is reminiscent of the *Uncle Remus* story, “Brother Fox Catches Mr. Horse.” Brer Rabbit convinces Brer Fox that Mr. Horse is dead, even though Brer Rabbit knows he isn’t. Brer Rabbit calls, “Come on, Brer Fox! I done fine de place whar you kin lay in fresh meat ’nuff fet ter las’ you plum twel de middle er nex’ year” (*Nights* 10). Echoing Rabbits words in the Creek story, Brer Rabbit lures Brer Fox to Mr. Horse and then Brer Fox allows Brer Rabbit to tie his tail to Mr. Horse, believing he can drag Mr. Horse home for food. Once Brer Fox is secured to Mr. Horse, Brer Rabbit cuts a switch and hits Mr. Horse with it. Mr. Horse wakes and starts to “jump en hump” with Brer Fox tied to him. Laughing Brer Rabbit repeatedly calls for Brer Fox to hold Mr. Horse down, which is impossible, until Mr. Horse tires out and stops. Uncle Remus tells the Little Boy that Brer Fox did not die, but he was broken badly (10-12).

By comparing “Brer Fox Catches Mr. Horse” to the Creek story of “The Rabbit and the Wildcat,” we see another instance of content appropriation. Although the Creek story has been broken into two different stories, the similarities between Harris’s and the Creek’s tales cannot be ignored. Rather the fact the extended ending of the Creek tale is found in another *Uncle Remus* tale highlights how saturated Harris’s collections are with reflections of Native American stories, emphasizing the content appropriation that occurred.

The most famous Brer Rabbit tale, “Brer Rabbit and the Tar-Baby” of “The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story” has been largely debated. As previously mentioned Glazier believes it stems from the Bantu tale of Hare, Tortoise, and the well. On the other hand, Davis and Demello argue that the Tar-Baby story “comes from the *Jataka*, and has been found in 250 versions

around the world” (146)¹³. Meanwhile, Vest adamantly claims that the Tar-Baby story belongs to Native Americans, citing Charles Hudson’s *Southeastern Indians* (35). While I cannot claim the origins of the tale as adamantly as Vest or Davis and Demello, I have found two versions of the tale among the Cherokee and the Biloxi. In Harris’s Tar-Baby, Brer Fox decides that he is hungry and figures out a way to capture Brer Rabbit. He creates a Tar-Baby, dressing it and placing it by the side of the road. Brer Rabbit walks by as Brer Fox hides and acts courteous to the Tar-Baby, saying good morning and other pleasantries. When the Tar-Baby does not respond, Brer Rabbit becomes upset and eventually hits the Tar-Baby, becoming stuck in it. Brer Fox comes and pulls Brer Rabbit out with the intention of killing and eating him. Brer Fox lists a couple ways he may kill Brer Rabbit and Brer Rabbit heartily agrees as long as Brer Fox does not throw him into the brier-patch. Of course, Brer Fox, wishing to hurt Brer Rabbit as much as possible, decides to throw Brer Rabbit into the brier-patch, only to learn that is Brer Rabbit’s home (*The Tar-Baby* 3-18; *Uncle Remus* 7-10).

Brer Fox’s intentions in this story paint him to be villainous. In this manner, the Native American stories differ. In the Cherokee version, “Rabbit and the Tar Wolf,” there is a drought and all the animals band together to dig a well. Rabbit, however, will not help because he does not want to get his paws dirty. The other animals agree, but forbid him from drinking out of the well when it is completed. As Rabbit is a greedy and tricky animal, he sneaks to the well and drinks anyway:

Wolf and Fox suspected him of theft and planned to trap him. They made a wolf of tar, placed it near the well. The following night, Rabbit came as usual to steal his supply of water. On seeing the tar wolf, he asked who was there. Receiving no answer,

he repeated the demand, threatening to kick the wolf if he did not reply. Receiving no answer, he kicked the wolf, stuck to the tar and was captured.

Fox and Wolf discussed what to do with him. Should they cut his head off? Rabbit protested it would be useless. It had often been tried. Other methods for killing him were also useless he said. They decided to let him loose to perish in the thicket.

Rabbit cried out, pleading hard for his life. Wolf and Fox refused to listen. They set him loose to die in the thicket.

Out of reach of his enemies he gave a whoop, bounding away exclaiming, "This is where I live." (Schmid 133)

Two other Cherokee versions exist, which detail the same events, in James Mooney's collection of Cherokee myths. The only difference between the one of the other versions and the one above is the Fox and Wolf are not specified. Instead, the stories claim all the animals did it together to punish Rabbit. In another version of the story, the Tar Wolf is made of pine gum and tar and Rabbit merely escapes, and no mention of the thicket appears. Overall the versions are extremely alike. What should be noted is that one of the versions in Mooney's collection is dated. At the end of the version it says, "Cherokee Advocate, December 18, 1845" (273).

The Biloxi version, "Tar Baby," remains consistent to the Cherokee version, with one minor detail changed. Instead of the animals building a well, it is a Frenchman who is friends with Rabbit. Deciding to dissolve the friendship, Rabbit refuses to help the Frenchman dig a well and, like the animals of the Cherokee, the Frenchman bans Rabbit from using the well. Suspecting Rabbit would use the well behind his back, the Frenchman creates a tar-baby, which Rabbit attacks after it refuses to talk or acknowledge Rabbit. The Frenchman captures Rabbit,

who proclaims his great fear of the brier patch, and shortly the Frenchman tosses Rabbit into it (Erdoes and Ortiz 181-82).

All four Native American versions of the Tar-Baby story align with the details of Harris's version. The differences that occur can be explained as the result of oral transmission and Harris's own editing. If we view Brer Fox as a version of Reynard the Fox, the story becomes an allegory for the relationship between Europe and America, which proves America's superiority once again. The story, also, establishes the importance of manners, which the Tar-Baby lacks, even if Brer Rabbit's reprimand of the Tar-baby nearly get him killed. Of course, I will acknowledge the obvious influence of Europeans on the Biloxi version as well as the similarities between the Bantu story of the well previously discussed and the Native American Tar Wolf stories. Such similarities could suggest a cultural exchange between the Africans and the Native Americans or support the idea of the universality of folklore. I do want to make a point that the Cherokee version recorded by Mooney is dated 1845, three years before the birth of Harris.

The final story involving Brer Rabbit to be discussed is "Mr. Rabbit Grossly Deceives Mr. Fox." In this story, Brer Rabbit attempts to impress Miss Meadows and the girls, claiming that for thirty years Brer Fox had been his riding horse. The next day Miss Meadows and the girls tell Brer Fox what Rabbit has said, causing Brer Fox to become upset and seek Brer Rabbit out. Upon reaching Brer Rabbit's house, Brer Fox finds that Brer Rabbit is sick. Begging Brer Fox to fetch a doctor, Brer Rabbit claims he cannot leave his house. Wishing for Brer Rabbit to go with him to Miss Meadow's place to correct the lie he told, Brer Fox offers to carry Brer Rabbit. Brer Rabbit argues that Brer Fox will drop him, but he will go if Brer Fox will carry him on his back. Sadly, Brer Fox agrees and even agrees to get a saddle so that Brer Rabbit won't

fall off. As the story progress, Brer Rabbit convinces Brer Fox to also wear blind bridle and to walk on all fours. Once they are on their way, Brer Rabbit puts on spurs, claiming he is pulling down his pants. When the agreed upon time for Brer Rabbit to get off comes, Brer Rabbit instead uses the spurs in Brer Fox's side, driving Brer Fox to run all the way to Miss Meadow's house (*Uncle Remus* 24-30).

Rabbit, in the Choctaw tale "Rabbit Rides Wolf," preforms the trickery:

One time Rabbit and Wolf, male wolf, been courting a female wolf.

So Rabbit been talking to the other animals, said, "Wolf is my horse."

So the girl heard it, and told him about it. That made Wolf mad. So he went looking for Rabbit. He finally found the Rabbit and he told him, he said, "You been telling lies on me."

He said, "What?"

He said, "You been telling that girl I was your horse."

"Naw, she just made that up, told you that."

Said, "Let's go down and see what she says. Let's go."

Rabbit says, "Oh, my leg is hurting so bad I can't walk."

Wolf said, "I'll tell you. Get on my back. We'll ride close to the edge of the yard." He said, "You'll get off and we'll walk."

So, "All right."

Rabbit got on Wolf. When they got to the edge of the yard, he pinched Wolf right on the side, and the Wolf run in the house. And the Rabbit riding on him said, "See? I been telling you about the Wolf being my horse." (Mould 221)

Just as in Harris's story, Rabbit tricks Wolf into being his horse, thereby proving his lie and impressing the female of his choice. Rabbit's method of tricking Wolf, an illness or injury, matches up to Harris's version. As with the previous Brer Rabbit tales, we can see a clear appropriation of content as the Choctaw story is far too parallel to the *Uncle Remus* story to be merely an accident.

These parallels between the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and *Uncle Remus* solidify the claim that Harris, no matter his awareness, appropriated Native American stories into his collections. By doing so he preserved an area of American culture that he did not mean to borrow, but results in his work being a crucial part of American literature. Harris's appropriation of European and African culture helps Harris further his own idealize of a Southern past which results from his Post-Civil War psyche. Yet his appropriation of Native American stories speaks to the American eradication of Native Americans.

CHAPTER IV

THE CULTURAL POWER OF *UNCLE REMUS*

Cultural appropriation is often associated with power. Taking the culture of another can empower the dominate culture. Joel Chandler Harris, by appropriating the European and African stories, gains power over the past and the present, promoting and creating a world which supports his Post-Civil War psyche. The appropriation of the Native American stories is different, but equally important. By Harris's time, Native Americans were drastically reduced.

The reduction and eradication of Native Americans occurred over about a hundred years. With first contact, Native Americans and colonists had a complicated relationship. At times the relationship was symbiotic and at others destructive and deadly. It is common knowledge that disease brought by the colonists severely reduced Native American populations as did numerous warlike skirmishes. By the nineteenth century, the American government was established and policies were created to take the lands of the Indians and give them the American people.

The American government began the removal process officially in 1802, when President Thomas Jefferson made a deal with the state of Georgia: "In exchange for Georgia giving up its claim on territory that later became the states of Mississippi and Alabama," Jefferson promised to gather the titles of Cherokee land inside the state borders ("The Indian"). Native Americans were pressured to trade land for debts they acquired while "assimilating" into white culture, so that by 1828, the Cherokee Nation adopted a constitution and republican form of government to resist the pressure placed on them to leave the lands in Georgia ("The Indian"). Around the same

time, Native Americans in Tennessee were being forced out the state. Ronald Satz writes, “When Tennessee entered the Union in 1769, the Cherokees and Chickasaws claimed about three-fourths of the state’s territory. By 1818 the Chickasaws had given up their title to land in Tennessee, and by 1835 all Cherokee claims in the state had been extinguished by the United States) (72). Many white North Carolinians used Native American support of the British during the Revolutionary War, they ignored previous treaties and flooded the Tennessee land (72).

The most famous Indian Removal occurred in 1830 with the Indian Removal Act, which offered land in the west to any “voluntary” Native Americans and punishment for those who did not leave “voluntarily.” By 1832 most of the Five Nations, including the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole, had signed treaties. The Cherokee resisted the removal and faced anti-Cherokee laws in Georgia until a small group signed a treaty in 1835, which the Cherokee government disavowed (“The Indian”). Unfortunately, the American government used the treaty to forcibly remove the Cherokee from Georgia. It is estimated that nearly 125,000 Native Americans were removed (“The Trail”). Even when removal was “voluntary,” the Native Americans were forced to migrate by foot, “without any food, supplies or other help from the government. Thousands of people died along the way” (“The Trail”). The subsequent years of Indian Removal have been named “The Trail of Tears” after the thousands of lives lost from the Five Nations.

The removal of Native Americans did not stop with the Indian Removal Act. After the Civil War, some tribes were punished for their support of the Confederates: “The Treaty of 1866 ending Chickasaw participation in the war included an ominous clause: it states that once the Chickasaw vanished, their lands would revert to the federal government, with tracts reserved for railroad companies to transport a multitude of white settlers into their nation” (Jean 3). Once the

war ended, thousands of whites, blacks, and Comanche flooded Chickasaw territory, claiming lands and ignoring the Chickasaw government (St. Jean 3). During the same time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs created American Indian boarding schools, resulting in Native American children being removed from their families and placed in these institutions in order to assimilate them. Native American children were forced to adopt Christian names and “were punished for speaking their own languages” (“Boarding Schools”). As a result, young children often forgot their cultural stories, histories, and traditions, leading to a calculated annihilation of Native American cultures.

By the time Harris began collecting and writing the *Uncle Remus* stories, Native Americans had nearly all disappeared from the state of Georgia and the rest of the southeast. The American government continued in its efforts to remove any presence of Native Americans. In 1887, President Grover Cleveland signed the Dawes Severalty Act “in a sincere but misguided attempt to improve the Native Americans’ lives by incorporating them into white culture” (“This Day”). The act dissolved many tribal affiliations, changed legal status of tribal members to individual subjects, and divided up reservations into individual property allotments to integrate Native Americans into American agrarian culture (“This Day”). The law also “created federally funding boarding schools designed to assimilate Native American children in white society” and cut tribal land from 138 million acres to 78 million acres (“This Day”). Such laws continued the eradication of Native Americans and their presence in the white world. In fact, as the result of historical novels and captivity stories, Native Americans fictionalized people, who few Americans had interactions with. Harris, as a native Georgian, would share the view of his peers. Native Americans did not belong or exist in Georgia. If a Native American were to appear, the Native American would be expected to have assimilated to white ways.

Being part of this generation in which Native Americans were being eradicated or assimilated, it is no surprise that Harris would deny their importance or influence on slave tales. Native Americans held no position in Harris's life, unlike his nostalgic memories of plantation slaves. However, his adamant and continual denial of the Native American influence points towards its significance. Only when a culture is completely gone, not just its people, can it be truly erased. Similar to how James Fennimore Cooper and Lydia Maria Child attempted to rewrite American history in their novels, Harris was rewriting American culture. His unwitting appropriation of Native American stories and his sequential denial of the Native American influence illustrates the continual removal of power from Native Americans. By claiming the Native American stories as slave, American, or European, Harris erases any claim Native Americans have to those stories. The stories become American and, through their popularity, spread as American folklore. Without a physical presence, power is further taken from the Native Americans as their own culture is appropriated, ensuring their continued disappearance. Just as the European and African tales furthered Harris's Post-Civil War psyche, the Native American tales furthered the creation of a solely "American" culture.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Over time, Joel Chandler Harris's work has been discussed and analyzed through a variety of methods. His popularity has grown and waned depending on the social situations of the generations. By merely organizing Harris's criticism, a clear pattern of appreciation and denouncement becomes visible. The reason for such diverse and extreme reactions is Harris's own language and culture. He unapologetically utilizes a dominant, racist tone in his work, of which he was clearly completely unaware. In his mind, Harris believed he was promoting and preserving the ideal southern past along with slave culture. Like others of his time, Harris could not conceive that his tone and attitude towards slaves was condescending or negative.

From such lack of self-awareness negative criticism grew and his works denounced. Arguments over the origins rage on, often focusing on one specific culture rather than the multitude that appear in Harris's collections. My essay acknowledges Harris's racist tone and vocabulary, although I believe it to be a symptom of his unconscious racism. Yet the main focus of this paper is exhibit the diverse cultural sources that influence *Uncle Remus*. The African influence is undeniable, but Harris's work should not be limited to a single cultural influence. Following other critics' examples, I have provided specific stories from Europe, Africa, and Native America in order to prove that Harris's work is proof of the melting pot that occurs in the American south. *Uncle Remus* is a collection of stories appropriated from three distinct cultures in order to further the Southern culture that Harris wished to promote. While appropriation has a

negative connotation, as James O. Young discusses, Harris's appropriations have not been not solely for dominance.

In the case of European and African folktales, the cultural appropriation is not an effort to suppress the minority cultures but to build upon the growing Southern culture. The post-Reconstruction South still struggled economically and culturally. Through appropriating the stories of Europeans, who founded America, and the Africans, who helped build America, Harris's stories perform content appropriation, absorbing the content of the folktales in order to strengthen what Harris sees as ideals. Since I argue that Harris's racism was unconscious, I also argue that his appropriation was not an attempt to suppress the African culture, but to integrate it into the American Southern culture, making it inseparable from the idealized past and the growing future. The European stories are also appropriate to strengthen the Southern culture, although there is an obvious conflict of power. Again, I do not believe that Harris was attempting to suppress European culture, but to absorb and recreate it so that the European stories became solely American. Through Brer Rabbit's dominance over Brer Fox, the American version of Reynard the Fox, Harris strengthens the South's connection to Europe while simultaneously elevating the South above the European past.

Harris's style of appropriation of European and African stories is highly significant when viewing his work in the large context. It is not just what he appropriated but how he appropriated it that matters. He uses European and African cultures as methods to validate his idealized view of the South in order to empower the South during a time of turmoil, defeat, and suffering. By celebrating the slave culture, oppressed people who helped build America, as part of Southern culture, Harris celebrates Southern culture as a representation of oppressed people.

While his appropriation of European and African culture is not vicious or meant to suppression, his appropriation of Native American culture is a different story. Once again, Harris becomes a mirror of his culture. By the late 1800's, Native Americans had mostly disappeared from the Southeast or were treated as aliens. They did not fit into the plantation system I as had slaves and whites, resulting in Native Americans becoming unimportant and disposable. Most Southerners did not even have regular or noticeable contact with Native Americans. Instead, Americans worked hard to create a world in which the Native Americans did not exist. Historical novelists rewrote history, creating Native American stereotypes and a history that determined that America was destined to belong to "Americans," casting Native Americans off to the land of extinction. It is no surprise then when Harris's work appropriates Native American stories and gives them no credit. In Harris's world, Native Americans were insignificant and held no cultural or social value. Through his adamant rejection of their influence, Harris reflects the social and cultural struggle for power. By appropriating the very stories which create Native American cultures, Harris and other Americans were solidifying their hold on America. Not only was land being stripped from the Native Americans, but their culture as well, leaving Native Americans homeless and cultural-less. Ownership of America in the literal and figurative ways belonged solely to white Americans.

Such a stripping of power from Native Americans is historically and socially important. As Native American critics and writers struggle for recognition, acknowledging past appropriations is crucial. Harris's work provides an opportunity to recognize such appropriation. The fact that critics continually deny the visible appropriation or only acknowledge it in the margins suggests to a continuing power struggle that occurs.

Harris's works are significant as evidence of the continual oppression of Native American claims, but also as literary evidence of skillful content appropriation. With noticeable skill, Harris appropriates not one, but three cultures, displaying the varying degrees of appropriation that occur. *Uncle Remus* demonstrates the attempts at positive appropriation and negative appropriation, which Young discusses. While appropriation is always a controversial subject, Harris's works are already controversial, so literary discussion can only benefit from tackling the issues of Native American oppression and African and European imitation. As I have added to the established African and European origins and have proven the Native American influence, I believe that we can move forward with *Uncle Remus* as a complicated collection that holds multiple layers for interpretation. It provides insight into the varying levels and types of appropriation as well as gives voice to the oppressed. Many famous literary pieces are controversial or even disliked, but are still valued for their literary importance. Harris should be appreciated in the same manner. From his works, we have a clear picture of the social and cultural past, much of which pertains today in a cultural-political climate that is riddled with racial tensions and cultural appropriations.

It may be that critics are uncomfortable acknowledging the Native American influences because of the cruel treatment that Native Americans suffered. In addition to physical suffering, Native Americans faced cultural annihilation due to assimilation and cultural appropriation. Laws even into the twentieth century have been denying the existence and rights of Native Americans. In 1924, Dr. W.A. Plecker, a registrar of the State of Bureau of Vital Statistics created a system in which "Indian birth, death, and marriage certificates...read 'colored' or 'Negro'" (Vest 30). Guilt over past wrongs can be a strong factor when considering how certain ethnic groups are treated. Yet the presence of Native American stories in Harris's work should

not be ignored, but studied for their literary and cultural significance. Harris's work can be viewed as a lasting example of appropriation and assimilation, continuing the white American trend of Native American eradication. In this manner, Harris's work is culturally important. Skillfully, Harris appropriates three distinct cultures, using them to suit his own political and social plans. Whether he consciously promotes racism or Native American extermination, Harris creates a text with layers of linguistic, cultural, literary, and psychological meaning. Encapsulating the major beliefs and ideals of his time and location, Harris's *Uncle Remus* collections present an opportunity for in-depth analysis, which they have long been denied. Through further research and dissection, his work may reveal more interesting finds. For this reason, Harris's works should not be banned, but should be studied and appreciated for their cultural and historic value.

END NOTES

¹ *Song of the South* is a 1946 Disney movie based on *Uncle Remus*. Although initially a financial success, the film has in more recent years face great criticism for its use of “Negro dialect” and black stereotypes. Robert B. Dier claims that he was “thoroughly disgusted,” while Herman Hill thought the film may “prove inestimable goodwill in the furthering of interracial relations (Gevinson 956).

² The “Lost Cause” is a term popularized by the journalist Edward A. Pollard. Bernstein defines it as an ideology that “asserts that the antebellum South possessed a noble and chivalric civilization that was unique (“peculiar”), precious and rightly self-enclosed. Military defeat and Emancipation caused this culture to become “Lost,” but the greater “Cause” could be resurrected...if writers and artists convinced the nation that southern culture out to exist free of molestation from the North” (134).

³ The illustrations could be appropriated from European culture, but I do not know enough about children book art work to speculate.

⁴ The Tortoise and the Hare story can be found in *Aesop’s Fables* as well as Cherokee and Choctaw cultures.

⁵ Referred to in Vest’s article as well as Warren and Gerber’s articles.

⁶ See “Mr. Wolf makes a Failure” in *Uncle Remus*.

⁷ See Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman's *Cryptozoology A-Z and Unexplained!* as well as Michael Newton's *Encyclopedia of Cryptozoology: A Global Guide to Hidden Animals and Their Pursuers*.

⁸ While today we spell folklore as one word, the original spelling is folk-lore.

⁹ In *Uncle Remus and the Little Boy* there is a story called "O' Joshway an' de Sun," which resonates with the Battle of Jericho and the Civil War.

¹⁰ Harris expresses an acute fear of the fate of the new Southern generation. The Second Little Boy is viewed as feminine and emasculated by his mother, who raises him not with the help of family but through the guidance of the government and scientists. Through Miss Sally, the Second Little Boy's grandmother, and Uncle Remus, the Second Little Boy is given chances to be saved and educated in the proper traits of Southern gentlemen.

¹¹ The *Cherokee Phoenix* does not elaborate on whether "Negroes" are slaves or freed African Americans. However, since some of the census does count slaves separately, I am interpreting "Negroes" as freed African Americans.

¹² Kaffir was a term used in South Africa to describe a black person. Also, spelled as Kaffer, the term is considered an ethnic slur now, but was prominent in Harris's time.

¹³ "Researchers think the tar baby story traveled via two routes from India to America: one by way of Africa, and the other via the Iberian Peninsula to America on another path" (Davis and Demello 162).

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APPENDIX A
SOUTHERN IMAGES

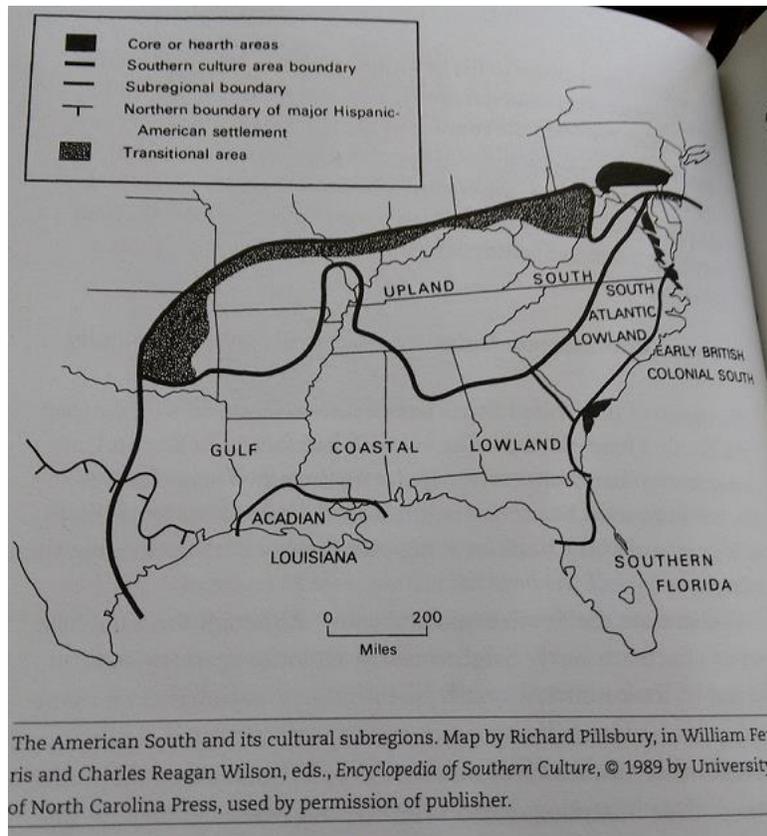


Figure 1.1 (Burrison 24)

APPENDIX B
UNCLE REMUS IMAGES



Figure 2.1 “Den You Come on Home; Yo’ Mammy Want You”

(Told 50)



Figure 2.2. “Mr. Rabbit Grossly Deceives Mr. Fox”

(Uncle Remus 26)



Figure 2.3 “Mr. Fox and Miss Goose”

(Nights 4)



Figure 2.4 “Brother Rabbit and the Mosquitoes”

(Nights 216)

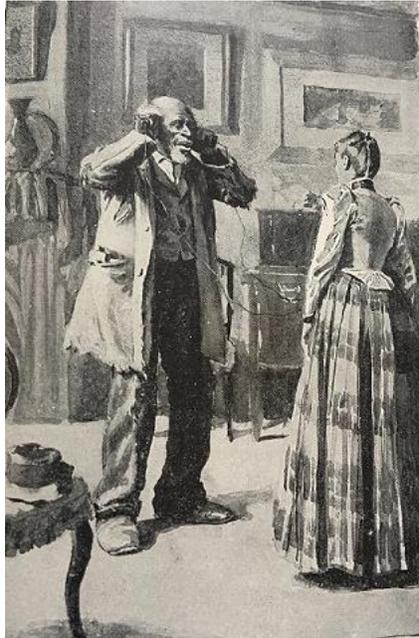


Figure 2.5 “I’m Sholy Gwine Ter Break Sump’n”

(Uncle Remus and His Friends 294)

VITA

Robyn Johnson works actively in Native American studies, specifically in Native American literature. Graduating in 2010 from DePaul University with a Bachelor's in Secondary Education English and Mathematics, she worked as a high school teacher with the Yakama Tribe and Wapato school district for two years. After moving to Chattanooga in 2014, Robyn continued teaching before returning to school for her Master's degree in English at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Since returning to school, Robyn has attended four conferences, including the Aboriginal North America and Europe: Strengthening Connections International Conference in Poznan, Poland. She has also published two academic articles, "I Will Not Bow: Analysis of the Feminine Refusal of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic in *Inuyasha*" (*IJOCA* 2017) and "A World Without Fathers: Patriarchy, Colonialism, and the Male Creator in Northwest Tribal Narratives" (*AIQ* 2014). Most recently, Robyn has received admission into the University of California-Riverside's doctoral program in Native American studies with the Chancellor's Distinguished Scholar Fellowship.