Indians, Land, and Ideology: The Disruption of Nationalism in the Works of Lydia Maria Child and Henry David Thoreau

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Indians, Land, and Ideology: The Disruption of Nationalism in the Works of Lydia Maria Child and Henry David Thoreau

by

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A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Montclair State University In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of Master of Arts January 2008

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**Thesis Abstract**

This thesis discusses presentations of American Indian culture and civilization in mid-nineteenth century American literature, especially as written by two northern Abolitionist writers, Henry David Thoreau and Lydia Maria Child. Tracing how these presentations are used to work both with and against developing American nationalism, most importantly in terms of the morality of U.S. expansionism, this paper explores the connections between Indians and land. As race is critical in nineteenth century nationalism, and land is necessary to industrial capitalism and U.S. expansionism, how these constructs are linked ideologically serves to either uphold or challenge the spread of the U.S. westward during the nineteenth century, and both Child and Thoreau offer challenges to the dominant ideology of their day.

Renée Bergland, in *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (2000), has traced “an obsessive mindset, in which American subjects continually return to the Native American figures who haunt them” (16). This haunting, she argues, results from the notion of the disappearance of Indians and Indian civilization. In “The Indian in the Museum” (1998), Paul Gilmore explains that in the nineteenth century, Indians are portrayed as “‘wild’ Indians uncorrupted by white culture—as stoically vanishing in the advance of a white civilization to which they would not submit” (26), typifying the cultural stereotype. These two notions, of disappearing and of wildness, are critical in understanding the development of the ideology that underlies nineteenth century American nationalism, putting the Indian in a location of necessary disappearance or violent defeat that reinforces notions of American political, economic and geographic progression and growth.
By employing theories of nineteenth-century literary racial tropes, I argue that the dominant depictions of Indians in American ideology exist for reasons traceable to the idea of the “savage” as opposed to the “civil”, and that the divergences from this opposition by both Thoreau and Child highlight not only the guilt that underlies an American consciousness but underscore the necessity of the ideas of progress and race as inherently irreconcilable in American nationalist ideology. While I theorize that while these abolitionist writers dissent from the “ghostliness” of American Indians in order to criticize concepts of land ownership, violent land appropriation, and industrialization emerging during the pre-war period, they can only do so by creating images of Indians that symbolize abstract ideals that do not necessarily conform to the historical accuracy of the lives and cultures of American Indians.

But while they do not strictly adhere to Bergland’s definition of the “Indian Ghost” nor to completely accurate depictions of Indian people and life, these writers create spaces where the ideology of the disappearing and violently “savage” Indian is challenged, and through this many contradictions within nationalist ideology are exposed. The irruptions these writers expose are important within the framework of the importance of literature to developing notions of the nation. Through close readings of several of their texts, including Child’s *Hobomok* and Indian stories, and Thoreau’s *Walden* and *The Maine Woods*, I explore how upholding American Indians as both in- and outside the realm of the American social, political, and economic landscape while tying them physically to the actual land works to provide a critique of an American nationalism that justifies violent land appropriation.
INDIANS, LAND, AND IDEOLOGY: THE DISRUPTION OF NATIONALISM IN THE WORKS OF LYDIA MARIA CHILD AND HENRY DAVID THOREAU

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of English

by

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Introduction

The first half of the nineteenth century witnesses the parallel growths of the United States as a nation, of the literature-driven ideology that approves this growth, and of the push to remove nearly all Indians from the eastern half of the continent. As the physical growth in U.S. territory aligns with the development of nationalist ideology, the territorial conflicts between the U.S. government and North American Indian tribes are framed as a war, both physical and ideological, between white "civilization" and Indian "savagery." The conflict underscores the portrayal of Indians as "Other," and as Indians occupy the physical environment into which the U.S. is continually expanding, the relationship between Indians and land is crucial to the ideological configuring of the U.S. expansionism. Territory that is settled by whites, or domesticated, becomes "nature," while the land inhabited by Indians remains configured as the "wild," which is always in need of domestication.

In nationalist ideology, the converting of "wild" land into private property occurs through the violence of the Indian removals and wars, yet there is a pressing need within the expanding U.S. to define this conflict as moral. The ideological framing of these conflicts over land and territory then follows two trends: one of the "savage" and violent Indian, bent on destroying "civilization," who is wasting the land and must be defeated, and the other of the Indian as the "child of nature" whose culture disappears in the face of white civilization, leaving its land for domestication. Susan Scheckel, in The Insistence of the Indian, theorizes: "Indians mattered during this period not primarily as a physical or political threat to the American nation but as a threat to Americans' sense of themselves as a moral nation—a threat, in short, to American national character and
legitimacy" (6-7). This threat is intolerable, and while the depictions of Indians as violent “savages” or disappearing “children of nature” seem oppositional, both serve ideologically to uphold the morality of white “civilization” and its expansion across the continent; from opposing starting points, they function toward the same end.

The literary projections of Indians thus in turn legitimate unfettered American expansion, which is not only a principle of the progress of enlightened white civilization but a very real material need for resources and “free” land. The task of nationalist ideology in defining the American nation as moral is masked by these seemingly contradictory depictions of Indians and land. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Lydia Maria Child and Henry David Thoreau published a wide array of writing that contains Indians, imaginary and real, and explores their connections to land. Working separately and in differing genres, the two writers have some similarities that underscore their writing; each was an abolitionist, each lived in Massachusetts, each spent some time in Maine and met Penobscot Indians. Critically, their writing is rarely studied jointly, but as both launch serious challenges to white American projections of Indians and land, their work exposes how the depictions of wild and domesticated Indians and land both work to justify U.S. expansionism. Through the developments of these topics in their writings they reveal that only challenges to both racism and land use can truly challenge the ideological and physical wars between the U.S. and Indian tribes for land.

Child and Thoreau write in a period when nationalist concerns are central to American literature, and as the “Indian problem” becomes one of cloaking land acquisition in a moral guise, this fosters the need for racist views of the Indians. Reginald Horsman, in Race and Manifest Destiny, writes, “From the beginning of
English settlement in America, there had been a dual image of the North American Indians. There had always been both an admiration for the supposed simple life as well as hatred for ‘savage’ violence” (103). Either white civilization must save itself by taking land from the violent “savages,” or the Indians must voluntarily cede land rights within a peaceable system of exchange—the Indians are simple children of nature who disappear. Both options rely upon imaginary Indians, a view of Indians and Indian culture that does not accurately reflect the lives of the actual Indians living at the time. As Lucy Maddox writes in Removals, “it is only the fully reconstructed and mythologized Indian—one who lives nowhere in nineteenth-century America—who can be assimilated into the civilized American text” (139), and the only alternative to assimilation is annihilation. Child’s strongest critical articulations come through her projections of race and her frequent refusals to perpetrate patriarchal concepts of white racial superiority; Thoreau, on the other hand, is at his most radical when he challenges American capitalist development and industrialization, especially its effects upon the natural environment.

This paper explores how Child and Thoreau start challenging nationalism through manipulating both the racist projections of Indians and traditional domestic tropes, each asserting the benevolence of nature and its links to individual self-development. Child, in her first novel Hobomok, and Thoreau, in Walden, question the connections between Indians and land, Child through the framework of the family and Thoreau through household economy, land use, and mythology. In their later works, each writer explores the concept of the “wild,” and while both continue to work both with and against racist projections of Indians, each reveals permanent connections between Indians and land. In
Child's Indian stories, her fiction exposes the horrifying physical and cultural violence of U.S. expansionism while Thoreau, in The Maine Woods, explores the physical and philosophical need for halting industrial expansion and domestication of the wild. In these later writings, both writers are concerned with myth, its generic structures, its ideological uses, and both attempt to construct new American mythology.

Through reading these texts, I argue that the inextricable connections between racist configurations of Indians and conceptions of land are revealed, and that these connections demonstrate the absolute, concurrent dependence of U.S. nationalist ideology on both racism and the domination of land and its resources. While neither writer presents a full critique of U.S. nationalism, as neither intended to do so, when read together their works reveal the breadth and depth of anti-Indian sentiment and the need for dominating the wild inherent in concepts of white “civilization.”

**Nationalism, Literature, Indians and Land**

The first half of the nineteenth century is a crucial time in the history of U.S. nationalism, as the concept of a “nation” itself is developed with notions of freedom, the rights of the individual, and their connections to land ownership. Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, writes of a nation as an “imagined political community” that is both limited and sovereign, noting,

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations...It is imagined as *sovereign*
because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchal dynastic realm...[N]ations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state. (6-7)¹

In the historical conflict between white civilization and native American Indians, the “elastic” borders are always in contest, and always shifting; the connections between God and freedom are also frequently in flux, although both concepts are crucial to the ideas of Enlightenment that shape American nationalist ideology. Ideally and materially, U.S. colonial and national history and ideology develop in consistent opposition to the land’s original inhabitants.

Thus the confluence of the Indian Removal period with the growth of an American literary canon produces conflicted representations of Indians and of land. Anderson argues that nationalism develops concomitantly with “two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper. For these forms provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (24-25). Literacy is thus integral to national development through both fiction and non-fiction, and Anderson asserts that the “primacy of capitalism” (37) allows for a mass-produced literary market to spread ideas along time and space, fomenting ideological development.² Literary Indians are thus crucial to developing American nationalism, and Scheckel writes, “Indians emerged as nationally liminal figures. Neither citizens nor aliens, at once symbolically central and politically
excluded, Indians constituted the boundaries at which the meaning of the nation is defined" (9).

Capitalism not only allows for the written expression and spreading of ideology but is predicated upon the need for natural resources and land. Maddox writes that Indians, “quickly proved to be an obstacle to white America’s claims to the moral right to unhindered expansion across the continent. The Indians, that is, continued to frustrate white America’s efforts—official and unofficial—to include them within the discourse of American nationalism and, concomitantly, within the structure of the country’s laws and institutions” (7). Indians’ positions outside of “laws and institutions” allow for the framing of the Indian as Other, and this concept simultaneously justifies keeping Indians on the outside. Both despite and because of this, literary Indians signify wildness, violence, childhood innocence, nature, peace, the “noble savage,” and ghostliness in the various ideological constructions created to justify land appropriation, all of which counter notions of “civilization.”

The literary merging of race and land is not accidental, and Renée Bergland, in The National Uncanny, writes that the period between 1820 and 1850 “could be described as the Indian Removal period of American history, or as the American Renaissance period of American literary history. The two coincide” (21). As the U.S. expands, Indians are forced continually west, creating an ever-shifting frontier stemming from the Louisiana Purchase, the Cherokee Removal, the Seminole War, and the continual settlement of frontier land. Dee Brown, in Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, writes that in 1834, “a new wave of white settlers swept westward and formed the territories of Wisconsin and Iowa. This made it necessary for the policy makers in
Washington to shift the 'permanent Indian frontier' from the Mississippi River to the 95th meridian” (6); the “permanent Indian frontier” exists then not as a geographical location or even a token of official U.S. policy but an ideological construction. Of the Indians being shifted west with imaginary borderlines, Brian Dippie, in The Vanishing American, writes, “Their fate had important implications for white Americans self-consciously searching for a national identity” (15); it is difficult to see the prevalence of freedom and enlightened progress in expansion unless Indians are racially constructed as destined to disappear before the advancement of white civilization, and the land constructed as a wilderness in need of white civilized development. While conservative ideology tends to celebrate the violence of appropriation, liberals were frequently assuaged with notions of the “vanishing Americans.”

Within these ideas, Indians both physically inhabit and symbolically embody borders and boundaries which reveal U.S. hypocrisy in land ownership and use. Scheckel writes, “debates over Indian policy called into question the very principles on which the idea of ‘America’ was founded, threatening to make explicit the contradictions implicit in American national ideology” (3-4). The masking of these contradictions is the primary function of American ideology; no matter how the land is envisioned, U.S. expansion, from the colonial period through the nineteenth century, is only possible when land is declared free and available for industrial development and settlement, and this more frequently than not occurs through overt violence. Ideologically, this violence must be either justified or hidden from historical view. Richard Drinnon, in Facing West, describes the three aspects of “significant national patterns of deracination and extermination” (xxv) upon which this ideology rests:
1. *Repression*...[includes] social controls and constraints imposed upon the desires and needs of the *whole* body...2. *Racism*...defined natives as nonpersons within the settlement culture and was in a real sense the enabling experience of the rising American empire: Indian-hating identified the dark others that white settlers were not and must not under any circumstances become...3. *Civilization*' [as] Western writers...have used [this term] to distinguish Western superculture, the one true 'civilization,' from the so-called primitive cultures. (xxv-xxviii)

When literary texts work to uphold the dominant concepts of land ownership and anti-Indian racism, these patterns seamlessly work together as not mere justification for U.S. expansion but as expressions of the righteousness of it. Conversely, writers who challenge the dominant ideological constructions of land and/or race reveal the contradictions in the enlightened notions of freedom and progress which form the cornerstone of U.S. ideology.

But whether celebrated or bemoaned, Bergland writes, “In public discourse, the birth of the American nation and the death of the Native American were as closely related as light and shadow” (49). Carolyn L. Karcher, in *The First Woman of the Republic*, concurs as she writes,

Culturally as well as politically, American nationalism fed off the Indian’s stolen birthright. The creation of a ‘native’ American literature required the appropriation of the Indian heritage—indeed, of Indians themselves—as surely as the building of a powerful modern state required the
appropriation of Indian land. Both appropriations reduced the Indian to the white man’s subject. (102-03)

This situation leads to the development of a new American mythology: not an adaptation of actual Indian mythology of the land, but white, written literary and political constructions of land and people—white and Indian—in mythic form that functions ideologically.

The dominant myths foster and work within nationalist ideology, and Richard Slotkin, in The Fatal Environment, writes,

The Myth of the Frontier is arguably the longest-lived of American myths, with origins in the colonial period and a powerful continuing presence in contemporary culture. Although the Myth of the Frontier is only one of the operative myth/ideological systems that form American culture, it is an extremely important and persistent one. Its ideological underpinnings are those same ‘laws’ of capitalist competition, of supply and demand, of Social Darwinism ‘survival of the fittest’ as a rationale for social order, and of ‘Manifest Destiny’ that have been the building blocks of our dominant historiographical tradition and political ideology. (15)

The creation of these new American literary mythologies depends upon the conflation of race and land that masks the capitalist underpinnings. Land itself is typified as nature—good, spiritual, benevolent—when it is settled, industrialized, and thus dominated; land is wild when untouched by white civilization and inhabited by Indians. This detestation of the wild is seen in the extinction of so many Indian tribes associated with it, and Brown writes of the nineteenth century:
More than three centuries had now passed since Christopher Columbus landed on San Salvador, more than two centuries since the English colonists came to Virginia and New England... On the mainland in America, the Wampanoags of Massasoit and King Philip had vanished, along with the Chesapeakes, the Chickahominys, and the Potomacs of the great Powhatan confederacy. (Only Pocahontas was remembered.) Scattered or reduced to remnants were the Pequots, Montauks, Nanticokes, Machapungas, Catawbas, Cheraws, Miamis, Hurons, Eries, Mohawks, Senecas, and Mohegans. (Only Uncas was remembered.) Their musical names remained forever fixed on the American land, but their bones were forgotten in a thousand burned villages or lost in forests fast disappearing before the axes of twenty million invaders. Already the once sweet-watered streams, most of which bore Indian names, were clouded with silt and the wastes of man; the very earth was being ravaged and squandered. To the Indians it seemed that these Europeans hated everything in nature—the living forests and their birds and beasts, the grassy glades, the water, the soil, and the air itself. (7)

This use of Indian names for geographical formations is not for reverence but for further co-optation, and is a sign of the white civilized hatred and domination of the wild. Trinh Minh-ha, in Woman, Native, Other, explains “This is the way the West[ern civilization] carries the burden of the Other. Naming is part of the human rituals of incorporation, and the unnamed remains less human than the inhuman or sub-human. The threatening Otherness must, therefore, be transformed into figures that belong to a definite image-
repertoire" (54). For dominant white American culture, these names reveal the dominance of both Indians and the land as that land is settled and mapped by whites, and the new myths put the now-developed locations into culturally familiar forms, particularly of the triumphant white male.8

Child’s and Thoreau’s texts work to create new myths of American land, and these stories fluctuate between reifying and denying moral and nationalist contradictions. Slotkin writes, “All of a culture’s ideology is contained in myths: the most opposite sides and contradictions of belief are registered in mythic discourse and brought within the frame of its narrative” (23). One such contradiction in how the Indians represent both race and land is seen in Chief Justice Marshall’s decision of Cherokee Nation v. Georgia in 1831:

it may well be doubted whether those tribes which reside within the acknowledged boundaries of the United States can, with strict accuracy, be denominated foreign nations. They may, more correctly, perhaps, be denominated domestic dependent nations. They occupy a territory to which we assert a title independent of their will, which must take effect in point of possession when their right of possession ceases. Meanwhile, they are in a stage of pupilage. Their relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian. (quoted in Scheckel 104)

This language works both toward a doctrine of violent usurpation of lands and a racist vision of domestic harmony. U.S. title can exist “independent of their will” so long as they are within U.S. boundaries, which the U.S. gets to define, and at any point the Indians may be demanded to cede possession of land. Simultaneously, they are children
in need of domestic education. This articulation of the “Indian nation” as a complete oxymoron becomes official U.S. policy and the bedrock of American nationalism itself: the U.S. must expand, must progress, and must teach others to progress. Any challenge to this ideology must then take on both the challenge of defining the boundaries, or of use and location of the frontier, and the racism inherent in the infantilizing and subsequent civilizing or the exterminating the Indians. Maddox writes, “nineteenth-century analyses of ‘the Indian question’ almost always end...at the virtually impassable stone wall of the choice between civilization and extinction for the Indians” (8), and while neither Thoreau nor Child resolves this conflict, their writing challenges the ways the conflict is framed, and neither fully succumbs to accepting the supposed morality of this choice.

In the dominant nineteenth century myths, a pattern emerges: land that is settled can be associated with its Indian past to show domination, while Indians as living people must be separated from the wild to show its accessibility for white civilization to develop it, and so that they may pass their “stage of pupilage.” Slotkin writes, “The myth/ideological systems that developed in the environment took as their central theme the association of all progressive or desirable change—whether of fortune or of moral character—with a physical movement outward” (35), or West. Of the continual flood of whites from the states into the territories in the years leading up to the Civil War, Brown writes,

To justify these breaches of the ‘permanent Indian frontier,’ the policy makers in Washington invented Manifest Destiny...The Europeans and their descendants were ordained by destiny to rule all of America. They were the dominant race and therefore responsible for the Indians—along
with their lands, their forests, and their mineral wealth. Only the New Englanders, who had destroyed or driven out all their Indians, spoke against Manifest Destiny. (8)

Of the New Englanders willing to speak (write) out against Manifest Destiny, Child and Thoreau both depict Indians who are mostly imaginary, frequently vanishing, occasionally childish, and sometimes “savage;” but who are time and again reconnected to the land in ways that challenge and criticize U.S. industrial expansionism by challenging the concepts of land on which this rested. Through their writing, both offer new myths that counter the tropes existent in Manifest Destiny and the frontier myth.

**Domestic Nature and Imaginary Indians**

The conflict between Indian assimilation and annihilation results in not only the construction of imaginary Indians but complementary projections of the land itself. The strongest articulation comes in the construction of a benevolent, spiritual nature that is opposed to a dark and foreboding wilderness or wild, mediated by the ever-elusive, ever-moving frontier. This concept of a benevolent nature is also crucial to the development of the self, which is theorized by the Transcendentalists of the time, of which Thoreau is a famous example. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in “Power,” presents a clear delineation of the relationship between man and nature that emphasizes the inevitability and positive aspects of social progress stemming from this spiritual and positive conception of nature: “A cultivated man, wise to know and bold to perform, is the end to which nature works, and the education of the will is the flowering and result of all this geology and
astronomy" (971). Similarly, in "Man the Reformer," he writes, "What is man born for but to be a Reformer, a Re-maker of what man has made; a renouncer of lies; a restorer of truth and good, imitating that great Nature that embosoms us all" (146). Nature is the repository of spirituality, the source of moral instruction for the individual. By turning to nature, the individual can bring the goodness of nature to society in all its aspects.

This articulation of the land as a model for progress has no little ideological consequence, especially as the "wild" remains forever untamable and "nature" becomes the domesticated but non-industrialized land that surrounds white civilization. "Nature" is undeveloped, but is marked, measured, and studied by a nearby white society, which makes it either the step before or recently included in the realm of private property.

Anderson asserts that the "European conception of nation-ness as linked to private-property language has wide influence in [the] nineteenth-century" (68), and thus how frontier land moves from the wild into the realm of nature and then private property has widespread implications, including in terms of how the Indian is constructed ideologically.

Maddox writes, "A survey of the literature reveals that there were some specific assumptions about what constitutes 'civilization' that were, if not universally agreed upon, at least never seriously contested in the literature. Foremost among them was the idea that any civilized society is founded on respect for private property" (22). This becomes one of the foundational issues upon which the racist constructions of Indians are predicated. Scheckel ties race and private property to nineteenth-century literary nationalism, and articulates the problem of early nationalist writers as "twofold: to establish the basis of Euro-American rights to lands possessed by Indians and to solidify
the lines of inheritance by which these rights devolved upon the present citizens of the United States. By manipulating the category of race, [they] found a way to bring the prior ‘owners’ of the American land—both the Indians and the English—into a narrative of kinship and inheritance as ancestors willingly bestowing their authority and property on their rightful American heirs’ (19).

The justification for the further annexation of land by the U.S. is then predicated on the tropes that justified colonial land appropriation. The conservative belief that Indians are simply not capable of “civilization” is articulated quite clearly by the federal government. In 1823, in the decision for Johnson v. McIntosh, Supreme Court Chief Justice Marshall writes,

the tribes of Indians inhabiting this country were fierce savages, whose occupation was war, and whose subsistence was drawn chiefly from the forest...The Europeans were under the necessity either of abandoning the country, and relinquishing their pompous claims to it, or enforcing those claims by the sword, and by the adoption of principles adapted to the condition of a people with whom it was impossible to mix. (quoted in Scheckel 26)

Additionally, Maddox notes that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs writes in “1838: ‘Common property and civilization,’ he said flatly, ‘cannot coexist.’ This belief that the Indians could enter into civilized life only after they had learned the value of acquiring and protecting private property dominated federal policy toward the Indians throughout most of the century” (23). The task for nationalist writers to bridge this opposition morally and ideologically necessitates the fabrication of both people and beliefs as they
create Indians who voluntarily cede their lands, or die and leave them available for the taking.

The liberal agenda advocated by those who do not support the whole-scale violent extermination of the Indians to justify land acquisition relies upon notions of domestication for both nature and Indians. Nina Baym, in *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860*, writes of the grounding of morality within the domestic sphere as all subject to the domestic realm are in need of patriarchal, authoritative rule: “from the earliest years of the republic men and women progressives defined [the home] as the place where citizens and citizenship were produced, and they expanded traditional maternal duties to encompass instruction in...the rudiments of patriotism, republican values, and an understanding of civic virtue” (6). This construction then includes the inculcation of nationalist ideology and morality simultaneously both by and in the domestic realm. Imaginary, assimilated, Indians can represent the peaceful progress of white society as they can be educated in the domestic realm as children are; imaginary “savage” Indians are relegated forever to the “wild,” and they can be fought for land rights and possession as they have no “civic virtue.”

“*The spirit of devotion sat brooding over the soul of the savage*”

The envisioning of the nation as a family lends itself ideologically to the task of domestication. Susan Scheckel asserts that, “The violence by means of which the nation was forged and defined must be forgotten so that it can be reimagined as ‘family’
history” (3). Lydia Maria Child’s first novel, *Hobomok* (1824), conforms to this description as it is an overt attempt both to help create a nationalist literary canon and to include Indians within the greater American family while relegating the “savage” forever to the violence of the wild. She begins chapter one by writing, “I never view the thriving villages of New England, which speak so forcibly to the heart, of happiness and prosperity, without feeling a glow of national pride, as I say, ‘this is my own, my native land’” (5). While her nationalist pride is clear, she is linking the ideas of “happiness and prosperity” with the land itself, and importantly with white ownership of it. However, in writing the character Hobomok and his interracial marriage with Puritan Mary Conant, Child blurs the distinctions between the Indian “savage” and the “child of nature” in a way that questions the legitimacy of land acquisition.

The linking of the land itself, of nature and of the wild, with nationalism is a clear concern from the onset of the novel. She continues,

In most nations the path of antiquity is shrouded in darkness, rendered more visible by the wild, fantastic light of fable; but with us, the vista of time is luminous to its remotest point. Each succeeding year has left its footsteps distinct upon the soil, and the cold dew of our chilling dawn is still visible beneath the mid-day sun. Two centuries only have elapsed, since our most beautiful villages reposed in the undisturbed grandeur of nature;--when the scenes now rendered classic by literary associations, or resounding with the din of commerce, echoed nought but the song of the hunter, or the fleet tread of the wild deer. (5)
Child clearly connects the passage of time to the land itself, as each year’s “footsteps” represent the continuum of expansion from small colonial village to her current presence in the state of Massachusetts. The “undisturbed grandeur” of nature, as presented here as economically undeveloped and historically undocumented—there for the easy taking—will be complicated within the novel itself as the land outside the village of Naumkeak is reflected as dark, scary, and largely inhospitable to the civilized white man, who initially only survives it with the help of the local Indians. Bergland writes, “It is notable that Child chooses the metaphor of occupied ground...since the occupying of American ground is one of the central concerns of the frontier romance, and since Child’s work emphasizes the indeterminate and uncertain nature of ownership and occupation in the American borderland” (66). As much as Child understands and employs the nationalist ideology of land as free, her work reveals the harsh truth of colonial settlement this trope seeks to conceal as her presentation of the morally upright Hobomok challenges the racist construction of the savage from whom it is only right to forcibly take land; her reliance upon the notions of land as opposition between property, domesticated nature and the wild ultimately undercuts her liberal intentions in creating an imaginary, domestic Indian, revealing her ambivalence about both American nationalism and Indian inclusion in white civilization.10

At the heart of Child’s challenge to American nationalism is her ambivalent presentation of Indian “savagism” which she figures through the characters of the always-wild Corbitant on one side, and Hobomok and his interracial marriage to the white Puritan Mary Conant on the other. While domestic literary tropes generally tend to uphold paternalistic authority, Child’s deployment of them here reveals a liberal agenda
of assimilation that attempts to counter racist savagism. In many ways, the use of the domestic sphere provides a ground for the inversion of constructs of morality; by including an oppressed group within a decidedly moral realm, the insistence on that group's inherent immorality is thwarted.

Hobomok and Mary's marriage and family works to "civilize" Hobomok. Claudia Tate, in "Allegories of Black Female Desire; or, Rereading Nineteenth-Century Sentimental Narratives of Black Female Authority," writes that "Nineteenth-century people, white and black, were well aware of the social ethos for their period. They staunchly sanctioned civil marriage as the vehicle for promoting family stability, social progress, and respectability; indeed, marriage was the sign of civilization" (103), and civilization, as we have seen, is dependent upon respect for private property, the domestication of land. Indian-white marriage is then a means for Indian inclusion in the moral conceptualization of civilization, and a means of moving the "wild" land into the realm of nature and property. Through Hobomok and Mary's interracial marriage, Child is able to deploy domestic tropes which endow him with morality denied by racism while she simultaneously keeps Hobomok just enough outside the realm of white civilization to ensure his link to the wild land that surrounds the Puritans. By the end of the novel, Hobomok is in position to cede his lands within the context of familial, not political, relations.

In this sense, Hobomok and Mary's marriage is legally, economically, morally and ideologically conflicted, and is presented in the midst of conflicts as well: between Mary and her father, between Hobomok and Corbitant, between the Pequots and the English, between ideas of the wild and the domesticated land, and even within Mary
herself as her mind is in a “vacillating state” caused by “the unreasonableness of grief and anger” (122) when she marries. Yet while the marriage is founded upon conflict, it is also presented as a loving, legitimate marriage. Laura Mielke, in “Sentiment and Space in Lydia Maria Child’s Native American Writings, 1824-1870,” writes of Mary’s growing affection of Hobomok that “The reader witnesses the power of sympathy, as modeled by mothers and practiced by their children, to unite Native Americans and Euro-Americans and (temporarily) sanctify interracial familial and sexual bonds” (175); this sanctity underscores the ideology of marriage as a moral union and propels Hobomok toward white Christian morality. Indeed, Mary says, “every day that I live with that kind, noble-hearted creature, the better I love him,” to which her friend replies, “I always thought he was the best Indian I knew...he seems almost like an Englishman” (137). Marriage not only keeps Mary from being lost in the wild, it transforms Hobomok himself.12

Hobomok’s inclusion in the family as husband and father, hence patriarch on a small level, lasts long enough to project his inclusion within the nation and economy. When Hobomok leaves and Mary marries Charles Brown, her inheritance is transferred, and all the conflicts that engendered the mixed-race marriage are resolved—except for the one between the Pequots and the English, which historically is ended in horrifying violence that is not addressed in the novel. The first marriage allows for morality in the love Mary and Hobomok feel for one another and for Hobomok’s participation in the economy of land exchange; the second reasserts the moral rectitude of white society in the resolution of the visible conflicts and in the domestication of what is now Mary and Charles’s land.13
This, of course, works with the creation of imaginary Indians, and Maddox writes that in *Hobomok* and other novels like it, “For the Indian characters, deference to the patriarch is natural. They are therefore trapped in a kind of perpetual childhood” (97). This is aligned with the way Child links the Puritans, as Christians, to the progress of white civilization stemming from the Enlightenment, and Hobomok’s figuration as a subordinate *within* this system allows for the notion of his and other Indians’ possible enlightened progress. This configuration of Hobomok works in tandem with the concept of Indians and the land both signaling the as-of-yet untamed or undomesticated wild. Mielke asserts that “in a period framed by federal policies of removal and allotment, Child’s Native American writings problematically associate racial-cultural categories with distinct spaces (both land and buildings), fetishizing difference and naturalizing segregation, but also denying Native American sovereignty” (173). Hobomok can *inhabit* the wild and represent its potential for domestication, he can leave it for his son’s family to take possession of, but he does not *rule* the land as that would position him as an economic and political equal to the Puritans. Child’s denial of Hobomok’s sovereignty is tied to how she represents nature as culturally and religiously encoded.

Early in the novel, Child frames the Puritans as the harbingers of the Enlightenment in the New World, and ties this philosophical and religious construct to images of nature: “The sun, which for ages beyond the memory of man had gazed on the strange, fearful worship of the Great Spirit of the Wilderness, was soon to shed its splendor upon the alters of the living God. That light, which had arisen amid the darkness of Europe, stretched its long, luminous track across the Atlantic, till the summits of the western world became tinged with brightness” (5-6). Indian spirituality, “the
strange, fearful worship” she here represents, is eclipsed by the brightness of Christianity, which the sun itself clearly prefers, linking enlightenment with domesticated nature, and positing Indian spirituality, “wild” as it is, as a stage before Christianity. Maddox writes that Child “embraced the new ‘Liberal Christianity,’ which aimed at replacing the Calvinist doctrines of natural depravity and special election with an emphasis on the ability of the individual to be guided toward the good by the light of reason and intuition. Most important, [she] fully accepted…the premise that human society is as susceptible of improvement as is the individual” (95-96), which in the novel is reflected through the Episcopalian Charles Brown. Maddox continues that Child “clearly wish[es] to revise Puritan historian’s representations of Indians as devilish savages and brutes” (96), and to “invent Indian characters who can be brought out of the woods—the domain of the male novelists—and into the domestic place” (96). The domestic realm is then not only the family and household but a settled, Christian nature as well, and its importance is emphasized as Hobomok appears frequently in Naumkeak and its surrounding area.¹⁴

Naumkeak expands as the novel progresses, and as it does so, Child asserts the benevolence of nature as her narrator describes Puritan colonialism in terms of morality and land:

As I stood gazing on the reflection of the moon, which reposed in broken radiance on the bay beyond, I tried to think soberly of the difficulties to which I and my brethren were exposed, and to decide how far I could conscientiously purchase peace and prosperity by conforming to mummeries which my soul detested…I looked out upon the surrounding scenery, and its purity and stillness were a reproach upon my inward
warfare. The little cleared spot upon which I was placed, was everywhere surrounded by dark forests, through which the distant water was here and there gleaming, like the fitful flashes of reason in a disordered mind.’ (12)

Child’s male narrator, discontented with the strict Calvinism of the Puritans, can see reason in glimpses of water through the beautiful trees of the “disordered” and frightening forest. He is more enlightened than his “brethren,” and that he stays in the colony signals that Naumkeak will inherit his rationality, as indeed he can see more reason outside of the small clearing; hence, the greater the clearing of the land, the greater the “flashes of reason.” Similarly, later in the novel the expansion of the Naumkeak settlement is also related in terms of progress: “the place which a few months before had only echoed the occasioned sound of the axe, or the shrill whoop of the hunter, was now busy with the hum of industry, and the clear, loud laughter of youth” (62).

Importantly, the positive and calming influences of domesticated nature are not limited to her rational narrator as they affect Hobomok as well:

As he came in sight of the seacoast, the sun was setting behind the ledge of rocks which stretched along to his right; and the broad blue harbour of Salem lay full in his view, as tranquil as the slumbers of a young heart devoid of crime... There was something in the unruffled aspect of things, which tended to soothe the turbulence of human passion. By degrees the insults of Corbitant, the remembrance of Pokanecket’s child, the clouds which imagination had seen lowering over the fate of his nation, and even
the danger of his English friends, became more dim and fleeting; till at length, the spirit of devotion sat brooding over the soul of the savage. (33).

This passage delineates much of the idea of nature that informs Child’s career throughout all of her Indian writings. The sea, to the East, is nature at its calmest, offering reason and meditation of strength great enough to “soothe” the “savage;” this is the same water that the narrator has calming “glimpses” (12) of as the wild forest of the colony scares him and reflects his cowardice. Corbitant, the inveterate “savage,” is removed from Hobomok’s ruminations and emotions; simultaneously, the calm of nature is here “the harbour of Salem,” even though Child takes pains to remind the readers throughout the story that this is set in the colonial village of Naumkeak, the Pequot name for the region, highlighting that this view of nature is already settled and domesticated.

Child emphasizes Hobomok’s “brooding” and “savage” character here in order to accentuate the power of nature aligned with civilization to calm, and thus nature itself is aligned with the East and with reason. This reveals that the depiction of a calm, soothing, spiritual nature depends upon the notion of the savage to counter it. Hobomok’s own body is tied to notions of civilized nature and the “noble savage,” and Child writes, “This Indian was indeed cast in nature’s noblest mould. He was one of the finest specimens of elastic, vigorous elegance of proportion, to be found among his tribe. His long residence with the white inhabitants of Plymouth had changed his natural fierceness of manner into haughty, dignified reserve” (36). While he is still tied to nature here and is indeed a “specimen” of his tribe, civilized society has had a physical effect upon him. In many ways, Hobomok himself is an embodiment of the frontier, the space where civilization and the wild meet and are contested. He may be “like an Englishman” (137) when
married, but he is also the hunter who shoots a deer in the darkness of night in the wild (89). Ultimately, though, Hobomok’s fluctuating position in terms of spiriturality, authority, the land, and the family are decided as he leaves his wife and son to a white man and disappears into the West.

This ending reflects Child’s retreat into the trope of the disappearing Indian, and Bergland writes, “both Hobomok, the novel, and Hobomok, the character, acquiesce to the removal and eventual disappearance of Native Americans as if inevitable” (70). His acquiescence is not a simple vanishing, however, as his roles in the family, in the colonial community and in connection to nature position him to leave his land behind as an inheritance to his wife and son, who are subsumed into white civilization. But while this ending is peaceful, it is problematic. Mark G. Vasquez, writing in “‘Your Sister Cannot Speak to You and Understand You As I Do’: Native American Culture and Female Subjectivity in Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick,” claims, “Child’s narrator provides a history lesson concerning the white man’s spiritual separation from nature in contrast to the Native American’s connection to it...[T]he view of nature as primal religious text, as well as Mary’s comparative language, seeks to unite and connect, to preclude conflict” (176). He continues that “Such a synthetic ending to Child’s novel indicates a social reform that results from challenging traditional discourses of historical, religious, and literary authority. In reworking conventional structures and languages, marginalized groups can seize authority and forge individual and cultural identity” (179). Similarly, Maddox also argues that the novel’s end signals an exchange between Indians and white women: “The Indians, according to her parable, were the friends of young America who provided a healthy corrective to the gloomy and dictatorial piety of the
Puritan fathers...[T]hey offered the children of the Puritans, especially the daughters, living models of the spontaneous and imaginative life, the life of ‘feeling,’ and they helped to nurture in the impressionable daughters a religious attitude based on instinctive reverence rather than on received dogma” (101). These interpretations, of course, reveal inversions of the Indians as the “children of nature” per se and offer reconciliation based upon gender inversion: Indians and white women have the ability to mediate crises peaceably. Ultimately, however, Mary rejoins Naumkeak through marriage to Charles Brown, who is more rational than the Puritans; he believes in individual self-development as “Spiritual light, like that of the natural sun, shines from one source, and shines alike upon all...the diversity of rays is occasioned by the nature of the recipient” (69), again tying rationality to nature. As Mary takes up the cloak of white civilized morality through her second marriage, the Indian-white cultural mediation fails, as Mielke writes: “The title character’s movement westward is implicitly and inextricably linked to a permanent disappearance of Native Americans from the region in which Child’s novel was written, set, and primarily consumed” (174).

Mary and Hobomok’s marriage can endorse ideas of the nation as domestic family and connect them to the land, but by novel’s end those stretches of woods are marked for clearing by the continually arriving colonists; the land that forms the basis for mediation is, finally, slated for deforestation. Hobomok leaves Mary and their son as soon as he sees Charles Brown alive, then declares his intentions to go West:

‘I will be buried among strangers, and none shall black their face at the unknown chief. When the light sinks behind the hills, see that Corbitant be not near my wigwam; for that hawk has often been flying round my
nest. Be kind to my boy’... Before Brown had time to reply, he plunged into the thicket and disappeared. He moved on with astonishing speed, till he was aware he must be beyond the reach of pursuit... He lay thus inactive for several hours, musing on all he had enjoyed and lost. At last, he sprung to his feet, as if stung with torture he could no longer endure, and seizing his bow, he pursued with delirious eagerness every animal which came within his view. (140)

As soon as he removes himself from white civilization, Hobomok is pictured as a wild hunter, racing off into the West and at war with the animal-like Corbitant, but his depiction as a return to the savage is incomplete. He both retains and rejects his role within the family as he literally leaves a physical inheritance of all the animals he hunts in this last frenzy and his lands, and his tears reveal the proper sentimentality associated with family and the loss of a child, revealing the sympathy Mielke has described (175). His disappearance into the West utilizes the trope of the Indian ghost: “He paused on a neighboring hill, looked toward his wigwam till his strained vision could hardly discern the object, with a bursting heart again murmured his farewell and blessing, and forever passed away from New England” (141), and this act of removal is equated with a moral act of self-denial.

Karcher writes, “the final element in the resolution of religious, racial, sexual, and generational conflicts with which the novel ends is the assimilation into Anglo-American society of the child embodying the marriage of America’s white colonists and Indian aborigines—the alternative Child offers to white supremacy and race war” (31). Of those left behind to benefit from his sacrifice, and of “the little Hobomok,” Child writes, “His
father was seldom spoken of; and by degrees his Indian appellation was silently omitted. But the devoted, romantic love of Hobomok was never forgotten by its object; and his faithful services to the ‘Yengees’ are still remembered with gratitude; though the tender slip which he protected, has since become a mighty tree, and the nations of the earth seek refuge beneath its branches” (150). The actual forest that witnesses Mary and Hobomok’s marriage and its dissolution works in the abstract realm of national ideology in the novel as the nation itself is now natural. Vasquez writes that, “the figurative language ends the novel in describing Hobomok’s progeny” (179), reading Hobomok as a symbolic progenitor or father. The ‘tender slip’ is a reference to the fledgling colony at Naumkeak, which has grown like a “mighty tree” and now houses immigrants from the “nations of the earth,” keeping Hobomok within the figuration of the nation as a family. While this peaceful ending bolsters the idea of Child the reformist and looks so hopefully to the possible power of interracial domesticity, there is a harsh reality in the permanence Child reveals in her metaphor: the national tree is rooted where Hobomok’s tribe had lived.

Thus the land that was once reflective of spiritual belief and progress is now a figurative description of the permanence of the nation, and Hobomok’s role within the American family is over. Child keeps him included only long enough to leave his entire life behind. Karcher writes, “This said, her conception of assimilation amounts to cultural genocide. Only if Indians cease to be Indians, it implies, can they earn a place in the society that is dispossessing them” (32). In the end, Child has Hobomok disappear into the West, the frontier, where he can continue to represent the notion that there are still “good” Indians who will help the whites settle the wilderness as Hobomok has
helped the colonists at Naumkeak. Child’s negative characterizations of the closed-minded Puritans are historically born out in terrible violence outside the frame of the novel, and she rescues Hobomok before the massacre of the Pequots, keeping his conciliatory character in the unexplored “safety” of the frontier. Perhaps Child is rescuing him and his culture until a time a people more willing to compromise than the Puritans were able to meet the Indians in the frontier, or perhaps she is signaling that the contemporaneous insistence on the evil of all Indians in the frontier is false because Hobomok must live on there; but in any event, she can only rescue him by sending him West. Hobomok’s son is absorbed into white culture, raised in Salem, and eventually educated in England. Even if Hobomok’s influence is no longer recognized by whites, Child signals that Hobomok’s influence on American culture remains, forever subsumed into the nascent country despite the lack of recognition. An Indian influence exists under the “civilized” façade of American culture, and while Child has, overall, endorsed the idea of the progressive expansion of the nation, she has posed serious questions about the terms under which the national land has been annexed, and has symbolically shown at least a portion of its cost to Indians.

“We would indeed restore mankind by truly Indian, botanic, magnetic, and natural means”

Thoreau’s approach to domestication in Walden is different from Child’s fictionalized family and occurs as he recounts the activities, events and circumstances of
the two years he spent living on the banks of Walden Pond, in “nature,” and throughout the text he presents diverging images of both the “savage” and Indian. While “savage” is always a derogatory term, Thoreau’s text contains positive, if imaginary, portrayals of Indian people and cultures. He uses “savage” strictly as a counterpoint to white civilization, making it a crucial method in separating his educated New England culture from the lives of indigenous North Americans and other non-Christians worldwide. Thoreau’s “savage,” like Child’s Corbitant, is always to be disdained, but Indian traditions and tribes are to be revered and even emulated. The distinction between his derision of the “savage” and respect for the Indian then works to signal his ambivalence about the Enlightenment philosophy guides American expansion and industrial development, and is frequently aligned with how he characterizes nature.

In Walden, Thoreau directly counters the ideas of literary nationalism, and nationalism on the whole, that was so important to Child and other writers of the time. He declares that the concept of the nation is unimportant to him:

The nation itself, with all its so called improvements, which, by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined in luxury and heedless expense...It lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles per hour...but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain. (395)

His criticism of the nation is more accurately a criticism of the materialism of a society predicated on capitalist development, as seen in his criticizing “commerce,” represented
by “the ice,” the “telegraph,” and the railroad that goes by at “thirty miles per hour.” But while he says that the nation is not so important, he is very concerned with the land he inhabits, and it is of course impossible to divorce Concord and its land from their nation. He critiques his nation’s lack of spirituality and idealism as he critiques materialist development through his conflicted depictions of Indians, “savages,” white civilization, and nature.

Walden presents an important conflict in Thoreau’s lifelong attempt to develop an understanding of the Indian, and Maddox writes that between 1847 and 1861, “Thoreau was steadily filling twelve notebooks—his ‘Indian Books—with notes, anecdotes, and transcribed passages from his reading about Indians” (133). While Thoreau mostly conforms to the notion of the vanishing Indian, he simultaneously creates an imaginary realm of existence from which Indians signify a way of existing materially, through the domestic work of housing, clothing, and food, that is superior to the industrialized material existence of white civilization; this material existence is posited as close to “nature,” and therefore enabling of spiritual development—for white men. In Walden, the Indian exists symbolically in the margins between “civilization” and “savage,” and between Thoreau’s notions of a spiritually informative nature and the actual place by the pond where he lived, which is, itself, domesticated. Of his Walden project, he writes “It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessaries of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them” (332). 

The relationship between manufacturing the “necessaries of life,” the peaceful projection of nature, and the development of the individual is vital to Thoreau’s career as
a writer. Robert D. Richardson, in *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, describes Thoreau's reasoning: "Neither nature nor human nature had changed, in essence, from Virgil's time to ours...If nature was the same and if men were the same—two constraints in a world of social change—then the modern writer stood in relation to his world in just the same way Homer stood in relation to his, and modern achievement could indeed rival the ancients" (25-26). This articulation of Thoreau's early beliefs, which remain essentially unchanged throughout his career, begins to reveal both Thoreau's doubt in the enlightened progression of civilizations and the kernel of his concern that industrial development poses a very real threat to the permanence and benevolence of nature.

Already, much to his dismay, advancing industrialization is encroaching upon the nature of Thoreau's Concord and impinging upon the spiritual development of his town, as is clear in his continuous criticism of the railroad: "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us" (396). Richardson continues: "In enunciating this belief in the permanence of nature and of human nature, and the equivalence of all eras—that any age is a heroic age to the heroic individual—we come to perhaps what is the single most important set of convictions for the young Thoreau. It was not a creed or construct, but the core of his practical, daily, actual belief...Once he grasped it, once he had seen it squarely in concrete relation to his own personal life, Thoreau never gave up this belief" (26).

The certainty of Thoreau's belief in individual development as advanced in nature makes his articulation of nature all the more important, especially as it remains opposed to both white civilization and to the wild and becomes the realm of his imaginary Indians; the materially superior Indians inhabit the ideally superior nature, but do not advance individually within it as he does; they are, in this text, represented tribally and not as
individuals. Thoreau’s depiction of both the land and the Indian thus blurs the distinction between the material and the ideal. While Thoreau declares “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (394), he also writes a book that gives a detailed, mapped account of the depth of the pond; specific Indian customs are to be admired and emulated, but there is no Indian spirituality endowing nature with meaning, counter to actual Indian existence.

The Indians in Thoreau’s nature, while exhibiting their domestic material goodness, do not always share Thoreau’s woods. Bergland writes, “During the nineteenth century... American national discourse insisted that Native Americans were extinct, that they did not exist, or that they existed as representatives of the past, rather than as contemporaries of a shared present” (15). Thoreau deviates from this as his advocating various Indian traditions and social structures brings them materially into the present while it relegates the “savage” to extinction; he mentions Indians in Concord, but it is crucial that Thoreau is alone at his pond. Bergland writes, “the term civilization, coined in 1772, is intended to describe a society on which ‘the central property and agency was reason.’ On the other hand, barbarism or savagery, and the human beings who are understood to be barbaric or savage are understood to be irrational as well as uncivil” (16). It is when Thoreau sees material, domestic rationality and/or superiority in the lives of Indians that he breaks with the dominant racist projections of Indians; they are not “savage” but skilled. Simultaneously, that he recognizes this is a mark in his own self-development; it does not signal the advance of the nation.
The Indian is then held to a space of mediation between the “savage” and the “civil.” Even though Linck C. Johnson, in “A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers” (1995), notes that “for Thoreau the destruction of the Indians was an integral part of one of the greatest catastrophes in history” (50), and although he read and took extensive notes on Indian history\textsuperscript{17}, Thoreau’s Indian is not always socio-historically accurate. While Thoreau denies Indian spirituality—not through denigrating its ideals, but by never mentioning that such a thing could exist—he is careful to include Indians in many aspects of the material world, interestingly aligning Indian practices and culture within ideas of a domesticated nature. While 	extit{Walden} is the book that explains why Thoreau “went to the woods,” it is not a travelogue. Thoreau’s text is involved in documenting his material existence in the domestic realm, not in terms of family or marriage but in its very mundane aspects: food, clothing, shelter, farming, and entertaining guests. Of the domestic economy, Habermas writes, “Activities and dependencies...relegated to the framework of the household economy emerged from this confinement to the public sphere...The economic activity that had become private had to be oriented toward a commodity market that had expanded under public direction and supervision; the economic conditions under which this activity now took place lay outside the confines of the single household; for the first time, they were of general interest” (19). Thoreau does assume that it is “of general interest” to read his lists of expenses, profits from farming, descriptions of farming techniques, home construction and land management, and he uses these descriptions to make very clear distinctions between his notions of “civilization” and the “savage.”
Thoreau’s first reference to “savages” (332) appears early in his first chapter, “Economy,” and is immediately used to criticize his own society. Richard J. Schneider, in “Walden,” writes that “Although he will describe ‘where he lived and what he lived for,’ he is just as interested in describing and critiquing how his audience lives” (94). In the passage, Thoreau retells Charles Darwin’s account of Europeans being cold next to a fire, while the “naked savages” were overly warm. Thoreau wonders, “Is it possible to combine the hardiness of these savages with the intellectualness of the civilized man?” (333); they are here simultaneously counter-positioned against civilization, yet display an economy in their relation to nature that Thoreau finds desirable. This excerpt places the “savage” as connected to the wild because they do not need the added warmth of the fire as does the “civilized man.” Sayre sees a “satire on the civilized waste of fuel. Europeans are not hardy; they shiver around a fire while ‘naked savages’ stand further off sweating” (65), yet while Sayre contends that Thoreau largely conformed to savagism despite its untruths, even in this first reference Thoreau’s ambiguity is detectable.

Schneider writes that the “strategy of first subverting the status quo with its opposite and then opening up infinite possibilities from that opposition point is crucial to Walden” (97). This still positions the “savage” and the “civil” as oppositional, but Thoreau is both using the savage to criticize the civil and searching for a middle ground, a way to blend the “hardiness of these savages” with its opposing “intellectualness;” neither is acceptable here. According to Sayre, “To Thoreau, the contrast between wildness and refinement is so fundamental in human history that it can be found anywhere” (43). If so, it is a contrast that here Thoreau clearly wants to breech.
Later in “Economy,” while condemning the high price of housing, he writes, “In the savage state every family owns a shelter as good as the best, and sufficient for its coarser and simpler wants; but I think that I speak within bounds when I say that, though the birds of the air have their nests, and the foxes their holes, and the savages their wigwams, in modern civilized society not more than one half of the families own a shelter” (346). The “savages” here are equated with animals, shown to have wants “coarser and simpler,” yet manage a material equality unmatched by Thoreau’s capitalist society. The “savages” are degraded in order to degrade “modern civilized society.” Within this same paragraph, the difference between “savage” and Indian is first seen: “The Indians had advanced so far as to regulate the effect of the wind by a mat suspended over the hole in the roof and moved by a string” (346). His admiration of the technology, of its rationality, is apparent in calling this mechanism “advanced,” revealing the middle ground between savage and civil, yet his conformity to the idea of the disappearing Indian is also evident in that they “had advanced,” and not “have advanced” (my emphasis).

Thoreau further derides the inequalities of class by deploying the comparison of “savage” and “civilized” societies:

The luxuries of one class is counterbalanced by the indigence of another...It is a mistake to suppose that, in a country where the usual evidences of civilization exist, the condition of a very large body of the inhabitants may not be as degraded as that of savages...Contrast the physical condition of the Irish with that of the North American Indian, or the South Sea Islander, or any other savage race before it was degraded by
contact with the civilized man. Yet I have no doubt that that people's
rulers are as wise as the average of civilized rulers. Their condition only
proves what squalidness may consist with civilization. (350)

In these instances, the "savage" is used to condemn a lack in Thoreau's society and is
meant to provoke his audience—other New England intellectuals. Steven Fink, in
"Thoreau and his Audience" (1995), reveals an underlying complexity in Walden in that
"we learn quickly that for Thoreau poverty is really a spiritual condition, and his
'economy' a spiritual economy, so he redefines his audience as 'the mass of men who
are discontented'" (85). This argument then collapses the clear distinction between the
life of "civilization" and the "savages" on an ideal level as well as on the material one,
and this comparison is itself followed by a reference to American slavery, a system he
consistently derides as immoral. Simultaneously, the excerpt reveals his idealist view of
economy and society: poverty only proves what conditions "may consist with
civilization" (my emphasis). A materialist view of capitalist economy would show that
poverty must exist alongside wealth. This material degradation of the savage is parallel
to that of "the laboring man...[who]has not time to be any thing but a machine" (327),
and the savage here has been "degraded by contact with the civilized man," inverting the
trope of white civilization's superiority. The market and its material inequality are
shaped as morally wrong.19

The poverty Thoreau derides, materially and spiritually, is consistent with his
frequent critiques of capitalist production, economy, and value. Yet another reason for
Thoreau's admiring Indian life is its distinction from capitalist participation, whether
accurate or not. Of this, Paul Gilmore, in "The Indian in the Museum," explains that part
of the stereotype of the noble Indian is, “the freedom of the primitive Indian’s integrated life with nature stands outside the market—neither consumer nor laborer” (47). But even though Thoreau is employing a racist stereotype here, he is not doing so for the sake of derision. Advocating living outside of the civilized market economy and in nature is largely one of the most important points of *Walden*. Schneider writes that in the text “The key to living...becomes to maintain our physical vital heat by the most economical (that is, the simplest) method, thereby producing the maximum amount of the only capital that is real: time” (99). The materially simplified approach to economy and nature that Thoreau typifies as Indian is then a means for pursuing the spiritual or ideal through the time taken away from trade. Along these lines, at the end of his discussion of the positive aspects of simplified household economy, about his rejection of salt he writes, “I do not learn that the Indians ever troubled themselves to go after it. Thus I could avoid all trade and barter” (373). Here, the Indian existence is typified as outside the market not to mock a lack of civilized development but as a model of better household organization.

In another critique of capitalist commodification, in a widely cited passage of an Indian selling baskets, he writes:

Not long since, a strolling Indian went to sell baskets at the house of a well-known lawyer in my neighborhood...Having seen his industrious white neighbors so well off...he had said to himself; I will go into business; I will weave baskets; it is a thing which I can do. Thinking that when he had made his baskets he would have done his part, and then it would be the white man’s to buy them. He had not discovered that it was necessary for him to make it worth the other’s while to buy them, or at
least make him think that it was so...I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but had not made it worth any one’s while to buy them. Yet not the less, in my case, did I think it worth my while to weave them, and instead of studying how to make it worth men’s while to buy my basket, I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them. The life which men praise and regard as successful is but one kind. Why should we exaggerate any one kind at the expense of the others? (337-38)

The Indian selling baskets is placed within white civilization and the market economy, but fails at his endeavor. Gilmore writes, “Indians’ ‘wildness’ makes them more truly men by making them untamable by commercialized culture. Thus, in confronting the commercial failure of his first book (A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers), Thoreau identifies himself with the seemingly misdirected Indian...In following the Indian’s model of manhood, Thoreau attempts to return to nature and thus avoid the entrapments of a...commercialized culture” (37-38). What saves this passage from being ridicule of the Indian is Thoreau’s alignment of his own attempt to sell his writing with the Indian’s attempt to sell baskets, both underscoring his disdain for the market. Thoreau learns what he presents as the useful lesson from his failure: “how to avoid the necessity of selling them,” or how to live outside of the marketplace. The Indian here functions to reveal negative aspects of the market and white capitalist society’s methods of measuring success, accentuated in Thoreau’s insistence that in terms of the writing itself, he did “think it worthwhile to weave them,” just not to try to sell them.

At points, Thoreau advocates emulation of specific aspects of Indian culture and his references to particular tribes and customs increase. Bergland writes, “Being haunted
by Indians usually signals the positive development of white consciousness” (19), and the Indian customs to be emulated would bring about better spiritual development for white, “civilized” men. He writes, “The customs of some savage nations might, perchance, be profitably imitated by us, for they at least go through the semblance of casting their slough annually” (376). The deployment of “savage” is here ambivalent, and he does invoke the specific tribe to bring about the ideal. This passage continues, outlining the sloughing traditions of the “Mucclasse Indians” (376) and concludes, “I have scarcely heard of a truer sacrament, that is, as the dictionary defines it, ‘outward and visible sign of an inward spiritual grace,’ than this, and I have no doubt that they were originally inspired directly by Heaven to do this” (377). The move from the generalized “savages” to the specific tribe allows for the complimentary portrayal, and for the concept of developing white consciousness, but that portrayal is effected by misrepresenting the tribe’s spiritual beliefs and including instead a Christianized view of heavenly inspiration.

This Christianization of the Indians is purposeful, and he upholds the morality of the “Indians” (381) who were burned at the stake by Jesuits as Christian. Sayre refers to Thoreau’s presenting “virtues yet inconceivable to the Christian mind” (69), when Thoreau writes that the Indians were “superior to physical suffering…superior to consolation…who loved their enemies after a new fashion, and came very near freely forgiving them all they did” (381-82). Despite Sayre’s characterization, this passage shows that the suffering men were not presenting an “inconceivable” virtue but were very clearly turning the other cheek. Thoreau endows these murdered Indians with Christ-like behavior in order to criticize the Christians who enacted their execution, and who clearly could not do the same; if they love their enemies “after a new fashion,” it is new because
it is unpracticed by the Jesuits. Johnson writes, “the bell had tolled the doom of native Americans and their culture, since the white settlers had dispossessed them of their religious traditions as well as their land” (49-50), and Thoreau’s description continues this dispossession. The Indians’ actions here bridge the gap between the ideals and structures of practiced religion eerily through their deaths and through a clear rejection of their own spirituality.

Despite and with these spiritual misrepresentations, Thoreau still presents positive Indian culture. He discusses the Massasoit and how the once future governor Winslow described their lack of manners in not offering food to guests. Thoreau writes, “I do not see how the Indians could have done better. They had nothing to eat themselves, and they were wiser than to think that apologies could supply the place of food to their guests...Another time when Winslow visited them, it being a season of plenty with them, there was no deficiency in this respect” (436-37). That he finds their actions “wiser” than rude reflects his admiration for material simplicity and equality, while noting, ironically enough, the white man’s misinterpretation of events. Thoreau also depicts the agricultural traditions of his day that were inherited from Indians, again aligning Indians with domesticated nature: “This generation is very sure to plant corn and beans each new year precisely as the Indians did centuries ago and taught the first settlers to do, as if there were a fate in it” (453). That Thoreau recognizes here the agrarian traditions of the Pequot shows his removal of the particular Indian from the savagist notions of the hunter-gatherer

In addition to questioning the accuracy in describing actual Indians as “savages,” Thoreau also explores the historical connections of Indians to the land. In the chapter
"The Ponds," he relates a false creation tale, a new American myth, about the name of Walden Pond. He writes,

My townsmen have all heard the tradition, the oldest people tell me they heard it in their youth, that anciently in the Indians were holding a pow-wow upon a hill here, which rose as high in the heavens as the pond now sinks deep into the earth, and they used much profanity, as the story goes, though this vice is one of which the Indians were never guilty, and while they were thus engaged the hill shook and suddenly sank, and only one old squaw, named Walden, escaped, and from her the pond was named...I detect the paver. If the name was not derived from that of some English locality,—Saffron Walden, for instance,—one might suppose that it was called, originally, *Walled-in* Pond. (468)

There is a complex creation and rejection of natural and social history here. In describing Margaret Fuller and Thoreau, Birkle writes, "although they declare their (political and cultural) independence from Europe, they view American with a gaze that is marked by the colonial and colonizing experience of the early settlements...they themselves use the language of colonization and thus appropriate the position of the conqueror" (499). The creation tale is a settlers’ tale, not one of the Penobscot, and it is presented then denied, clearly tying the Indian presence to the land pre-colonization while signaling the tribe’s destruction. He rejects the colonizers’ inaccurate depiction of tribal life yet includes his own gross generality: "this vice is one of which the Indians were never guilty.” The name is colonial, and he chooses the most material explanation for the pond’s name: a
description of its being enhanced through man’s work. Indians are connected to nature initially here, but “the paver” proves the domestication of both by white civilization.

He thus injects Indians into the pond’s name only to deny it. He denies its location as the space of a pow-wow, which would connect it with Indian spirituality, yet maintains the Indians’ previous physical presence there, signaling their ghostly history. Bergland writes, “the figure of the Indian ghost is profoundly ambiguous” (2), and so in this instance is Walden Pond itself as a representation of nature. In describing its name, Thoreau ties together then tears apart Indians, their spirituality, colonization, its misrepresentations, his own misrepresentations of Indian culture, and the pond as a natural, ideal, and material entity. His most concrete statement, “I detect the paver,” ultimately emphasizes the material effect on Walden Pond by man; his myth of the land overrides all others.

This is by no means the sole ambivalent portrayal of the Indian connection to the geography of Walden. Thoreau’s work both combines Indians with and removes them from the land; they are shown in then removed materially from having effects upon the land, and placed into American ideology, but not in terms of American idealized development. In the following excerpt, he injects Indian life into the landscape in order to emphasize ambiguity in nature itself. He describes on the bottom of the pond, circular heaps half a dozen feet in diameter by a foot in height, consisting of small stones less than a hen’s egg in size, where all around is bare sand. At first you wonder if the Indians could have formed them on the ice for any purpose, and when the ice melted, they sank to the bottom; but they
are too regular and some of them too plainly fresh for that... These leave a pleasing mystery to the bottom. (470)

Thoreau is both utilizing and inverting the trope of the Indian ghost. He imaginatively brings Indians into the landscape where there is no material evidence, and then removes them, leaving a “pleasing mystery” of which they are not a part. Similarly, in “The Ponds,” he writes, “I was pleased to hear of the old log canoe, which took the place of an Indian one of the same material but more graceful construction, which perchance had first been a tree on the bank, and then, as it were, fell into the water, to float there for a generation, the most proper vessel for the lake” (475). The Indian canoe signals the tribe who initially inhabited and has disappeared from the area materially, and who provided the model for a means of living “most proper” in nature. Nature provides the tree, which needs not be logged, to be manufactured into a canoe, to provide the best commodity for travel. This peaceful expression of manufacturing in harmony with nature is also uncertain, relying upon imagination, signaled by “perchance.”

Similarly, he at times uses the Indian and nature in his didacticism, as seen in “Philanthropy”: “If, then, we would indeed restore mankind by truly Indian, botanic, magnetic, and natural means, let us first be simple and well as Nature ourselves” (384). The Indian is “simple,” but also a signal of a better, idealized time to come. This type of didacticism also extends from the social to the individual: “I lived like the Puri Indians, of whom it is said that ‘for yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow they have only one word’... This was sheer idleness to my fellow-townsmen, no doubt; but if the birds and the flowers had tried me by their standards, I should not have been found wanting” (412). Here nature is fragmented into the animals and plants, and is seen as superior to the town...
as an arbiter of higher spirituality. Lawrence Buell, in “Thoreau and the Natural Environment” (1995), writes, “The idea that natural phenomena had spiritual as well as material significance had a life-long appeal to Thoreau” (171-72), but this spirituality is meant for individual self-development, not for the type of myth-making that allows for either true Indian animism or the configurations that support industrial development and destructiveness.

Thoreau’s most complex use of the Indian and nature that complicates the progressive idealism to which he tries to adhere to occurs in “House-Warming.” The passage employs a view of nature as a nurturing mother while using the Indian to signal not only the past but the coming of a better age. In a discussion of a ground-nut tuber near the pond, he writes:

This tuber seemed like a faint promise of Nature to rear her own children and feed them simply here at some future period. In these days of fattened cattle and waving field-grains, this humble root, which was once the totem of an Indian tribe, is quite forgotten, or known only by its flowering vine; but let wild Nature reign here once more, and the tender and luxurious English grains will probably disappear before a myriad of foes, and without the care of man the crow may carry back even the last seed of corn to the great corn-field of he Indian’s god in the south-west, whence he is said to have brought it...Some Indian Ceres or Minerva must have been the inventor and bestower of it; and when the reign of poetry commences here, its leaves and string of nuts may be represented in our works of art. (513)
Of *Walden*, Birkle writes, “Thoreau’s desire to understand nature in a transcendental sense as a sign of a divine concept which promotes the poet and philosopher to the position of a godlike imaginative being...Thoreau repeatedly stresses his idea of nature as cyclically regenerating itself in order to create order out of chaos” (503). In this sense, in Thoreau’s excerpt the Indian signals the cyclical aspect of history and nature; in the tuber’s being the totem of a tribe and the invention of an Indian “Ceres or Minerva,” to becoming the future object of art, what was once revered, then rejected, returns to signal a better day. That the Indian “Ceres or Minerva” is not an Indian but Greek or Roman spirit signals Thoreau’s reluctance to accept spiritual growth from a source outside the continuum of progressive white civilization. The Indian and nature are mixed into Thoreau’s idealism through a past materiality, but the contemporary Indian is not brought in to share in this eventual “reign of poetry,” nor is Indian mythology allowed.

Ultimately, these complicated and contradictory depictions of the Indian and nature cannot be reconciled into one clearly articulated trope, and so neither wholly support or reject the enlightenment philosophy that underscores U.S. nationalism. Buell writes that Thoreau, “began and ended his career fascinated by the vision of the natural realm as correspondent to the human estate” (177), but the correspondence does not hold smoothly in light of the ambiguous portrayal of Indian life, past and present, in comparison to nature and to white civilization. He does not strictly deny civilized rationality or positive signification to the Indian as he does the “savage,” and this, coupled with the contradictions of the material and spiritual in the presentation of nature, relegates the Indian to a space outside the idealistic continuum inherent in the concept of development from “savage” to “civil.” The Indian, disappearing as Bergland’s ghost and
still living in Concord to sell baskets and live in wigwams, exists as a paradox, inhabiting an imaginative ground where American capitalist ideology is challenged, domesticated nature is embraced, and the notions of idealized progress are both defended and challenged, thus personifying the materialism Thoreau cannot dispense with or overcome.

The Mythic Indian and the Paradox of the Wild

The domestication of land and Indians fails to either fully justify or criticize American nationalist expansion, and interestingly neither Thoreau nor Child stays within these tropes as they further explore these topics. In Child’s subsequent Indian short stories and Thoreau’s collection of essays The Maine Woods, both writers continue to explore concepts of race, the natural environment, land and nationalism in vastly different ways, and both offer more serious criticism of United States expansion and land acquisition. Central in the writings are the concepts of the wild and the frontier. As both physical geography and theoretical space, the wild is all that is original in creation, that is, all that is not permanently altered by white civilization and is hence capable of engendering spirituality and myth. The wild then is separated from white civilization by the frontier, the space of mediation.

Within their literary explorations of the wild, both Thoreau and Child show concern for myth and its role in the development and sustenance of cultures and individuals. For both writers, Indians are essential to the creation and preservation of American myths, as is the land, especially when figured as wild. In explaining the
creation of the dominant American myths that both Thoreau and Child counter, Slotkin writes,

An environment, a landscape, a historical sequence is infused with meaning in the form of a story, which converts landscape to symbol and temporal sequence into ‘doom’—a fable of necessary and fated actions...[The frontier is] a mythic region whose wildness made it at once a region of darkness and an earthly paradise, a goad to civilization and a barrier to it; whose hidden magic was to be tapped only by self-reliant individualists, capable of enduring the lonesome reach; whose riches were held by a dark and savage enemy with whom white Americans must fight a war to the knife, with the future of civilization itself as the stake. (11-12)

This mythology is not mere storytelling; these constructs rest upon very real political and economic realities, and so create morally ameliorating tropes within the American nationalist ideology that absorbs them.

The expansion of the nation rested on contention with the Indians over land designated as wild, and in 1823 in Johnson v. McIntosh, Chief Justice Marshall writes of the Indians, “To leave them in possession of their country, was to leave the country in wilderness” (quoted in Scheckel 110). The fight for possession in the courts, on battlefields, and in culture is predicated upon ideas of the “civilized” nation, and Maddox writes of “the difficulty white Americans had in conceiving of living Indian people as belonging to nations...If tribal people could not qualify as citizens of a nation, neither should their claims to proprietorship of land within the geographical limits of the nation
be considered valid” (9-10). Nationalism is in this way predicated upon a fear of the wild, and is manifested in Indian war and removal.²⁰

In this historical context, the need to repress animistic myth and replace it with nationalist ideology is all the more important, which fosters the need to repress history and create new American myths that reconfigure Indians. The Indians that are presented mostly fit the two tropes of the “savage” and the “vanishing Indian,” but both Thoreau and Child challenge these constructs. In explaining the structure of myths, Slotkin writes, “The past is made metaphorically equivalent to the present; and the present appears simply as a repetition of persistently recurring structures identified with the past. Both past and present are reduced to instances displaying a single ‘law’ or principle of nature, which is seen as timeless in its relevance, and as transcending all historical contingencies” (24). As such, Child and Thoreau, even when incomplete in their analyses of the problems of American society, expose when and where American myth and ideology gloss over the truths history would show if it were fully and accurately presented.

This lack of accuracy feeds into configurations of the wild as well, as literally and literally it is constantly moving and morphing. In describing how the wild is largely indefinable and connected to race, Drinnon writes,

Part of the problem stems from the difficulty of locating the sections with some specificity...The truth was that slaves and a stratified society had long since moved into the ‘West’...This prevailing confusion about the West, where it began—did it ever end?—and where the South and the North left off, made tracing regional variations chancy...to allow for the
continued rise of the Union and of the superior race, [Indians] had to be cleared from the land. Society had a place for blacks in the bottom caste but no place where reds could be put and kept. (145)

The wild becomes an imaginative and physical repository for Indians, and as the wild is elusive, Indians are disconnected from it; they can represent the wild in the abstract, and when land is needed for U.S. expansion, they are destroyed or vanish accordingly.

In many ways, the work of Child and Thoreau resist the trope of the vanishing Indian, even though neither author is able to escape it completely. When, where and how Indians survive to counter the dominant ideological beliefs expose the contradictions of that ideology, and for both writers, the wild becomes a place in need of preservation and a sign of white violence in each place it has disappeared or is disappearing. They emphasize the original Indian “ownership” or possession of very specific geographical sites, tying Indian culture and history back to the land already taken and changed by white civilization, which too works against the ideology of their time, as they clearly indicate that land appropriation depends upon violence, and the wild is not an “earthly paradise” (Slotkin 12).

Theoretically, myth and its repression are tied to the opposition of the wild and the white civilized individual, as for any enlightened individual, embracing myth is seen as a step backward.21 Child’s and Thoreau’s later texts relegate Indians to the wild and to myth as they seek to erase actual Indian myths of the land and replace them with American myths of the Indian and the wild; they reinforce the idea of the progressive continuum of civilization and the individual while criticizing the land appropriation and racism responsible for the decimation of Indian lives and culture.22 Both Thoreau and
Child also concern their writing with the problem that some individuals are barred from this notion of “civilized” self-development on all levels, and address this through their depictions of Indians within and outside of this enlightenment trope. This presentation of Indians within tropes of the individual is no simple task, and both Child and Thoreau face a contradiction in terms of how to present the Indian individual and removal in terms of both self-development and material conditions without implying moral degradation, a contradiction they do not always overcome.

Maddox states that “a cliché...was often heard during debates on Indian removal in the 1830s: the idea that uncivilized people are immediately contaminated and degraded by contact with white civilization” (58). This cliché refers to ideal, spiritual conditions, and both writers present the reality of “degradation” in that real Indians were being forcibly removed from the land they depended on not just for their sustenance but their spirituality as well, and were suffering for it. Erdoes and Ortiz write, “The native American, following the pace of ‘Indian time,’ still lives connected to the nurturing womb of mythology. Mysterious but real power dwells in nature—in mountains, rivers, rocks, even pebbles. White people may consider them inanimate objects, but to the Indian, they are enmeshed in the web of the universe, pulsating with life and potent with medicine” (xi). The desire to place mythic, imaginary Indians within the continuum of progress erases the spirituality of nature as defined by Indian culture, especially as “inanimate” objects take on different signification within white culture and poverty is a personal failing; most contemporaneous readers of these texts believed that material existence reflects moral character.
Karcher writes that based upon the Protestant Ethic, the middle class believes that “adopting bourgeois habits of industry, perseverance, and self-denial opens the door to upward mobility” (73), and Thoreau and Child expose the falsity of this belief. Thus in these texts, for both Child and Thoreau, as the contention over land is played out, the emergence of a white land owner, in a corporation or in person, signals the worst of white civilization that seeks profit from dominating the wild without merit or hard work. Success does not rely upon “habits of industry” but selfish and violent appropriation and use of the wild, and the work of Indians does not yield proper material or moral success. Through creating new myths of American land and history, their works expose the false ideology upon which U.S. expansion relies, deploying Indians to challenge material greed and devastation while, unfortunately, relegating the Indians to the ever-vanishing wild themselves.

“Chocorua goes to the Great Spirit—his curse stays with the white men!”

Much of Child’s short Indian fiction depicts either recreations of historical white-Indian conflict or the story of a permanent mark left on a geographical site by particular Indians, real and imaginary. Karcher writes, “Unlike her contemporaries, Child did not use these subgenres to commemorate ancestral triumphs over British tyrants and Indian savages. Instead, she adapted them to more subversive ends. Her best short stories...expose the ills threatening the nation’s future, and rewrite American history from the viewpoint of its victims” (52-53). This narrative viewpoint, which endows
Child’s Indian characters with agency, functions to criticize white duplicity in property transactions and land use while frequently conferring white middle-class values upon the Indian characters. Maddox clarifies how this functions as she asserts that Child’s “Indians, stereotyped as they are, are still granted the status of individualized characters, and their fates are the source of the strongest emotional appeal” (130). The fates of her characters are directly tied to the fate of the land upon which the stories are set, and this conflation lends to their mythic quality. Her depictions of the wild also do not underscore the need for enlightenment as they did in Hobomok; while Child does still address the mixing of peoples literally through interracial reproduction and abstractly through the sharing of cultural tropes, the need to domesticate both the wild and her Indian characters is effaced as her criticism of American expansionist policy becomes more pronounced; this does nothing, though, to change their fates.

Karcher asserts that in her Indian stories Child “places the blame for racial conflict squarely on the shoulders of white colonists. Not Indian savagery, she emphasizes, but white duplicity, has poisoned the relationship between the two peoples” (117). Simultaneously, however, the agency of and advocacy for Indians in these stories still fail as her Indian characters meet brutal, violent ends in the face of the continual expansion of white civilization, and the failure to save the Indian characters’ lives is also the failure to save the wild land itself. Maddox writes, “The question of whether Indians and whites could inhabit the same territory, physical or metaphysical, was unavoidable as long as the Indians continued to defend their right to live (and to maintain their tribal identities) within the territorial limits of the United States” (6). In the places where
conflict is resolved through violence, Child’s stories become myths of once-wild land that always signals white guilt. Karcher writes,

only a half-dozen stories in the gift books of the Indian removal era attempt to articulate the Indian’s viewpoint, hold whites accountable for the state of war between two peoples, or envision alternatives to genocide. Four of them are Child’s…[H]ighlighting America’s sorry history of racial conflict and squarely confronting the white rapacity and bad faith responsible for it,…[these stories] offer no happy endings, because Child has come to realize that her novel’s ending is not happy for the Indian…Pervaded by images of ravaged forests and blighted lives, they also warn of the price the nation will pay for its dispossession of the Indian. (103-04)

This price can only be understood through the emotions and fates of the Indians. Because of this, these characters must have some qualities recognizable as moral to the reading public. In “The Lone Indian,” Child utilizes the love of and within the family to draw sympathy to the story’s protagonist, the Mohawk chief Powantonamo. While this familial love inspires many of his actions, his firm attachment to the wild colludes in not just his own death but his tribe’s obliteration through the domestication of the land by whites. Child marks the celebration of his marriage to Soonseetah, the “Sunny-eye of Oneida,” by highlighting not only romantic love properly sanctified through marriage but also the cooperation of two tribes. She writes, “There was feasting and dancing, and the marriage song rang merrily in Mohawk cabins, when the Oneida came among them Powantonamo loved her as his own heart’s blood. He delighted to
bring her the fattest deers of the forest, and load her with the ribbons and beads of the
English. The prophets of his people liked it not that the strangers grew so numerous in
the land. They shook their heads mournfully, and said, “The moose and the beaver will
not live within the sound of the white man’s gun. They will go to the lakes, and the
Indians must follow their trail” (155-56). The happy marriage is short lived here as it is
immediately given over to tying Powontonamo to the wild through his hunting, and the
eventual destruction of this same wild by the English. The animals flee not English
civilization but its violence, “the sound of the white man’s gun,” and the voice of the
elders justifies the idea of voluntary Indian removal but challenges the notion that Indian
culture and peoples will give way before the great progress of white civilization; they
have to flee to follow their own food sources chased away by the English.

Powantonamo’s despair at the destruction of the wild is spiritual as well as
material, and Child initially ties this to familial love: “Yet when he held his son in his
arms, as his father had done before him, he sighed to hear the strokes of the axe leveling
the old trees of his forest” (156). While the woods are wild, they are “his forest,” and he
has inherited them from his father. The land cannot be passed down in the same way
once the English intrude, and Child highlights the devastation of the wild through the act
of settling or domesticating nature:

Wherever he looked abroad, the ravages of the civilized destroyer met his
eye. Where were the trees, under which he had frolicked in his infancy,
sported in boyhood, and rested after the fatigues of battle? They formed
the English boat, or lined the English dwelling. Where were the holy
sacrifice-heaps of his people? The stones were taken to fence the land,
which the intruder dared to call his own. Where was his father’s grave?
The stranger’s road passed over it, and his cattle trampled on the ground
where the mighty Mohawk slumbered. Where were his once powerful
tribe? (156-57).

Here Child is directly confronting the degradation of the Mohawk and Oneida through
the Englishmen’s devastation of the land, and the spiritual and emotional losses ring
loudly in the lost “sacrifice-heaps” and the father’s grave paved over by road;
Powantonamo cannot leave this land to his son, either, as his son dies an infant death.

The disastrous condition of the tribe is reflected through the individual Indian.
Karcher writes, “Compounding desecration with barefaced effrontery, the white man who
has seized the Indian’s domains, after being welcomed as a guest, now accuses the Indian
of trespassing” (105). The irony is clear, and while Child justifies Powantonamo’s anger,
she undercuts sympathy as she reinforces his links to the wild through his violent
reaction. When a white settler complains that Soonseetah is stripping bark from “a dozen
of my trees,” Powantonamo’s reaction is strong: “as he spoke he seized the shaggy pate
of the unconscious offender, and eyed him with the concentrated venom of an ambushed
rattlesnake” (157). Whether or not his anger is justified, it is frightening and animal-like,
and Child continues, “After that, his path was unmolested, for no one dared to awaken his
wrath; but a smile never again visited the dark countenance of the degraded chief” (158).
His spiritual state matches his material circumstances, and after the early deaths of his
wife and his son, Powantonamo gives in and voluntarily removes himself: “Yes;
Powanotonamo will go home,’’ sighed he. ‘He will go where the sun sets in the ocean,
and the white man’s eyes have never looked upon it.’ One long, lingering glance at the
graves of his kindred, and the Eagle of the Mohawks bade farewell to the land of his
fathers” (159).

While he here embodies the trope of the vanishing Indian, he is not permanently
gone until the once-wild land reflects his removal. As an old man, Powantonamo returns
to see a tree he had planted at the grave of his son and a vine entwined with it to
commemorate his wife both felled by an axe, and “A deep groan burst from the soul of
the savage…They were the only things left in the wide world for him to love, and they
were gone. He looked abroad. The hunting land of his tribe was changed, like its
chieftain” (159). Powantonamo leaves again, and Child describes his eventual lonely
death: “Perchance, he slept his last sleep where the distant Mississippi receives its
hundred streams. Alone, unfriended, he may have laid him down to die, where no man
called him brother; and the wolves of the desert, long ere this, may have howled the
death-song of the Mohawk Eagle” (160). Karcher explains, “At the end of the story no
trace of Powontonamo or his family remains. Even the tree he has planted over the grave
of his wife and son has been cut down…Child reverses the significance of the ‘vanishing’
Indian convention to… Though she dispatches Powantonamo across the ‘distant
Mississippi’…the last glimpse she provides of the country he has left behind flatly
contradicts the myth that a higher civilization has taken the Indian’s place…”The Lone
Indian’ reveals only the denuded landscape” (105). By deploying the trope of the
vanishing Indian against the ideology it is meant to serve, Child’s story is resoundingly
one of loss, not expansion and gain, and as Karcher writes, “Child does not let her readers
take refuge in…comfortable evasion. Instead, she forces them to confront the human and
environmental cost of the nation's unbridled expansionism. The expulsion of the Indian results in continental blight, not 'improvement,' she implies” (106).

“Chocorua’s Curse,” set in rural New Hampshire, goes further in that the wild is not ruined through conflict but refuses to yield to domestication. Karcher writes, “Like 'The Lone Indian,' 'Chocorua's Curse' dramatizes the clash between incompatible cultures—one viewing nature as a source of life to be venerated and propitiated, the other treating it as an enemy to be subjugated” (120), and the curse left upon the land by the title character, “she hints, might be the fate of a nation that has forgotten the ancient lesson of human survival so central to Indian culture—respect for nature and its creatures” (121). Child includes this story in the growing canon of American nationalist literature, as she writes, “A high precipice, called Chocorua’s Cliff, is rendered peculiarly interesting by a legend which tradition has scarcely saved from utter oblivion. Had it been in Scotland, perhaps the genius of Sir Walter would have hallowed it, and Americans would have crowded there to kindle fancy on the altar of memory. Being in the midst of our own romantic scenery, it is little known” (162). While the mention of “Sir Walter” signals the idea of a nationalist literary canon, her lament that this story is “little known” levels criticism at that same developing canon. Her story, instead of erasing violence, is the creation of an American myth meant to permanently mark the violence of the landscape, violence which prevents its proper domestication.

In this story, Child equates the wildness of the place with Chocorua’s character, but also insists upon the possibility of temporary, peaceable coexistence of two cultures on a small scale:
A very small settlement, in such a remote place, was of course subject to inconvenience and occasional suffering. From the Indians they received neither injury nor insult. No quarrel had ever arisen; and although their frequent visits were sometimes troublesome, they never had given indications of jealousy or malice. Chocorua was a prophet among them, and as such an object of peculiar respect. He had a mind which education and motive would have nerved with giant strength; but growing up in savage freedom, it wasted itself in dark, fierce, ungovernable passions...In his small, black, fiery eye, expression lay coiled up like a beautiful snake.

(164)

She renders him savage but capable of improvement through education, thus fearful for this lack of self-development according to white civilized means, all the more so as he is linked to the wild. As Chocorua dies from a bullet wound, a symbol of white industrial development, he issues his malediction: “A curse upon ye, white men. May the Great Spirit curse ye when he speaks in the clouds, and his words are fire! Chocorua had a son—and ye killed him while his eye still loved to look on the bright sun, and the green earth! The Evil Spirit breathe death upon your cattle! Your graves lie in the war path of the Indian! Panthers howl, and wolves fatten over your bones! Chocorua goes to the Great Spirit—his curse stays with the white men!” (166). Chocorua’s curse comes to fruition, signaling the permanent devastation caused by racial conflict and the lack of enlightened thinking. Child ends the story, declaring “To this day the town of Burton, in New Hampshire, is remarkable for a pestilence which infects its cattle; and the superstitious think that Chocorua’s spirit still sits enthroned upon his precipice, breathing
a curse upon them" (167). While the myth is linked to the "superstitious," she marks the permanence of the Indian's curse on the land as real and continuing. The area is now domesticated as the town of Burton, but it cannot escape its violent past.

Violence is enacted differently in "A Legend of the Falls of St. Anthony" (published initially under the title "The Indian Wife"), in which Child affirms the dangers of the wild through presenting violence within a domestic family structure that fails to unify whites and Indians. In a story which shows a great movement away from Hobomok's acquiescence of his own son to the advancement of white civilization, Child ironically emphasizes both the domestic happiness of Indian family life and its self-destruction in the wake of a white civilization determined upon co-opting Indian lands. To avoid the death of culture and family ties through forcible assimilation, the mother, Zah-gah-see-ga-quay, chooses death for herself and her son as she literally drowns them in the destructiveness of the wild.

Mielke writes, "Child's Native American writings...reinforced the concept of difference and the centrality of property to Native American claims for equality" (187), and both of these qualities are prominent in this story. Zah-gah-see-ga-quay is consistently compared to animals and children as Child emphasizes her role as a representation of the wild, incapable of inclusion in her husband's French civilization. Simultaneously, the Frenchman, de Ranee, is presented critically for advancing notions of reason and profit, of developing imperialism, over familial love. Child writes, "Indian lands were becoming more and more desirable to his ambitious nation...He had an aversion to marriage; but this he knew would be but the shadow of a fetter, for he could dissolve the bond at any moment, with little loss of reputation as if it were a liaison in
Paris. Thus reasoned the civilized man, while the innocent child of the woods was as unconscious of the possibility of such selfish calculations, as is a robin in the mating season" (205). While Zah-gah-see-ga-quay’s role as an “innocent child of nature” conforms to stereotype, Child’s condemnation of the greed and guilt of white civilization is clear, even if she is shifting the blame for land theft onto the French from the English colonists or U.S. citizens.

Karcher writes, “‘The Indian Wife’...exposes French colonialism as...destructive to the Indians...Under different circumstances this adaptability to each other’s cultures might herald a truly reciprocal relationship between Indian and European. But in a colonial context, where the Sioux’ ‘extensive lands on the Missouri [are] daily becoming of more consequence to de Ranee’s ambitious nation,’ the relationship will necessarily involve dominance and exploitation” (114). Child directly ties the profit made through land appropriation with the destruction of both the family and Indian culture. In thinking of his daughter, Child narrates de Ranee’s thoughts:

Buoyant and free was her Indian childhood; but she was approaching the period, when she would be claimed as a wife; and he could not endure the thought, that the toilsome life of a squaw, would be the portion of his beautiful daughter...In order to advance his ambitious views, it was necessary to wean Felicie from her woodland home; and he felt that his Clouded-Sunbeam, though still beautiful, would be hopelessly out of place in Parisian saloons...The acres of forest and prairie, which he had received, on most advantageous terms, from his Indian father-in-law, were sold, tract after tract, and the money deposited in Quebec. Thither, he
intended to convey first his daughter, and then his son, on the pretense of a visit, for the purposes of education, but in reality, with the intention of deserting his wife, to return no more. (208)

Karcher continues, "As long as the Indians remain subordinate partners to be discarded at will, the story suggests, intermarriage hardly constitutes an alternative to race war" (115); the race war is merely enacted on a smaller scale. After Felicie is taken, Zah-gah-see-ga-quay becomes fiercely protective of her son, "watched over him like a she-wolf" (210), and raises him to reject his French background: "She scornfully abjured his French name, and instilled into his bosom the deadliest hatred of white men. The boy learned his lessons well. He was the most inveterate little savage that ever let fly an arrow... The Sioux were proud of his vigour and his boldness, and considered his reckless courage almost a sufficient balance to the disadvantage of blood" (210). While Child does here give voice to an Indian rejection of mixed marriages, she does so in language steeped in the notion of the Sioux as savage. There is no compromise in the mother’s view, and she falls into an opposition with white society that ends with both her and her son’s death, signaling again the devastation of Indians as they oppose white civilization. When Zah-gah-see-ga-quay sees that "the fascinating and insidious Frenchman was gaining complete power over the boy" (210), she takes drastic, violent action. Putting her son in a canoe, she directs them both to the Falls of St. Anthony, where, she tells her son, "‘We go to the spirit-land together... he cannot come there to separate us’" (211). By vanishing into the falls, the two literally and permanently become part of the wild. Child writes, "With whirl and splash, the boat plunged down the cataract. The white foam leaped over it, and it was seen no more. The sky soon darkened, and the big rain fell in torrents. The
Indians believe that the spirits of the drowned ones, veiled in a winding-sheet of mist, still hover over the fatal spot" (211). The haunting spirits that “still hover” fall into the trope of the Indian ghost, and this ties Indians to the wild through violence; yet their continued effect upon the landscape remains to mark white guilt, not expanding enlightenment.

Finally, in a similar vein, Child’s story “The Church in the Wilderness” begins by using then subverting pastoral tropes, and this subversion links American land to violence:

There is a solitary spot, in a remote part of Maine, known by the name of Indian Old Point. The landscape has no peculiar beauty, save the little sparkling river, which winds gracefully and silently among the verdant hills, as if deeply contented with its sandy bed; and fields of Indian corn, tossing their silken tresses to the winds, as if conscious of rural beauty. Yet there is a charm thrown around this neglected and almost unknown place, by its association with some interesting passages in our earliest history. The soil is fertilized by the blood of a murdered tribe. (234)

The pastoral loses its “charm” in the knowledge of the massacre, and Karcher writes, “Child leaves her readers with the chilling image of a civilization that has founded its prosperity on genocide” (112).

While Child ties the land directly to the Abnakis who had inhabit it, in the next paragraph she denies their claim to it: “Our broad lands were considered an ample tract of debatable ground, where nations of the earth might struggle for disputed possession; and terrible indeed was the contest for religious supremacy between France and England,
during the early part of the eighteenth century” (235); apparently, in conformity with the Supreme Court designation of Indians as “domestic dependent nations,” the Abnakis do not constitute one of the “nations of the earth,” and they do not contend for this land. Child continues to frame the conflict in terms of the clash of white religions: “The English settlers, who resided about three miles from the village of the Abnakis, regarded [the French priest] with extreme aversion; but to the Indians he was the representative of the Good Spirit” (236). In this framework, the Indians are the children to be swayed by one or another parent’s influence, exposing Child’s dependence here on the idea of Indians as children of nature. The lack of Abnaki agency is underscored by the lack of Abnaki characters; the two prominent Indian characters are emphasized as “mixed-blood,” and exist in relation to the Catholic French and Protestant Indians more than in contact with other Abnakis.

Child writes Father Rale to connect the Abnakis and the wild, stating that “For thirty years he lived in the wilderness, sharing the dangers and privations incident to savage life” (236). He is in a privileged position here, a literal “father” to the Indians who are connected to “savage life.” Their fate is decided by the clash of white civilization with itself, in a sense, and the only hope for their salvation, the two mixed-heritage characters, is partially to blame for the conflict and is destroyed as well. Karcher writes, “By challenging boundaries of race, culture, and gender through her mixed-blood characters, Child shows that contrary to American ideology, these boundaries do not grow out of nature, but violate it. The products of a biracial heritage and an Indian upbringing, Otoolpha and Saupoolah exemplify the harmony with nature that
intermarriage might have made available to Europeans as to Indians” (110); their death is the loss of this harmony and the assertion of racial boundaries.

Regardless of this “harmony with nature,” their position as outsiders also signals that there is no heritage of land transfer. Emphasizing their mixed heritage, Child writes, Otoolpha is “found among the savages the orphan son of the Baron de Castine, by a beautiful young Abnakis” (236); Saupolah, with a “nose slightly approaching to aquiline, and a complexion less darkly colored than usual, betrayed an origin half European; but...her parentage and tribe were unknown” (237). Child also stresses the importance of the mixture of two cultures, “Educated by the learned priest, as far as such fetterless souls could be educated, and associating only with savages, these extraordinary young people grew up with a strange mixture of European and aboriginal character. Both had the rapid, elastic tread of Indians; but the outlines of their tall, erect figures possessed something of the pliant gracefulness of France. When indignant, the expression of their eyes was like light from a burning-glass; but in softer moments, they had a melting glance, which belongs only to a civilized and voluptuous land” (238). Their anger and physicality is Indian; their grace and calm is white.

Despite this, their physicality and personalities are emphasized as wild throughout the story. Despite Child’s initial intention here of writing against racist concepts of Indians, by insisting on the wildness of their lives she reaffirms instead the differences between Indian life and beliefs in white civilization:

Contemptuously as some think our red brethren, genius was no rare endowment among them; and seldom have souls been so rich in the wealth of nature, as the two powerful and peculiar beings, whom we have
described. Many were the bold and beautiful thoughts which rushed upon their untutored imaginations, as they roamed over a picturesque country, sleeping in clefts where panthers hid themselves, and scaling precipices from which they scared the screaming eagles. (239).

While the simultaneity of their “genius,” with its “bold and beautiful thoughts,” and their complete lack of white domestication makes them cultural amalgams, their sleeping with panthers and scaring eagles outweigh their potential for enlightened rationality. They are not, however, bereft of proper familial affection and attachments. After writing of Saupoolah and Otoolpha’s affections for both father Rale and an Englishwoman who lived nearby, demonstrating their abilities to bridge cultural differences on a personal level, Child reasserts the dominance of cultural differences and animosities in which the Abnakis are ultimately subordinated to the European cultures: “The troubles between the neighboring villages of English and Abnakis increased daily; and not a few of the latter were induced to revolt against their spiritual ruler” (245). The English file complaints against Rale, which Child writes, “were, in some measure, well founded; for it was the dangerous creed of the Jesuits, that all human power, good or bad, should be made subservient to one grand end. Yet the Norridgewocks (Abnakis) has so much reason to complain of the fraud and falsehood of the English, that it is difficult to decide to whom the greatest share of the blame rightfully belongs” (246). The Abnakis may have been a party to the conflicts, but their beliefs and culture do not figure; they are only complained about by extension through complaints about Rale, and their complaints yield no results.

The massacre of the Indians is complete; “Not one escaped; not one” (249). Child writes, “Before the setting of the sun, the pretty hamlet was reduced to ashes; and the
Indians slept their last sleep beneath their own possessions. For many years two white crosses marked off the place where the Jesuit and his English boy were buried; but they had long since been removed. The white man’s corn is nourished by the bones of the Abnakis; and the name of their tribe is well nigh forgotten” (250). The story’s end emphasizes the land itself as the repository of history, and Child is clear in her condemnation of both the massacre itself and the culture’s whose history forgets it.

Just as Slotkin describes myth as “An environment, a landscape, a historical sequence is infused with meaning in the form of a story, which converts landscape to symbol and temporal sequence into ‘doom’—a fable of necessary and fated actions” (11), in all four of these stories, the land is ultimately equated with the fate of the Indians who have inhabited it; it is drenched in blood caused by the conflict between Indians and whites, and the disappearance of the Indians aligns with the domestication of the wild. The crucial difference in this last construction between Child and dominant American frontier myth is her inversion of this violent destruction as negative and not the progressive march of triumphant white civilization; the Indians, however, are still the ones to pay the price.

In fact, characterized as having the potential for education but left to dissipate their mental energies in the wild, the violence these characters enact reflects a serious doubt on Child’s behalf in the feasibility of Indian assimilation into white civilization, even as that civilization is being called into question. While her Indians are invested with easily identifiable moral characteristics—love of family, hard work, a determination to survive, self-denial—each of the main characters acts on his/her most violent impulses; each uses the narrative agency Child affords to choose disappearance and destruction. In
terms of the work of myth in collapsing time and allocating symbolic meaning to space, events, and characters, Child’s stories create brutal myths of land appropriation and domestication, emphasizing the human loss, yet relegating the Indians into the wild again and again.

“What right have you to celebrate the virtues of the man you murdered?”

While Child’s stories condemn the violent appropriation of the wild and the American history that overwrites this violence, her myths of American land still depend upon concepts of Indians as the vanishing children of nature and upon the fear of the wild. Thoreau’s work in The Maine Woods is similar in its presentation of Indians in “Ktaadn” and “Chesuncook,” but as his work begins to incorporate myth into its structure in “The Allegash and the East Branch” (“The Allegash”), his depiction of Indians and the wild becomes mythic as well, taking on a serious criticism of capitalist industrialization, U.S. expansionism, and the nationalist ideology that supports them. In many ways The Maine Woods is an explicit exploration of the connections between myth, Indian people and culture, and white civilization, and the wild becomes the means for negotiating and articulating these connections.

The same contradiction in ideology that surfaces through Child’s stories, the need for civilization to preserve and dominate the wild, surfaces throughout The Maine Woods, but as many years separate Thoreau’s writing “Ktaadn” and “The Allegash” there are some vast differences in Thoreau’s figurations of both Indians and the wild in these
essays. The Maine Woods is comprised of three travelogues documenting Thoreau’s three separate trips to Maine, and of nineteenth-century travel writing, Thoreau’s in particular, Maddox writes, “Each writer’s project, then, is to present the illiterate to the literate through a text, to make the Indians-as-subjects ‘readable’ to a distanced, non-Indian audience, while at the same time maintaining the writer’s credibility as a reliable witness of the Indians-as-objects. Each writer must, that is, find a way of interpreting the living Indians, who are illiterate, uncivilized, and moribund, so that they become available for preservation in the text” (136). While Thoreau holds the “Indians-as-objects” to the prevalent racist tropes, “Indian-as-subjects” are represented through the actual Indian Joe Polis, which marks a clear, if conflicted, divergence from vanishing and savagery. Polis is for Thoreau the entrance of the Indian into the realm of individual enlightened self-interest while he represents the need to preserve the wild from the damaging encroachment of white civilization.

It is this idea of self-development that leads Thoreau toward exploring myth and the wild. Richardson explains that for Thoreau “Self-culture became a major concern, perhaps the major concern of his life, and...he came to believe that the cultivation of one’s self has a good deal in common with the cultivation of the soil” (57). While “Ktaadn,” outlined while Thoreau was living at Walden, maintains the opposition between the savage and the civil, “The Allegash” is removed from the cultivation of soil as that of the self, and is also removed from the idea of the “savage” and the “civil” signifying an absolute binary. Buell writes, “Thoreau became increasingly interested in defining nature’s structure, both spiritual and material, for its own sake, as against how nature might subserve humanity” (172). The codependency of myth and the wild
surfaces then not as a point of distinction from white civilization but a condition necessary for civilization’s existence. As Richardson writes, Thoreau equates “freedom with the wildness he understood to be the source and raw material of all civilization and culture” (316), and by the time Thoreau writes “The Allegash,” this source is in need of saving from a white civilization bent on its destruction.

Thoreau counters notions of enlightened white civilization by projecting the wild’s connection to myth as positive, and this works against the dominant frontier myth. Slotkin writes, “The dominant themes of the Frontier Myth are those that center on the conception of American history as a heroic-scale Indian war, pitting race against race; and the central concern of the mythmakers is with the problem of reaching the ‘end of the Frontier’” (32). For Thoreau, to save the wilderness from capitalist development is to save myth itself, which in turn saves a necessary source of self-culture; this posits the wild as the center of self-development, and Thoreau then reveals how land is in a dialectical relationship with nationalist ideology: the U.S. is the land it inhabits, and it must grow in order to maintain its social and economic progress, yet must still perpetually maintain the wild land as the source of growth for U.S. citizens. It can only grow and expand onto more wild land by saving wild land: in terms of American development, the nation must never reach the “end of the Frontier” for which it must always strive, and it must not destroy the Indians it needs to destroy to prove its progress.

The locating of the frontier and the wild in Maine is an essential organizing point of all three essays. Early in “Ktaadn” Thoreau writes that “some hours only of travel in this direction will carry the curious to the verge of a primitive forest, more interesting, perhaps, than they would reach by going a thousand miles westward” (594). Immediately
parallel to his discussion of the wild is his condemnation of the industrialized use of it: Thoreau writes the “The mills are built directly over and across the river. Here is a close jam, a hard rub, at all seasons; and then the once green tree, long since white...becomes lumber merely...Mr. Sawyer marks off those spaces which decide the destiny of so many prostrate forests” (594). He blames the anonymous “Mr. Sawyer” as he blames the corporations that depend upon wood, both representing white civilization. He continues, “Think how stood the white-pine tree on the shores of Chesuncook, its branches soughing with the four winds, and every individual needle trembling in the sunlight,—think how it stands now,—sold, perchance, to the New England Friction-Match Company!” (594).
From this point on, the domestication of natural resources figures as destruction that only becomes more fervently denounced.

Initially, Thoreau’s depiction of the wild conforms to the frontier myth, of which Slotkin writes, the “new territory...[is]a Garden of Earthly Delights...endowed with fabulous wealth and fertility, gorgeous and exotic to the aesthetic mind, a Garden of Eden to be settled by men forewarned of serpents. Above all, the restorative and regenerative power of the land was emphasized: its ability to redeem the fortunes of those fallen from high estate, improve the lot of the lowly, provide an arena for moral and military heroism” (40). Thoreau echoes the ability of the wild “improve the lot of the lowly” as he advocates immigrants migrating into Maine when he writes “cannot the emigrant who can pay his way to New York or Boston pay five dollars more to get here...and be as rich as he pleases, where land virtually costs nothing” (“Ktaadn” 602).

This view of the wild as redeemable, workable land is largely supplanted by the idea of the wild being the proper place for the poet, and Richardson writes, “Thoreau’s
wildness is not synonymous with savagery or ferocity; it is distinguished from raw destructive violence in two ways. First, it can be sought more successfully by a walker or a poet than by a warrior, and second, it can be better expressed in myth than in battle” (230). Maddox concurs and writes that Thoreau “understands the wilds better than do the wild men he has come to observe and learn from... Thoreau has obviously come to the wilderness equipped with his own pencil, ready to write the axe- and rifle-wielders out of the way” (137). As he romanticizes the notion of the poet as the only one who can truly understand the wild, he also points out that those who try to use it for material gain are doomed to a constant misunderstanding of nature. Industry will destroy the wild, as the loggers are ruining Indian hunting grounds, and thus destroy the source of inspiration for the poet, thus ironically contributing to the decline of the “civilization” industrial expansion serves to increase.

How he positions Indians in relation to the wild, to individual, poetic self-development, and to industrialized white civilization is complicated, and Maddox writes that Thoreau “values the Indians for the primitiveness and their naturalness, which for Thoreau places them among the essential, unmediated ‘facts’ of American life; but what actually attracts him most about the Indians is their distance from the realities of life in nineteenth-century America. That is, he would like the figure of the Indians to convey both immediacy and distance, to be one of the facts of American experience without really interfering in its material reality” (149). He does point out, however, that material reality interferes with Indian life. This does not mean he is not insulting, and in “Ktaadn,” for instance, he writes, “Met face to face, these Indians in their native woods looked like the sinister and slouching fellows whom you meet picking up strings and
paper in the streets of a city. There is, in fact, a remarkable and unexpected resemblance between the degraded savage and the lowest classes in a great city. The one is no more a child of nature than the other. In the process of degradation the distinction of races is soon lost" (651); material poverty collapses race into class, and it is industrial poverty he bemoans here, and while he upholds the notion of the “degraded savage” he rejects the notion of the “child of nature,” revealing his refusal to conform fully to any trope.  

This tension between the degraded material and pastoral ideal in Indian life is complicated as Thoreau takes to reconfiguring the wild. Richardson writes, “The problem at the center of “Ktaadn” is the problem of primitivism, of wildness and man’s relation to it...[T]his view of nature contradicts his earlier view of nature as benign, pastoral, and civilizing. But it is not a real contradiction...Nature may indeed smile on man in the valleys, but there are also places where man is not welcome. In short, there are limits” (181). Despite Richardson’s characterization on the lack of contradiction, Thoreau cannot reconcile his preconceived notions of “primitive” life with the myth he looks to create from the wild environment of Maine. Thoreau’s myth of the wild in The Maine Woods begins as a recognition of ancient, foreign myth enacted in the American landscape. For instance, Thoreau describes the colorful trout: “While yet alive...they glistened like the fairest flowers, the product of primitive rivers” and Thoreau expressed astonishment that “these jewels should have swam away in that Aboljacknagesic water for so long, so many dark ages;—these bright fluviatile flowers, seen of Indians only, made beautiful, the Lord only knows why, to swim there! I could understand better, for this, the truth of mythology, the fables of Proteus, and all those beautiful sea-monsters;—how all history, indeed, put to terrestrial use, is mere history; but put to a celestial, is
mythology always” (632). While recognizing myth and designating it as original to human progress, Indians are afforded a special, if imaginary, relation to this. This scene is “seen of Indians only,” so they are therefore part of the wild itself and not the “civilization” that the myth serves, and so exemplify the ideal.

Thoreau also sees Ktaadn as “an undone extremity of the world” (640), and describes it in terms of mythology:

It reminded me of the creations of the old epic and dramatic poets, of Atlas, Vulcan, the Cyclops, and Prometheus. Such was Caucasus and the rock where Prometheus was bound. Aeschylus had no doubt visited scenery as this. It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits.

Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. He is more lone that you can imagine... Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers some of his divine faculty. (640)

While both of these mythic wonders, of Proteus and of the Titans, occur in Maine, they are captured in terms of Greek mythology. The latter scene allows the climber, the “man,” to lose part of himself, including his reason, as he loses his power over nature and enters into the untamed wild. The development of the individual is then posited as a loss of ego in the face of the “Titanic, inhuman Nature,” and accordingly, Thoreau’s description of the “wild” of Ktaadn is closely followed by a description of the self-evaluation it fosters; what’s interesting is how he does not know how to characterize what he learns of himself on top of the mountain. He writes: “I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of
which I am one... What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries!—
Think that our life in nature,—daily to be shown matter, to come into contact with it,—
rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! The common sense!
Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?” (646). There is both a splitting and a
rejoining of the material and the ideal in terms of his body and the “life in nature,—daily
to be shown matter:” he is a “ghost;” he affirms “Contact!” In terms of Slotkin’s defining
myth as a moment in which “Both past and present are reduced to instances displaying a
single ‘law’ or principle of nature” (24), the confrontation of the individual with the wild
sparks the need for absolute self-reflection, bereft of social input: “Who are we? where
are we?” engenders myth.27

The ambiguity in white-Indian relations and myths that begins to surface in
“Ktaadn” becomes far more pronounced as The Maine Woods progresses. Thoreau
begins “The Allegash” by describing his meeting Joe Polis, who is the subject of the
essay as much as the wilds of Maine. Polis’s house is “a two-story one with blinds, the
best looking that I noticed there” (713), complete with a garden. On asking Polis if he
knew a guide for the journey Thoreau and his unnamed relative planned to take, Thoreau
writes, “he answered, out of the strange remoteness in which the Indian ever dwells to the
white man, ‘Me like to go myself; me want to get some moose’; and kept on scraping the
skin. His brother had been into the woods with my relative only a year or two before, and
the Indian now inquired what the latter had done to him, that he did not come back, for he
had not been seen nor heard from since” (713-14). This literal vanishing can eventually
be read as Polis himself is, as both a representation of the real, material conditions of
Indian life in Maine and metonymic of the material and ideal life of the entire tribe: he is, for Thoreau, man and myth.

Radiating from the metonym of Polis as “the Indian,” the adversarial white-Indian relation inherent in the “Frontier myth” is called into question as Thoreau’s ambivalence in connecting Indians to “savagery” grows into real reluctance. In all of “The Allegash,” Thoreau uses the word “savage” twice. One reference is an unapproachable shoreline, overgrown with trees, and the second is in a repudiation of the term when describing Polis. Thoreau listens one night to Polis singing a “musical chant...which was probably taught his tribe long ago by the Catholic missionaries” (729), and reflects “His singing carried me back to the period of the discovery of America, to San Salvador and the Incas, when Europeans first encountered the simple faith of the Indian. There was, indeed, a beautiful simplicity about it; nothing of the dark and savage, only the mild and infantile. The sentiments of humility and reverence chiefly were expressed” (730). While the ambiguity in the source of the “simple” chant belittles both the tribe that learned it and the Catholics who taught it, there is nothing “dark and savage.” The words “mild” and “infantile” remain at this point to connect Polis to the idea of Indians as the “children of nature,” but this construction becomes increasingly ambivalent as the knowledge of nature both materially and spiritually supersedes the notion of a people who need paternal authority.

This passage continues into Thoreau’s discovery of phosphorescent light emitting from rotting wood, and precipitates a discussion of wilderness, spirituality and science, as he writes “I thought that there was such a light shining in the darkness of the wilderness for me,” and he happily learns the Indian name for this phenomenon, “Artoosoqu” (731).
Thoreau is articulating his belief in turning to nature for understanding and spiritual development or transcendence, and at first links this to the knowledge he assumes is possessed by Polis and other Indians: “Nature must have made a thousand revelations to them which are still secrets to us” (731), thereby attaching the Indian to the wild, but doing so positively, as Indians here have knowledge he respects but does not possess. He continues, “I let science slide, and rejoiced in that light as if it had been a fellow-creature. I saw that it was excellent, and was very glad to know that it was so cheap. A scientific explanation, as it is called, would have been altogether out of place there” (731). That it is “so cheap,” in one sense, marks its place outside of capitalist commoditization, which is as important as its being removed from rational explanation; this rejection of science reaffirms Thoreau’s belief in the ideal over the material as well. Linking the phosphorescence to Polis’s singing reverses the traditional linking of the Indian and the wild as dark and dangerous; the connection here reveals a peace and spirituality Thoreau prefers to “cheap” rationality, and is literally a glowing light.

This episode aligns with how Joseph J. Moldenhaur, in “The Maine Woods,” explains how Thoreau sets “The Allegash”: “The represented world that predominates here...is neither the cosmic laboratory of rock and cloud of Mt. Ktaadn above timberline, nor the glinting panorama viewed form a mountain’s slopes in clearing weather, nor the wilderness in process of being by settlers...It is the Indian’s world, the woodlands seen from the ground—or water level” (132). As soon as they arrive at Moosehead Lake to begin their journey by water, Thoreau begins explaining the Penobscot name for every aspect of local geography, the animals and the plants. Arriving at the large lake Thoreau writes, “The Indian said that it was called ‘Mspame, because large water’” (719). Polis’s
translation of the wild comprises a great deal of the text, and as Thoreau consistently connects the geography, flora and fauna to both white and Indian civilizations through names, Polis is frequently referred to as “the Indian” or “our Indian,” emphasizing his race and the hierarchical relationship involved where one civilization and language has supplanted another. “The Indian” who names everything is both the past that is gone and the man presently speaking; they are traveling in a realm both claimed through names and largely undeveloped by industry—hence “wild.”

The problem of names is a matter not only of geography and who gets to print maps, but one for Thoreau’s text as well, as his insistence on the term “Indian” for Polis does not reflect what Thoreau claims occurred during the journey. Thoreau writes that “He never addressed us by our names, though curious to know how they were spelled and what they meant, while we called him Polis” (721). Thoreau may have thought enough of him in person to use his name, but for the purposes of writing he is his ethnicity as often as he is an individual. Interestingly, Thoreau’s relative is never named in the essay, and his role in events is often simply a reference point for what happens between Thoreau and Polis, and his identity is less important that Polis’s.

Polis’s translations are both literal and figurative, and stem from Thoreau’s career-long interest in the Indian names for local geography. Thoreau begins the second paragraph of “Ktaadn” with, “Ktaadn, whose name is an Indian word signifying highest land, was first ascended by white men in 1804” (593), and sentences like this one pepper The Maine Woods. Anderson stresses the link between “particular languages and their associations with particular territorial units” (43) in national development, and beyond merely providing the names of places, Thoreau in “Ktaadn” seeks to explain the logic of
the names and how they function as maps, connecting Indian language to the environment itself. Thoreau explains the Indian names for all the bodies of water passed “as you ascend the [Penobscot] river,” and explains, “First we came to Passamagamet Lake, then to Passamagamet Falls, then to Passamagamet stream, emptying in. This order and identity of names, it will be perceived, is quite philosophical, since the dead-water or lake is always at least partially produced by the stream emptying in above; and the first fall below, which is the outlet of that lake, and where that tributary water makes its first plunge, also naturally bears the same name” (626-27). Each describes some attribute of the geography of the area, and is not abstracted from the land and water; Indian language is connected to the wild. He explains the function of this in “The Allegash”: “So much geography is there in their names. The Indian navigator naturally distinguishes by a name those parts of a stream where he has encountered quick water and falls, and again, the lakes and smooth water where he can rest his weary arms” (801).

In this explanation lies Thoreau’s recognition and respect for knowledge he does not possess himself. Of Polis’s ability to understand the wild environment, Thoreau writes, “He does not carry things in his head, nor remember the route exactly, like a white man, but relies on himself at the moment. Not having experienced the need of the other sort of knowledge, all labelled and arranged, he has not acquired it” (735). Out of context, this seems possibly insulting to Polis, but Thoreau is recognizing that there is a way of understanding the environment and living within it that is positive, utilitarian, different, and that renders some of his own knowledge useless. This, Thoreau asserts, is important for white men to remember: “And not less interesting is it to the white traveller, when he is crossing a placid lake in these out-of-the-way woods, perhaps
thinking that he is in some sense one of the earlier discoverers of it, to be reminded that it was thus well known and suitably named by Indian hunters perhaps a thousand years ago” (801).

The translations then go beyond just language, then, and are also cooperative, as Thoreau explains that early in the journey he and Polis come to an agreement: “I told him that in this voyage I would tell him all that I knew, and he should tell me all he knew, to which he readily agreed” (721). Of this passage and this journey, Maddox writes that “Thoreau acknowledges that there is a specific purpose for all his observing and note-taking: if he was after primitive wilderness on his first trip, on these two trips he is after Indians, the primitive men” (133), which characterizes Thoreau as a biased anthropologist. Perhaps he was, but in his simple explanation of his relationship with Polis, Thoreau is also representing reciprocity; both men are students and both men are teachers, and this alone reveals a remarkable departure from the bulk of Indian writing of the century. Here Polis, the individual, is not the subordinate, and his desire to learn, to self-educate, is as important as Thoreau’s. Their meeting takes place in Oldtown, on the frontier, when they are about to enter into largely uninhabited areas of Maine, as here they can meet as equals; in white civilization the rules of hierarchy would intrude, and the predominance of industrialization would taint their exchanges.

Polis’s inclusion in tropes of self-development interrupts nationalist ideology as much as it does stereotypes of “savage” Indians. In describing the links between enlightened notions of nature and the furtherance of democracy and capitalism of the period, Slotkin writes, “The agrarian ideology found an alternative to [the] language of slaughter in the metaphorical linkage of the Indian’s fate to natural processes like the
growth and decay of plants or the rise and fall of contending animal species. Nature, not human choice, is destroying the Indian” (79). This division of human agency from the violent projects of removal safeguards the land needed for economic expansion from moral condemnations, and works within Weber’s description of the Protestant Ethic. Slotkin writes,

The doctrines of agrarian democracy, as developed by Jefferson and elaborated by Jackson, held that the social cement of the republic must be the self-interest of its citizens. In economic terms, this meant that each citizen must be possessed of sufficient property to guarantee the subsistence of himself and his family, or at least have a credible prospect of attaining that level of economic independence through his labor...The reservoir of Frontier land was to provide a guarantee that each citizen would always have a reasonable chance to acquire land. (110)

This ideal, cemented in its economic conditions, is at the heart of the paradox of the wild; the wild needs to be forever available and forever dominated. Thoreau makes it clear that it is indeed “human choice,” the choice to appropriate land and squander resources, that is destroying the land and hence the livelihood of the Indians, and Polis further reflects Thoreau’s dismissal of Jeffersonian agrarianism in his role as property-owner; where Polis owns the land, it is unavailable for white appropriation.

Of Polis, Moldenhaur writes he is “the man who occupies a midway or ‘frontier’ position between woods and village, radical simplicity and sophisticated culture, who draws from each pole those elements that enrich the mind and spirit, and who recognizes and eschews in each those elements that threaten to exhaust, demoralize, cheapen, and
brutalize him” (134-35); of everything that marks him as “midway,” it is his relation to
land that is most important. The Indian control of property surfaces in controversy as
Polis explains his tribe’s fight with the Catholic church over the town’s school; Thoreau
writes “our Indian told us at length the story of their contention with the priest respecting
schools. He thought a great deal of education and had recommended it to his tribe. His
argument in its favor was, that if you had been to college and learnt to calculate, you
could ‘keep ‘em property,—no other way’” (819). While Thoreau agrees with this
sentiment, he will also have problems with any sign of desire for material or financial
advancement on Polis’s part; to be fair, Thoreau’s entire career is rife with criticism for
those interested in material gain.

Polis thus encompasses many ideas for Thoreau, and Thoreau is careful to
represent him accurately in terms of materials, skills, and his relationship with whites
while presenting him mythically in terms of spirituality and ideal connections to the wild
and idealized Indian culture. Traveling north by coach to their starting point, Thoreau
describes Polis’s quiet demeanor: “The Indian sat on the front seat, saying nothing to
anybody, with a stolid expression on his face, as if barely awake as to what was going on.
Again I was struck by the peculiar vagueness of his replies when addressed in the stage,
or at the taverns. He never really said anything on such occasions” (717). Thoreau
continues on to report that this style of conversation is “instead of the conventional
palaver of the white man,” and is “equally profitable” (717) as it is born out by the
descriptions Thoreau then provides of two white men on separate occasions being
horribly rude to Polis. Thoreau’s implying the wisdom in his taciturnity is clear, and he
criticizes those white people who “get no more than this out of the Indian, and pronounce
him stolid accordingly” (717). He similarly interprets Polis’s lack of instructions in the
wild as respectful: “He was really paying us a great compliment all the while, thinking
that we preferred a hint to a kick” (803).

Thoreau’s work to represent Polis as the paragon of Indian skills focuses on the
material and affirms Polis’s role as teacher. Traveling in the wild, the focus of the essay,
reveals that what Thoreau and his relative have brought vastly outweighs what Polis
brings, and the continual comparisons reveal true admiration. While Thoreau and his
relative have large knapsacks stuffed full and India-rubber bags, in comparison, Thoreau
writes, “As for the Indian, all the baggage he had, beside his axe and gun, was a blanket,
which he brought loose in his hand” (715). He later admits “I found that his outfit was
the result of a long experience, and in the main was hardly to be improved upon” (767).
This, of course, is coupled with innumerable passages outlining Polis’s skills in canoeing
down rapids, cooking, hiking through dense woods, building canoes, making medicine
from plants, creating a candle out of birch bark, hunting and skinning a moose (the lip of
which is a present for his wife) and tanning the hide. His skills are such that as “a skilful
dresser of moose-hides, [it] would make it worth seven or eight dollars to him, as I was
told. He said that he sometimes earned fifty or sixty dollars in a day at them…This was
the way he had got his property” (799).

But woodcraft and material skills do not suffice to make Polis into a respectable
man; Thoreau’s respect is related to Polis’s position as a literate man who owns property,
hires others to work for him, yet chooses above all to be a hunter; Thoreau writes, “Thus
you have an Indian availing himself cunningly of the advantages of civilization, without
losing any of his woodcraft, but proving himself the more successful hunter for it” (747).
Again Thoreau works against Jeffersonian agrarianism as Drinnon describes it: “Both Puritanism and the Enlightenment made contributions to ‘the specific and peculiar rationalism of Western culture,’ to quote Weber again, with the Enlightenment the surprising but true ‘laughing heir’ of Puritanism... For Jefferson the Indian was the face of unreason. If he chose to remain an Indian, in the face of all paternalistic efforts to the contrary, then he confessed himself a madman or fool who refused to enter the encompassing world of reason and order” (102). Polis is no fool.

Thoreau similarly shows his liking for Polis when he writes, “he would step into the canoe, take up his paddle, and, with an air of mystery, start off, looking far down stream, and keeping his own counsel, as if absorbing all the intelligence of the forest and stream into himself; but I detected a little fun in his face... for he was thoroughly good-humored” (788). This “absorbing all the intelligence of the forest and the stream” is not merely a connection between the Indian and the wild—although there is no doubt that it is—it is also a description of the different kind of learning Thoreau recognizes in Indian culture, and Polis “keeps his own counsel” because he knows what he is thinking and learning is out of Thoreau’s realm. When asked, Polis replies, “‘O, I can’t tell you... Great difference between me and white man’”(735).

While Thoreau supports Polis’s actions in defending the school, his depiction of Polis is not consistently positive and respectful, and there are moments when Thoreau is quite insulting. While Polis is presented as an individual who has chosen to keep to his Indian society and life despite his education and status as property-owner, and while it is this choice that allows Thoreau to include him within the construct of a man looking to nature to learn for himself as any proper transcendentalist would do, when Polis speaks of
increasing his property and hence augmenting his position within the constructs of white civilization, he is mocked and denigrated:

The Indian was looking at the hard-wood ridges from time to time, and said that he would like to but a few hundred acres somewhere about this lake, asking our advice. It was to buy as near a crossing place as possible.

My companion and I having a minute's discussion on some point of ancient history, were amused by the attitude which the Indian, who could not tell what we were talking about, assumed. He constituted himself umpire, and, judging by our air and gesture, he very seriously remarked from time to time, 'you beat,' or 'he beat.'" (779)

While Thoreau tends to switch topics abruptly throughout his writing on all subjects, this second paragraph is truly apropos of nothing. It signals that while Polis may buy property and assimilate into the economy, he cannot assimilate in white, educated society as he cannot understand the intellectual discussion about "some point of ancient history." Polis can represent ancient mythology in an ideal, imaginary fashion but cannot learn of it himself; for Thoreau, Polis can only remain connected to the wild so long as he remains excluded the tropes of white civilized culture, even if included in its economy.

Thoreau continues his derision of Polis as he connects the wild to myth and Polis relates a Penobscot myth; the myth of the Maine wild and the Indian is only positive when Thoreau constructs it. He disregards that Indian myths are fundamental to individual development in his belittling of Polis as a storyteller:
the Indian repeated the tradition respecting this mountain’s having
anciently been a cow moose,—how a mighty hunter, whose name I forget,
succeeded in killing this queen of the moose tribe with great
difficulty...He told this at some length, though it did not account to much,
and with apparent good faith...An Indian tells such a story as if he thought
it deserved to have a good deal said about it, only he has not got to say it,
and so he makes up for the deficiency by a drawling tone, long-
windedness, and a dumb wonder that he hopes will be contagious. (724-25)

Of course, the implied emptiness of the myth he labels a “tradition” occurs because
Thoreau does not see its relevance or understand its form. Trinh writes of “myths
functioning like syntagms within a system in perpetual motion...[as] anonymous myths
give birth to other anonymous myths, multiplying and ramifying themselves without fear
of being absorbed by the other, and beyond any myth teller’s control” (61). Clearly,
Thoreau missed a respectful invitation to participate in actual Indian myths of the wild.
When compared with his epiphany upon climbing Ktaadn and seeing Prometheus in the
wilderness around him, it is hard to mistake that not all myths are the same in Thoreau’s
view; he does not allow for Polis’s myth of a hunter whose “name I forget” to contain the
same level of abstract meaning as a story of a Titan tied up and having his liver eaten.

Thoreau’s connecting myth to the wild is thus philosophical, and it feeds into his
criticism of the destruction of the wild by industry and U.S. expansion as he finds
conserving the wild necessary to finding myth and furthering self-development. His
condemnation of the intrusion of industry, its devastation of the land, and the changing of the geography grasps the violence of the situation:

The wilderness experiences a sudden rise of all her streams and lakes, she feels ten thousand vermin gnawing at the base of her noblest trees... The character of the logger's admiration is betrayed by his very mode of expressing it. If he told all that was in his mind, he would say, it was so big that I cut it down and then a yoke of oxen could stand on its stump. He admires the log, the carcass or corpse, more than the tree. Why, my dear sir, the tree might have stood on its own stump, and a great deal more comfortably and firmly than a yoke of oxen can, if you had not cut it down. What right have you to celebrate the virtues of the man you murdered?

The Anglo-American can indeed cut down, and grub up all the waving forest, and make a stump speech, and vote for Buchanan on its ruins, but he cannot converse with the spirit of the tree he fells, he cannot read the poetry and mythology which retire as he advances. (768-69).

Here, reason, education, politics, all that white civilization rests its laurels upon, are taken from the wild, but because of the devastation caused they are spiritually and intellectually inferior to the recognition of myth and self-development. In the trees, the wild is personified as the victim of terrible violence that reveals white duplicity, and the loggers themselves are "ten thousand vermin." While industrial use of the trees is tied to death, the "carcass or corpse," Thoreau’s rhetorical question takes on an incredible irony as he
justly condemns the selfishness and brutality of a system that destroys the wild trees but
does not address this question to the same system that destroys the lives of Indians.

This, however, does not deter Thoreau from using Polis in his condemnation of
how encroaching industrialization has negatively affected both the land and Indian
people. He writes, “Our Indian said that he was a doctor, and could tell me some
medicinal use for every plant I could show him. I immediately tried him...[and he
proved] himself as good as his word. According to his account, he had acquired such
knowledge in his youth from a wise old Indian with whom he associated, and lamented
that the present generation of Indians ‘had lost a great deal’” (774). What Thoreau does
not do here is reveal why so much has been lost: the material conditions of the Indians
whose hunting grounds are being deforested by white industry. This passage also links
Polis to Indian tradition, and it is this tradition that figures predominantly over the notion
of Polis as a skilled contemporary. Maddox writes, “Polis sits in the same canoe with
Thoreau and sleeps by the same fire, while still convincing Thoreau that he is completely
other, the inhabitant of a different world; he can be, that is, both immediately present to
Thoreau and distant at the same time” (153). This configuration is what allows Thoreau
to present Polis as a myth himself, even though he gives so much detail in representing
him as a very real man.

Thoreau presents Polis as an ideal, and describes Polis’s travels in language that
accentuates individualism, mythology, and their connection to the wild of Maine:

When I asked how he went, he said, ‘First I go Ktaadn, west side, then I
go Millinocket, then Pamadumcook, then Nickatou, then Lincoln, then
Oldtown’...What a wilderness for a man to walk alone! None of your
half-mile swamps, none of your mile-wide woods merely, as on the skirts of our towns... It reminded me of Prometheus bound. Here was travelling of the old heroic kind over the unaltered face of nature. From the Allegash, or Hemlock River, and Pongoquahem Lake, across great Apmoojenegamook, leaving the Nerlumskeechticook Mountain on his left, he takes his way under the bear-haunted slopes of Souneunk and Ktaadn Mountains... and so on to the forks of the Nickatou, (nia soseh 'we alone Joseph' seeing what out folks see,) ever pushing the boughs of the fir and spruce aside, with his load of furs, contending day and night, night and day, with the shaggy demon vegetation, travelling through the mossy graveyard of trees... Places where he might live and die and never hear of the United States, which make such a noise in the world. (774-75)

The originating myth is again Prometheus, denying any originating Indian myth could even exist here, but the reliance upon the Indian names for the geography reinforces that this is outside of white existence, which is framed positively in the last line as it critiques the "noise" the nation makes in the wider world of white civilization. Polis here is a mythic traveler despite his actually having made this trip, and despite his own articulation of his travels. Polis's language is translated into the present tense, collapsing time to signify the symbolic truth of the journey; Polis and Thoreau here come full circle in their initial exchange: Polis has translated the wild into language, and Thoreau has translated that knowledge into myth. This construction of Polis as man and myth is reinforced near the end of "The Allegash," as Thoreau writes, "As we drew near to Oldtown, I asked Polis if he was not glad to get home again; but there was no relenting to his wildness, and
he said, 'It makes no difference to me where I am.' Such is the Indian's pretence always” (821), except the “pretence” really exists in Thoreau's written translation: the Indian is everywhere and nowhere in the wild. Thoreau genuinely admires Polis and his achievements because of Polis's ability to work so well within the wild, which allows Thoreau both material and ideal, mythic space to reconfigure how U.S. citizens, white civilized men, ought to be related to nature and to the wild.

**Concluding Remarks**

To challenge the ideal of the land as a resource to be used primarily for the acquisition and increase of wealth levels a criticism at the heart of American ideology; Child's stories read as new American myths that tie what is widely recognized by her readers as "American" land to both Indians and its violent past, while Thoreau both emphasizes the importance of myths and creates a few of his own to challenge the relationship between white civilized men and the land. In these texts, as the Indian comes to symbolize the land, it is then also employed to critique the American economy and expansionism.

To put a vanishing or violent Indian into the wild reifies the racist beliefs in the Indian as childish or dangerous and untamable; to show the heritage and the complexity of the Indian in land through names and myths of Indian society, life, and death evokes images of a culture of thousands of people who were violently dispossessed. Child's work uncovers the falsity of race as an impediment to progressive development of the individual, and ties her idea of individual progress to education and domesticity; her flaw
is how this still insists upon destroying Indian culture. Thoreau falls into the pitfalls of the racist ideology of the vanishing Indian, but when relating even ideal Indians to the land he exposes the greed and spiritual emptiness that fosters industrial-capitalist development. In both the abstract wild and the literal domestication of land, both Child and Thoreau challenge how race becomes the ideological means for justifying violent land acquisition and war. In the midst of the growing nation and nationalism that occurs within this context, liberal opposition to racism and land acquisition must also occur simultaneously or be doomed to articulate a failed vision. Thoreau and Child, then, offer failed but complementary opposition to the dramatic and violent growth of the U.S., Thoreau through his presentation of the wild and land as spiritual, not fodder for capitalist development, and his linking this vision clearly and positively with Indian life, and Child through her advocacy of the goodness and intelligence in Indian people against notions of biological racial determinism.
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Notes

1 Anderson also writes, “[I]t is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). It is this imagined connection that allows for the pervasiveness of ideology, and the racialized American ideology imagines “fellow-members” as white.

2 Karcher writes that the time spent in Maine and her parents abolitionist inclinations helped shape Child’s life, and certainly helped frame her writing: “Child’s years in Norridgewock had their greatest impact...in awakening her sympathy for Indians, who would inspire some of her best early fiction and draw her into her first political cause” (9-10), and that Child had an early interest in “the creation of a distinctive national literature rooted in American soil” (17).

Richardson outlines three major public contexts for Thoreau’s living at and writing about Walden. First, in 1845, there was “growing debate over how to dispose of the vast new federal lands in the newly created states of the expanding West...In the second context, Thoreau’s going to live at Walden seems clearly intended as the self-reliant individual’s answer to the challenge posed by the utopian communes such as Brook Farm...The third context is the most clearly political. On March 1, 1845, President Tyler signed the bill annexing Texas...This was regarded as a major victory to the slave states...Going to Walden was Thoreau’s liberation, his experiment in freedom” (149-51).

3 The critical delineations of literary Indian depictions vary somewhat, but fall into two general trends: the “savage” and the “disappearing” Indian, and the latter is usually connected to projections of Indians as the “children of nature.” In either case, these depictions are always framed as directly opposed to projections of “civilized” white people, most frequently men. Drinnon asserts, “from 1628 to 1883 and after, the unwritten code assumed Indians not to be persons, who might be responsive to kindness and fair dealing, but ‘savages,’ who would inevitably use any available weapon to strike at the lives of newcomers, those bearers of ‘civilization’” (13); Renee Bergland has identified “an obsessive mindset, in which American subjects continually return to the Native American figures who haunt them” (16), typifying the Indian as a “ghost”; Robert F. Sayre in Thoreau and the American Indians explains “savagism” as having five characteristics: “The Indians were (1) solitary hunters, rather than farmers; (2) tradition-bound and not susceptible to improvement; (3) childlike innocents who were corrupted by civilization; (4) superstitious pagans who would not accept the highest offerings of civilization like Christianity; and, therefore, (5) doomed to extinction” (page 6); Brian Dippie writes, “the Vanishing American won public acceptance after 1814. By its logic, Indians were doomed to ‘utter extinction’ because they belonged to and ‘inferior race of men’. ...Romantic poets, novelists, orators, and artists found the theme of a dying race congenial” (10-11), and he outlines the “noble savage” as “commonly associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau,...mankind once enjoyed a ‘Golden Age,’ a bright morning of existence marked by innocence and contentment never since recovered...[whose] primary virtue was innocence of civilized failings” (18-19); and Horsman explains, “In general the Indians by the latter years of the seventeenth century were despised because they had tried to remain Indian and had shown little desire to become Christian gentlemen. The Indians could therefore be thrown off the land, mistreated, or slaughtered, because in rejecting the opportunities offered to them they had shown they were sunk deep in
irredeemable savagery” (103-04). These racial categories overlap, oppositional images can appear in tandem with one another, and this plasticity reveals both how widespread these figurations were and how they could be deployed to fit a variety of particular political and economic situations.

4 The patterns of nineteenth century Indian removals follow those of the colonial period, and Drinnon writes, “The European invasion of the Atlantic seaboard in the early 1600s led to a series of conquest wars among coastal tribes such as the Pequots, as whites claimed lands and pushed their trade up river valleys” (39). He continues, “the Indians were on the receiving end of European imperialism, their lands furthering the objectives of mercantilism and eventually of market capitalism” (46). This imperialism is mirrored in the nineteenth century, and Maddox writes, “The passage of the Removal Act in 1830, which authorized the federal government to exchange land west of the Mississippi for land held by Indians living east of the river, and the Cherokees’ subsequent refusal to trade their lands and leave their homes, brought into sudden, sharp focus a number of large and previously amorphous issues and questions...The case of the Cherokees drew greater public attention and initiated more serious debate than had previous encounters between the United States government and an Indian tribe for several reasons. In the first place, the federal government was for the first time considering giving official sanction to the forced removal of an entire Indian tribe from land it had occupied long before the whites began to make any permanent settlements there. In the second place, the Cherokees had been, for many years, quietly and successfully adapting the customs and practices of their white neighbors to their own purposes” (16-17). But the removals did not end with the Cherokee “trail of tears,” (Brown 7) and Brown writes of the ever-shifting frontier: “only a quarter of a century after enactment of Sharp Knife Andrew Jackson’s Indian trade and Intercourse Act (June 1834), white settlers had driven in both the north and south flanks of the 95th meridian line, and advance elements of white miners and traders had penetrated the center” (9). Bergland argues that “Indian spectralization is the literary corollary to Indian Removal, removing Indians from American culture as they are removed from American territory” (65).

5 More fully, Scheckel writes, “[T]he first half of the nineteenth century...encompasses a moment in American history when attempts to articulate a coherent narrative of national identity and to define the status and rights of Indians within the United States intersected to create a pattern that reveals much about the forces driving both projects. On a conceptual level, these two concerns were linked because debates over Indian policy called into question the very principles on which the idea of “America” was founded, threatening to make explicit the contradictions implicit in American national ideology and social experience and to reveal widespread tensions in the discourses of American nationalism: between republican and liberal values; natural rights and positivist theories of the law; federal and state power; and among differing version of how race, gender, and property qualified “We the People.”” (3-4).

6 For a complete explanation of the patterns Drinnon identifies, see pages xxv-xxviii. In short: “1. Repression. For the Saints and their descendents, ‘going native’ has always been tantamount to ‘going nature’...Repression...refers not only to restraint and denial of genital gratification, though that is surely an important component, but also social controls and constraints imposed upon the desires and needs of the whole body. Here a good illustration would be the fifty long years the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs refused to let the Plains Indians experience their sun dance...

2. Racism. One of the varieties of Western racism has been what I call, following Melville’s lead, the metaphysics of Indian-hating, those deadly subtleties of white hostility that reduced native peoples to the level of the rest of the fauna and flora to be ‘rooted out.’ It reduced all the diverse
Native American peoples to a single nonwhite group and, where they did survive, into a hereditary caste...In the national experience race has always been of greater importance than class, the cornerstone of European property-based politics. Racism defined natives as nonpersons within the settlement culture and was in a real sense the enabling experience of the rising American empire: Indian-hating identified the dark others that white settlers were not and must not under any circumstances become...

3. "Civilization." Western writers...have used [this term] to distinguish Western superculture, of the one true 'civilization,' from the so-called primitive cultures. This ethnocentrism with its unmistakable racist overtones led to what Weber properly scoffed at, the 'nullity' imagining that it had 'attained a level of civilization never before achieved.' To guard against such nonsense, I have fenced in this expansionist term with ironic quotation marks” (xxv-xxviii).

This delineation of the notions of "civilization" and the wild as binary opposition is also reflected in The Dialectic of Enlightenment, in which Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno write, “The self, entirely encompassed by civilization, is dissolved in an element composed of the very inhumanity which civilization has sought from the first to escape...For civilization, purely natural existence, both animal and vegetative, was the absolute danger. Mimetic, mythical, and metaphysical forms of behavior were successively regarded as stages of world history which had been left behind, and the idea of reverting back to them held the terror that the self would be changed back into the mere nature from which it had extricated itself with unspeakable exertions and which for that reason filled it with unspeakable dread” (24). Maddox concurs and writes that “the sine qua non of civilization is repression: the abridging of the freedoms of savage life” (121).

7 In a fuller explanation of the “Frontier myth,” Slotkin writes, “The Myth of the Frontier is the American version of the larger myth-ideological system generated by the social conflicts that attended the ‘modernization’ of the Western nations, the emergence of capitalist economies and nation-states...The major cultural tasks of the ideology were to rationalize and justify the departures from tradition that necessarily accompanied these developments. Progress itself was to be asserted as a positive good against the aristocratic and peasant traditions that emphasized stasis and permanence in productive techniques and social relations...Progress itself was to be interpreted in economic terms—an increase of wealth, of productive capacity, of levels of consumption from year to year and decade to decade. Individualistic assertiveness and achievement were to be justified as values in themselves, and reconciled with the traditional claims of corporate solidarity and deference. Social bonds were to be redefined, with free contract replacing customary fealties, and social standing varying according to achievement as well as birth” (33).

8 In terms of repressing myth, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno write, “At the turning points of Western civilization, whenever new peoples and classes have more heavily repressed myth, from the beginnings of the Olympian religion to the Renaissance, the Reformation, and bourgeois atheism, the fear of unsubdued, threatening nature—a fear resulting form nature’s very materialization and objectification—has been belittled as animist superstition, and the control of internal and external nature has been made the purpose of life” (24); the naming of the settled land after Indian tribes and language reveals the success of this “control” or repression of nature. For books about the triumphs of white men in settling the wild, Drinnon references James Fenimore Cooper, James Kirke Paulding, William Gilmore Simms, and Robert Montgomery Bird (123-24).

9 The initial ideological splitting of the land from the Indians occurs during the colonial period but is heavily reinforced through most nineteenth century nationalist writing. Slotkin writes, “in North America, the Indian population did not exist in a form or quantity sufficient to employ in
plantation farming... Instead, the English colonies aimed to prosper by displacing the natives, replacing them with white farmers drawn from their own growing population and with black slaves purchased (sic.) in Africa or bred in the colonies. This fact had important consequences for the development of American ideology and myth. It made feasible the separation of the idea of the wilderness land—the resource base—from the idea of the land’s human inhabitants... The story of American progress and expansion thus took the form of a fable of race war, pitting the symbolic opposites of savagery and civilization, primitivism and progress, paganism and Christianity against one another. Quite early in the history of white-Indian relations, a conception of Indian warfare developed that tended to represent the struggle as necessarily genocidal” (53).

10 Karcher writes, “Child’s response to the call for an authentic national literature does not succeed in resolving the central contradictions of the American historical novel, nor those of American history itself: that white Americans win their political freedom at the expense of the Indians they exterminate and the Africans they enslave, and that they achieve their cultural independence by expropriating the cultures of peoples they have systematically debased, devalorized, and deprived of an independent identity. Nevertheless, Hobomok does offer a more progressive version of race and gender relations that the one ultimately encoded in the American literary canon. Child breaks out of the mold in which American writers had hitherto found themselves imprisoned by the sources they drew on as they sought to create a distinctive national literature—the Puritan narratives of captivity and the Indian war that served to justify white conquest” (32).

11 Maddox writes, “The family language serves as a means of eliding those differences in ethnicity, social organization, belief, and behavior that are so patently at the heart of Indian-white incompatibility... To figure the nation as a family, especially in an era in many ways uncritical of patriarchy, is to depoliticize questions of power and to naturalize social and political hierarchies” (171). That marriage is implicitly concerned with land and property is unsurprising as land is at the heart of colonialism, capitalism, and thus white nineteenth century civilization. Of the interdependence of marriage and capitalist concerns, Jurgen Habermas, in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, writes of the developing enlightenment/capitalist period that “Even the contractual form of marriage, imputing the autonomous declaration of will on both partners, was largely a fiction, especially since a marriage, to the extent that the family owned capital, could not remain unaffected by considerations regarding the latter’s preservation and augmentation” (47). According to Habermas’s formulation, the morality assigned to marriage is then an ideological construct that serves to mask capitalist concerns. This ideology is then deployed against itself when, in the nineteenth century American context, the moral constructs of marriage and family are used to include races that are otherwise figured as completely outside the realm of civilization and law. Tate asserts, “Marriage is defined as civil status, condition and relation, created by a contract, which is regulated by law, that involves the mutual agreement of a man and a woman, competent to contract, to live together as husband and wife for the purpose of civilized society... Thus, marriage is the foundation of the family and indeed the very foundation of society, without which there would be no civilization or progress” (101-02).

12 Nevertheless, the entire marriage takes place within Hobomok’s realm, reinforcing its strangeness by placing it in the forest outside Plymouth; it begins with the ceremony is in his wigwam, and ends with his decision to leave her in the forest outside the colonial settlements. While the marriage includes Hobomok within the originating American family, it is temporary, lasting only long enough to justify land transference. Habermas relates economic autonomy, which Hobomok needs if he is to leave his lands for inheritance, to the presentation of the domestic sphere: “the autonomy of private people, founded on the right to property and in a sense
also realized in the participation in a market economy, had to be capable of being portrayed as such. To the autonomy of property owners in the market corresponded a self-presentation of human beings in the family”(46).

13 For all that is positive in imagining an Indian-white, loving union, the marriage and its dissolution are problematic. Baym writes that while “Child’s approval of Indian-white intermarriage is piquantly provocative, albeit presented as a lost opportunity;... [it] does derive from the same belief that Indians are primitive Christians” (40), and Hobomok’s tentative inclusion in Christian, enlightened tropes is crucial to the idea of his legitimacy as a husband and family member. The help he consistently offers to the English settlers is predicated upon a nascent Christian morality that is most obviously manifested in his deference to patriarchal authority. Maddox writes that in addition to respect for private property, “Two other of the requirements for civilization on which there was widespread agreement were conversion to Christianity and the adoption of the English language” (23). Hobomok speaks English, albeit broken, and while he is confused about Mr. Conant’s theological discussions, he defers to the Puritans’ patriarchal authority by speaking only when spoken to, and speaking freely only with the also-subordinate women. Child writes, “Hobomok seldom spoke in Mr. Conant’s presence, save in reply to his questions. He understood little of the dark divinity which he attempted to teach, and could not comprehend wherein the traditions of his fathers were heathenish and sinful; but with Mary and her mother, he felt no such restraint, and there he was all eloquence” (85). His inability to understand Puritan theology shows both his need for further education and that Child is not willing to remove Hobomok entirely from the realm of the wild at this point; he needs to remain connected to the land in order to pass it on.

14 The expansion of the Naumkeak settlement then signifies the spread of enlightened, Christian, white civilization upon a once-wild but now-domesticated nature, and parallels the individual progress reflected in both Hobomok and Child’s narrator. At the start of the narrative of Hobomok, the colonists had erected “six miserable hovels...[which] constituted the whole settlement of Naumkeak” (7). The growth of this tiny settlement parallels U.S. growth during Child’s time, and Child’s narrative reveals that the small, fledgling colonial villages did not survive because of their “enlightened” ideology but by the constant arrival from Europe of more settlers with already-domesticated animals for farming and for eating: “the expected vessels did arrive, and their fine flock of horses, cows, sheep, and goats were well provided for” (15). This dependence of the expansion of the colony on the influx of economic support from Europe does nothing to detract from Child’s attachment to notions of enlightenment progress:

"As for the poor, unlettered Indians, it exceeded their comprehension how buffaloes, as they termed them, could be led about by the horns, and be compelled to stand or move at the command of men; and they could arrive at no other conclusion than that the English were the favorite children of the Great Spirit, and that he had taught them words to speak to them. To these, and similar impressions, may be ascribed the astonishing influence of the whites over these untutored people. That the various tribes did not rise in their savagery, and crush the daring few who had intruded upon their possessions, is indeed a wonderful exemplification of the superiority of intellect over mere brutal force. (29)"

While the rhetoric of savagism is clear, Child does here break somewhat with the normal racist encoding of violent Indians as she stresses the lack of education in the Indian point of view here. They are “unlettered,” and she insists that they believe that white people have been “taught” by the Great Spirit; combined with the ending paean to the “superiority” of reason, her advocacy of the availability of enlightenment to all who are educated, beyond the confines of race, is articulated, even though she absolutely champions the superiority of white civilization. Child,
however, cannot continue this pretense of the power of learning throughout the novel, and it is
Mary who reminds readers of the necessity of violence in the survival of the colonies. She says
to her friend Sally, “when you remember how many Indians we have lately met, whom Morton’s
unthinking wickedness has armed with powder and firelocks, you will be glad that we have three
hundred more defenders around us, whatever price we may pay therefore” (19). Learning is all
well and good, but in the meantime, a large, heavily-armed group of white men is indispensable.

15 Thoreau’s cabin was on land R.W. Emerson purchased in 1844 (Richardson 149), and has been
altered by industrialization, as seen in the railroad that runs next to the pond, the cutting and
removing of ice in winter, and the field of stumps he clears for his bean field, among others.

16 The distinction between the material and the ideal is an important one for Transcendentalists.
In his essay “The Transcendentalist” (1842) Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, “I affirm facts not
affected by the illusions of sense, facts which are of the same nature as the faculty which reports
them, and not liable to doubt... facts which it only needs a retirement from the senses to discern.
Every materialist will be an idealist; but an idealist can never go backward to be a materialist”
(193). This split between the ideal and the material for the Transcendentalists is summarized by
Robert McGregor in A Wider View of the Universe (1997): “Maintaining that the senses were
unreliable allies in the personal search for absolute truth, they believed that insight into the
universal reality of God came directly to each individual human mind. Rational scientific
investigation, the transcendentalists argued, uncovered knowledge only of the inferior material
world” (35-36).

17 Of Thoreau’s Indian journals, Richardson explains, “Thoreau was to fill ten notebooks with
material for this project, yet he never seems to have sketched even a tentative draft or lecture on
it. But while he neither wrote nor planned a single great work on early North America and its
people, the subject preoccupied him and flowed over, in innumerable ways, into his other
projects... Thus, in the end, very little of the Indian material was finally wasted, since his
sympathetic identification with the early North American landscape and its inhabitants colored so
much of his mature work” (280-81).

18 Richardson writes, “As Thoreau’s dissatisfaction with the arrangements of white nineteenth-
century grew, he became increasingly willing to... recognize in his conception of the American
Indians, and, as time went on, in the Indians themselves, certain non-European virtues that were
not only valuable to the Indians but valuable in themselves and badly needed by the poor white
man” (220-21).

19 This use of the Indian also conforms with Bergland’s assertion that the Indian ghost signals
guilty American consciousness: “Phantasmic descriptions of African Americans, women, aliens,
and the poor point out the strength of the ghost metaphor and its strong association with white
American men’s anxiety and guilt over their complicity in American hierarchies of race, class,
and gender” (19). Thoreau’s living at Walden is itself his attempt to separate himself from the
sins of civilization.

20 Maddox writes, “By the end of the 1830s, removal had become an accomplished fact, and it
had become clear that the territorial contest between Indians and whites would continue to be an
unequal one... By 1838, according to the best estimates of the commissioner of Indian Affairs, a
total of 81,000 Indians had been removed to land west of the Mississippi, leaving only 26,700 in
the East” (28). Of that year’s Cherokee removal, Dee Brown writes that “On the long winter trek,
one of every four Cherokees dies from cold, hunger, or disease. They called the march their ‘trail
of tears’” (7), revealing the horrific scope of the removals that racist configurations of Indians as “savage” and the fear of the wild function to mask ideologically.

21 In The Dialectic of Enlightenment, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue, The self, entirely encompassed by civilization, is dissolved in an element composed of the very inhumanity which civilization has sought from the first to escape...For civilization, purely natural existence, both animal and vegetative, was the absolute danger. Mimetic, mythical, and metaphysical forms of behavior were successively regarded as stages of world history which had been left behind, and the idea of reverting back to them held the terror that the self would be changed back into the mere nature from which it had extricated itself. (24)

22 Horkheimer and Adorno write, “At the turning points of Western civilization, whenever new peoples and classes have more heavily repressed myth...the fear of unsubdued, threatening nature—a fear resulting form nature’s very materialization and objectification—has been belittled as animist superstition, and the control of internal and external nature has been made the purpose of life” (24).

This idea of the repression of myth as tied to individual development is crucial to Enlightenment ideology. Scheckel writes, “According to Rousseau, for example, enlightened self-interest, which urges men to enter into the social contract, is the very basis and guarantee of civilization. Liberal theories of political and economic development envisioned self-interest as the engine of progress that could, in theory, benefit society as a whole” (5). This is clearly a progressive idea, and it supports the notion that the individual is to take an active role in shaping society and its laws; self-development is the foundation for social development. Thoreau echoes these sentiments in “Resistance to Civil Government,” as he writes, “The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual...Is it not possible to take a step further toward recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly” (564).

23 Karcher writes, “American bourgeois ideology could neither mask nor resolve conflicts involving race, however, which displaced class discrimination onto targeted Others. To extend the promise of upward mobility to Indians and African Americans, whose extorted land and labor furnished the nation’s wealth, would mean overturning the economic foundations of the American republic” (63).

24 This belief stems from the influence of the Protestant Ethic on white North American culture from the colonial period, and Drinnon asserts, “Puritans were not...merely responding to current footlooseness. That they abhorred, admittedly; but they were driven against it by a goal that shot so far ahead of their times as to make them almost modern: They sought nothing less than to master the masterless ‘natural man’ and, for good measure, the rest of nature” (30-31). This trend continues as the colonial period gives way to the revolution and early years of the United States. The domination of the wild proves civilization, as Horkheimer and Adorno contend: “What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings” (2). If “enlightened” civilization then rests upon the domination of Indians and the wild, the project of writing Indians who embody enlightened ideals is immediately paradoxical.

frugality, self-denial, orderliness, punctuality—though originating in the desire to lead a pious life, proved crucial to the development of capitalism...[T]he middle class formulated a new
ideology based on the premise that ‘merit, talent, and hard work should dictate social, economic, and political rewards’ (59-60).

25 Karcher writes that Scott “brought the historical novel to maturity in the second decade of the nineteenth century” (18), aligning this with the growth in nationalist literature. Interestingly, Horsman writes, “All of the important English writers were read in America, but the two of particular importance in creating a sense of racial unity and destiny were Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Carlyle. Scott was by far the most popular of the English Romantics in America and, as in England, Scott did more than any other writer to bring the idea of the sturdy Anglo-Saxon past into popular consciousness” (160-61). There is an underlying, if unintentional, irony in naming Scott in a story meant to challenge racial assumptions.

26 This rejection of Indians as “the children of nature” collapses, too, in “Ktaadn” as he compares the villages of Oldtown and Lincoln. Thoreau describes Oldtown’s buildings as “generally they have a very shabby, forlorn, and cheerless look...The church is the only trim-looking building, but that is not the Abenaki, that was Rome’s doings. Good Canadian it may be, but it is poor Indian. These were once a powerful tribe. Politics are all the rage with them now. I even thought a row of wigwams, with a dance of powwows, and a prisoner tortured at the stake, would be more respectable than this” (596). The material degradation matches for Thoreau the spiritual degradation as it does not fit his preconceived, ideal “wild” Indian, and in contrast, Thoreau describes Lincoln far differently: “Learning that there were several wigwams here, on one of the Indian islands, we left our horse and wagon, and walked through the forest half a mile to the river, to procure a guide to the mountain...[W]e discovered their habitations,—small huts, in a retired place, where the scenery was unusually soft and beautiful, and the shore skirted with pleasant meadows and graceful elms” (597). Here, embodying Thoreau’s preconceived notions of how Indian life should look, whatever material poverty may actually exist is overwritten by the positive pastoral description.

27 At this point in “Ktaadn,” this self-development is for white male individuals, and Thoreau still clings to the idea of the Indian as connected to the wild, but as he develops his own myths within the essay, he depicts highly ambiguous Indians. He relies upon an ideal connection between Indians and the wild, yet separates this from dominant notions of savagery that normally determine this alignment. He writes,

there turns up now into the mouth of Millenocket stream a still more ancient and primitive man...In a bark vessel sewn up with the roots of the spruce, with hornbeam paddles, he dips his way along. He is but dim and misty to me, obscured by the aemos that lie between the bark-canoe and the bateau. He builds no house of logs, but a wigwam of skins. He eats no hot bread and sweet cake, but musquash and moose-meat and the fat of bears. He glides up the Millenocket and is lost to my sight, as a more distant and misty cloud is seen flitting behind a nearer, and is lost in space. So he goes about his destiny, the red face of man (652).

While Thoreau here is undoubtedly employing the language of vanishing, he is also entering into the creation of myth as the present tense of the passage collapses this in time; the man in the canoe is “ancient and primitive” yet “goes about his destiny” in Thoreau’s present, even if disconnected from Thoreau himself. Here, the Indian’s life is distinct from Thoreau’s and white civilization, but is also self-sufficient, out of Thoreau’s understanding, not at all savage or violent, and Thoreau betrays no need to change any of this: the Indian has his own “destiny,” and Thoreau need not be a part of it.
Moldenhaur identifies him as “Concord neighbor Edward Sherman Hall, thirty-four years old and recently returned from roughing it in California” (129).

Maddox writes, “having persuaded himself that the primitive man could still be found in the nighttime woods, Thoreau could then come home to declare the truth about Indian history: it is static, the Indians have learned nothing from the whites (since the true Indian is still primitive), and they are therefore fated to become extinct. The only trouble was, he couldn’t publish what he learned by observing Polis in the woods. Joe Polis might read the article, might even confront Thoreau about its political implications. That complicated everything” (157-58). This is the contradiction with which Thoreau could never come to terms: his own philosophical need to see the Indians and the wild as one eternal entity, and his direct knowledge of a differing reality that he at times denigrates and at times greatly admires. His lack of a published Indian book may mean that ultimately he had no clear idea of what to say on the topic.