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Addressing Racial Conflict in Antebellum America: Women and Native Americans in Lydia Maria Child's and Margaret Fuller's Literary Works

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Abstract

Through an analysis of two lesser-known works, Summer on the Lakes (1844) and The First Settlers of New-England: or, Conquest of the Pequods, Narragansets and Pokanokets (1829),the essay aims to investigate the ways in which two American thinkers, Margaret Fuller and Lydia Maria Child, used literature as a means of resistance against American expansionist policies and as an instrument for portraying, addressing and resolving racial conflict at U.S. borders during two crucial moments in antebellum American history.

Keywords: Margaret Fuller; Lydia Maria Child; Women Reformers; Nineteenth Century; Native Americans; Expansionism.

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1 Introduction: The Nineteenth-Century Debate on Native Americans' Lot — Between Assimilation and Extinction

In December 1829, when the newly elected president, Andrew Jackson, addressed Congress to ask for the removal of Native Americans beyond the Mississippi River, the Indian Question,[1] as the 'problem' of Native American presence within the U.S. territory was called, was already part of a long-term debate that spanned the entire history of the country. Only ten years earlier, President James Monroe had signed the *Civilization Fund Act*, a program that paternalistically allocated tens of thousands of dollars a year to the literacy of Native American children and the teaching of agricultural techniques to adult Indians with the goal of "civilizing" and integrating them into U.S. society. The underlying idea was that without a proper process of assimilation supported by government policies, Native Americans would be doomed to extinction. In 1828, the election of a frontier man as president, who had managed to rise to the top of the political arena thanks to his military success in the country's recent expansionist wars, made peaceful coexistence between the Natives and the Americans on the American soil even more unattainable. Indeed, as Laura L. Mielke has pointed out, "politicians and members of benevolent societies increasingly argued [...] that such efforts to save American Indians from extinction through education were undermined by the pupils' proximity to the corrupting elements of non-Native culture. Thus, removal policy signaled a desire to secure land for eager settlers and to shore up U.S. territory in the wake of conflicts with France, Spain, and Britain and a rejection of the belief that American Indians could become 'civilized' while directly contending with a rapidly expanding Euro-American population."[2]

American women reformers played a leading role in this debate. Although Mary Hershberger extensively illustrated how, since the ratification of the *Indian Removal Act* by the Senate in 1830, women have used petitions as the main means of resistance against American expansionist policies,[3] female authorship in terms of advocacy for Native American rights needs further analysis. Studying this kind of literature[4] allows us to understand the means available to women to make their voices heard in the context of gender-based social restrictions. At a time when the cult of motherhood and domesticity[5] excluded women from taking part in the public life of the country, they used literature as an

1. On the Indian Question see, among others, Reginald Horsman, *Expansion and American Indian Policy, 1783–1812* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967); Bernard Sheenan, *Seeds of Extinction. Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973); Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Long Bitter Trail: Andrew Jackson and the Indians* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993); Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties. The History of a Political Anomaly* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Susan Scheckel, *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians. The Tragic Fate of First Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002); Susan M. Ryan, "Benevolent Violence. Indian Removal and the Contest of National Character," in *The Grammar of Good Intentions. Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence*, ed. Susan M. Ryan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 25–45; Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

2. Laura L. Mielke, *Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 1.

3. Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s," *Journal of American History*, 1(1999): 15–40.

4. See also Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American. Frontiers, 1630–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, *The Frontiers of Women's Writing: Women's Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996); Cheryl J. Fish, *Black and White Women's Travel Narratives. Antebellum Explorations* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Susan L. Roberson, *Antebellum American Women Writers and the Road: American Mobilities* (New York: Routledge, 2011); and Gerald J. Kennedy, *Strange Nation: Literary Nationalism and Cultural Conflict in the Age of Poe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

5. On the relationship between nineteenth-century women's rights movements, domesticity and the public sphere see, among others, Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly*, 2(1966): 151–174; Ellen Carol Dubois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920," *The American Historical Review*, 3(1984): 620–647; Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Nicole Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference: The*

instrumental way of overcoming the ideology of separate spheres and entering into American public discourse.

The paper aims to investigate Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844) and Lydia Maria Child's *The First Settlers of New-England: or, Conquest of the Pequods, Narragansets and Pokanokets* (1829) in order to show the limits of the humanitarian approach of women reformers dealing with the Indian Question. Born and educated at the beginning of the nineteenth century in New England, the liberal cradle of American culture and philosophy and the home of radical white abolitionism, during their long career as writers and journalists both Fuller and Child were attentive observers and insightful interpreters of the political events and social conflicts that in the first half of the century were shaking the American continent. While Fuller was one of the pioneers of American feminism, and Child was one of the most important abolitionist women in the Garrisonian circle, they both dealt with the Native American question using similar literary tools, yet providing very different, and often conflicting, interpretations and solutions. The paper explores the ways in which the two women reformers used literature as a tool to portray, address and resolve racial conflict at the U.S. borders during two crucial moments in antebellum American expansionist history. The focus is on how Fuller's and Child's narratives entangle with complex issues of imperial expansion and how, through their works, they joined a multifaceted debate on racial conflict between the settlers and the Native Americans whose concepts often reaffirmed a presumed American exceptionalism filled with racist paradigms and patterns of white supremacism.

In general, it can be argued that, however radical they might be, in many cases the leading American intellectuals of the antebellum period did not deviate much from the assumptions, which were well rooted in American political tradition, that the United States had been chosen by God as the model and leading country for all the nations of the world that aspired to a future of freedom and equality. Although many of them challenged the idea of Manifest Destiny and questioned the American expansionist project, they often carried out their criticism "in terms every bit as destinarian as those of the most extreme expansionists."[6] If Euro-Americans perceived themselves as the elected people, it logically followed that the Native Americans had to be wild and inferior, and therefore, destined to disappear before the progress brought by the white man. In particular, the approach employed by Northern politicians and intellectuals had its roots in the myth of the "Noble Savage" of Rousseau. Moreover, it was influenced by and fully blended in the pseudo-scientific theories that justified the existence of racial hierarchy: Euro-Americans were clearly at its top; Blacks and Indians, on the other hand, were at the bottom. President Jackson's Secretary of War, Lewis Cass, stated in 1830 that the Cherokees lived in a state of nature. Even Ralph Waldo Emerson, only two years after the ratification of the *Indian Removal Act*, commented that "[S]o inferior a race must perish shortly … That is the very fact of their inferiority."[7] Moreover, Henry David Thoreau, in his notebooks on Indian matters, claimed that there was "a vast difference between a savage & civilized people," and this was the main reason why the American Indians were destined to be "exterminated at last by the white man's improvements."[8] According to the Concord philosopher, "the history of the white man is a history of improvement, that of the red man a history of fixed habits of stagnation."[9]

Nonfiction of Catharine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997); Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Sylvia D. Hoffert, *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature*, 3(1998): 581–606; Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); Raffaella Baritono, *Il sentimento delle libertà. La dichiarazione di Seneca Falls e il dibattito sui diritti delle donne negli Stati Uniti di metà Ottocento* (Torino: La Rosa, 2001); Etsuko Taketani, *U.S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism, 1825–1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Tiffany K. Wayne, *Women's Roles in Nineteenth-century America* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007).

6. Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1995), 48.

7. Quoted in Joshua David Bellin, "Native American Rights," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*, eds. Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, Laura Dassow Walls, and Joel Myerson (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks Online, 2012).

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

It is, therefore, necessary to highlight why Native Americans witnessed much less enthusiasm regarding the defense of their cause, while advocates of nineteenth-century reform movements opposed continental expansion mainly because it would further the extension of slave territories. As Joshua David Bellin has clearly pointed out considering the transcendentalist movement of the Bostonian area, "though major figures [...] read widely on Indians, traveled among them, and harbored a lifelong fascination with them, their admiration did not lead to advocacy. Though some of the Transcendentalists kept on talking about issues relating to the Indians, the talk did not come through in their actions."[10] Indeed, the fact that Native Americans were the focal point of interest of a large number of U.S. reformers, and the subject of many anthropological and ethnographic studies, does not in any way imply that their cause was pursued on political grounds.

2 Margaret Fuller, American Expansionism and Native Americans' Extinction

This is precisely the case with *Summer on the Lakes*, the story of the journey that Margaret Fuller undertook in the summer of 1843, together with her friend Sarah Clarke, into what was then called the "American Northwest," the Great Lakes area, visiting Niagara Falls, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and the plains of Illinois and Wisconsin. The text, which was revised and updated by Fuller through additional research[11] carried out at Harvard College Library, was published in 1844.

From the very first pages of her travel narrative, she described a society that was gradually taking shape before her eyes, a "great and growing world"[12] in which rhythm flowed quickly, "the torrent of emigration swell[ed] very strongly,"[13] and life was governed by very different rules compared to Europe or the old states in New England. Although the motto of "go ahead" turned into "warlike invasion" and showed "the rudeness of conquest," according to Fuller, this was a process of creative destruction and, therefore, it only represented a necessary step in the creation of a new order, an egalitarian society that would ensure material and spiritual prosperity to all settlers. "I trust by reverent faith," she stated, that "a new order, a new poetry is to be evoked from this chaos."[14] Fuller believed that she was witnessing a growing democratic society in the West, "a pleasant society" made up "of the families who live along the banks of this stream upon farms" which, coming "from various parts of the world," "have in common the interests of a new country and a new life,"[15] contrary to the artificial comforts of Europe and Eastern America, that she defined as societies "of struggling men." According to Fuller, the West was a place "where nature still wore her motherly smile and seemed to promise room not only for those favored or cursed with the qualities best adapting for the strifes of competition, but for the delicate, the thoughtful, even the indolent or eccentric. She did not say, Fight or starve; nor even, Work or cease to exist."[16] However, as Jeffrey Steele has pointed out,

10. Ibid.

11. Fuller is known as the first woman allowed to access and carry out research at Harvard College Library. Among her sources, which she explicitly mentions in the course of the book, we find some travel narratives and memories by former pioneers of that area, such as the colonial American explorer Jonathan Carver (1710–1780), the explorer Alexander Henry (1739–1824), the American painter and writer George Catlin (1796–1872), the English author and diplomat Sir Charles Augustus Murray (1806–1895), the geographer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1793–1864) and his wife Jane Schoolcraft (1800–1842), the Anglo-Irish writer Anna Brownell Jameson (1794–1860), the renowned writer Washington Irving (1783–1859), the Irish revolutionary aristocrat Lord Edward Fitzgerarld (1763–1798), the historian James Adair (1709–1783), the Superintendent of Indian Affairs Thomas L. McKenney (1785–1859), the English abolitionist Morris Birkbeck (1764–1825) and the Scottish poet and author Anne Grant (1755–1838). Fuller explicitly states that she will refer to the books "which may be found in the library of Harvard College." Margaret Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1844), 242.

12. Ibid, 110.

13. Ibid, 113.

14. Ibid, 28.

15. Ibid, 60–61.

16. Ibid, 60.

> Beginning her travels with high expectations, she found that her journey toward freedom could not be separated from an increasing sense of the oppression experienced by others.[17]

Fuller witnessed the oppression suffered by women pioneers, mothers, wives and daughters of the settlers, whose choice to leave for the West had been exclusively dictated by the need to follow their men: "The great drawback upon the lives of these settlers, at present, is the unfitness of the women for their new lot. It has generally been the choice of the men, and the women follow, as women will, doing their best for affection's sake, but too often in heartsickness and weariness." According to Fuller, pioneer women were unfit for frontier life because of the type of education they had received in Europe and New England, which had made them mere "ornaments of society," because it had given them "neither the strength nor skill now demanded."[18] It is for this reason that they could not live in harmony with nature. In Fuller's considerations, therefore, it is precisely women's condition, and the inadequacy of the American educational system, that indicate the contradictions of the life in the West. They represent the starting point for a broader reflection on women's rights that Fuller would finalize in 1845 through the publication of her well-known feminist manifesto, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

In addition to pioneer women, Fuller focused her attention on another group that had been heavily affected by the U.S. expansionist project: Native Americans. In her writing, she addressed the traditional wilderness/civilization duality associated with the supposed ontological distinction between Native Americans and Euro-Americans. When she found herself describing, in the very first pages of her travel narrative, the sublime feeling that the view of the Niagara Falls aroused in her, she underlined the indissoluble bond between American Nature and Native Americans, who were "shaped on the same soil."[19] Since her first encounter with the Indians, often called "naked savages,"[20] Fuller stated that what differentiated them from the settlers was their deep connection with the "wilderness," that was the wild, boundless and primordial nature that contrasted with "the rudeness of the white settlers," a primitive, unnoble and artificial roughness that was destroying the uncontaminated nature of the West.[21]

Fuller rejected the process of territorial expansion that, starting under Jefferson's administration and furthered in 1840 by the Manifest Destiny ideology,[22] had progressively taken territories from Native Americans and justified the atrocities committed on the basis of pseudo-religious racial and racist

17. Jeffrey Steele, *Transfiguring America: Myth, Ideology, and Mourning in Margaret Fuller's Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 140.

18. Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes*, 61–62.

19. Ibid, 5.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid, 18.

22. On the relationship between American exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny and nineteenth-century expansionism see, among others, Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Gloucester: P. Smith, 1958); Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); Allan O. Kownslar, *Manifest Destiny and Expansionism in the 1840's* (Boston: Heath and Company, 1967); Byron E Shafer, ed., *Is America Different? A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Amy Kaplan, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: Norton, 1996); William Earl Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire. American Expansion from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1996); Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, eds., *Manifest Destiny and Empire. American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997); Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Gregory H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1997); Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design. American Exceptionalism & Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); James Q. Wilson and Peter H. Schuck, eds., *Understanding America: The Anatomy of an Exceptional Nation* (New York, PublicAffairs, 2008); Daniele Fiorentino, "Eccezionalismo, identità nazionale e interdipendenza: nuove sintesi italiane sulla storia degli Stati Uniti d'America," *Mondo contemporaneo: rivista di storia*, 2(2009): 177–190; Mario Del Pero, *Libertà e Impero. Gli Stati Uniti e il mondo, 1776–2016* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2017).

arguments,[23] as follows: "I know that the Europeans who took possession of this country, felt themselves justified by their superior civilization and religious ideas. Had they been truly civilized or Christianized, the conflicts which sprang from the collision of the two races, might have been avoided."[24] Nevertheless, at the heart of Fuller's argument, in addition to the myth of the "Noble Savage" was that of "the vanishing Indian," which manifested itself in her firm belief that the Native Americans were doomed to extinction before the advance of the superior white race. Although rejected and criticized in its destructive violence, the colonization of wilderness by the white man was considered by Fuller as written in destiny and as bearer of a new historical phase of progress, therefore, not only inevitable but also desirable. Despite the Indians' disappearance being "inevitable, fatal"[25] as their living in a world of "ignominious servitude and slow decay,"[26] Fuller stated, "we must not complain, but look forward to a good result [...] the white settler pursues the Indian, and is victor in the chase."[27] The Natives, according to Fuller, were aware of the imminent end of their people and had resignedly accepted that "the power of fate is with the white man."[28]

Bellin suggests that the gender inequality that Fuller perceived in Indian societies could have reinforced her conviction that their extinction "was not only inevitable but also proper."[29] Despite the fact that there were female chiefs among the Indians, she argued that they had no real power of decision or control: "It is impossible to look upon the Indian women, without feeling that they *do* occupy a lower place than women among the nations of European civilization." However, compared to their "white sisters," "who have more aspiration and refinement, with little power of self-sustenance," according to Fuller "they suffer less" because "they inherit submission, and the minds of the generality accommodate themselves more or less to any posture [...] But their place is certainly lower."[30] Although Indian women seemed to occupy a lower position in society than white women, Fuller found that the two groups shared a common experience of subordination. Like their white 'sisters,' Indian women "have great power at home" but, she argued, "this power is good for nothing, unless the woman be wise to use it aright. Has the Indian, has the white woman, as noble a feeling of life and its uses, as religious a self-respect, as worthy a field of thought and action, as man? If not, the white woman, the Indian woman, occupies an inferior position to that of man. It is not so much a question of power, as of *privilege*."[31] Once again, the argument about the condition of women, this time Indian women, provided the starting point for broader reflection on the patriarchal system and a critique of male privilege that permeated the entire American society, including the Native Americans.

Despite the fact that she portrayed Indian morality as noble and representative of a virtuous people, and their potential distance from virtuous behavior as an effect of the influence of European colonization, Fuller could not free herself from nineteenth-century racial stereotypes on Indian inferiority when she pointed out that "their moral code" was not as "refined as that of civilized nations."[32] She insisted on the qualitative difference between the white settlers and the Indians, describing them as belonging to two different stages of evolution within a hierarchy of human races. In stating that by becoming civilized, men moved away from nature while perfecting their intellectual faculties and thus affirming that "the civilized man" had "a larger mind" even though he possessed "a more imperfect

23. See Reginald Horsman, "Scientific Racism and the American Indian in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *American Quarterly*, 2(1975): 152–168, and Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

24. Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes*, 234.

25. Ibid, 47.

26. Ibid, 173.

27. Ibid, 47.

28. Ibid, 115.

29. Bellin, "Native American Rights."

30. Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes*, 179.

31. Ibid, 182. The author's emphasis.

32. Ibid, 208.

nature than the savage,"[33] Fuller showed that her ideas were crammed with racist pseudo-scientific theories that were taking shape throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, not only did the American Indian race belong to a different state of human evolution, but it was also unable to improve itself, as she wrote in verse in her poem, "Governor Everett Receiving the Indian Chiefs," which recalled the 1837 meeting held in Boston between Edward Everett, governor of Massachusetts, and the Indian chiefs of the Sacs and the Foxes, defined as "an unimproving race."[34] Quoting directly "the admirable speech of Governor Everett on that occasion," and defining it as "the happiest attempt ever made to meet the Indian in his own way,"[35] she implicitly supported his assumption about a territorial and cultural separation between the West and the East. Everett had described the former as the native place of the Indians and the latter as that of the white settlers, deliberately not mentioning the process of colonization that had pushed the Indians to the west of the Mississippi River:

> Brothers! you dwell between the Mississippi and the Missouri. They are mighty rivers. They have one branch far East in the Alleghanies, and the other far West in the Rocky Mountains; but they flow together at last into one great stream, and run down together into the sea. In like manner, the red man dwells in the West, and the white man in the East, by the great waters; but they are all one branch, one family; it has many branches and one head.[36]

Appreciating Governor Everett's speech, Fuller rejected any solutions that would entail a peaceful coexistence between the two groups.

Therefore, what did Fuller propose to solve in American racial conflict?

First of all, she rejected interracial marriage. According to Fuller, the merging of races would not bring an improvement but, on the contrary, a progressive degradation. Through amalgamation, both the Indians and the settlers would lose their best qualities.

> Amalgamation would afford the only true and profound means of civilization. But nature seems, like all else, to declare, that this race is fated to perish. Those of mixed blood fade early, and are not generally a fine race. They lose what is best in either type, rather than enhance the value of each, by mingling. There are exceptions, one or two such I know of, but this, it is said, is the general rule.[37]

Second, since she acknowledged that the disappearance of the Natives was already written in destiny, there was not much more to be done for the Indians other than to "respect the first possessors of our country."[38] Fuller did not take a political stand against American colonization and she did not advocate the right of Native Americans to life, to sovereignty over the land and to self-determination. Instead, she simply attempted to save the memory "of the lost grandeur of the race,"[39] proposing the recovery of American Indian history to be carried out by historians "of their own race"[40] and the musealization of their past. She seemed more interested in the remains of the Indians that she found rather than in the description and understanding of their human, political and social conditions. Fuller felt an urgency to preserve a mythical past, which she even compared to ancient Greece, rather than to describe a present that did not please her. Her approach looks more like the effort of an antiquarian who wants to preserve something that seems to almost be lost forever. The Indians had to be 'saved' not as bearers of inalienable rights, but because their memory was as an inseparable part of the

33. Ibid, 221.

34. Ibid, 188.

35. Ibid, 190.

36. Ibid, 192.

37. Ibid, 195.

38. Ibid, 213.

39. Ibid, 182.

40. Ibid, 232.

transcendent nature that the Western man called home. It is in this perspective that Fuller proposed the collection of materials that belonged to the Indians, and their display in "a national institute" designed for the whites, "containing all the remains of the Indians," including "a collection of skulls from all parts of the country."[41] In this way Fuller, adopting an attitude that Jeffrey Steele has defined as "political sympathy"[42] that, I argue, does not turn into political activism, reinforced racial stereotypes and hierarchies that did nothing but reaffirm expansionist archetypes. Indeed, as Bellin has argued, reproducing ethnographic discourses regarding the Indians as being naturally different, inferior and destined to extinction, "Fuller trades political sympathy for racist necrology."[43] She wrote:

> I have no hope of saving the Indian from immediate degradation, and speedy death [...] Yet, ere they depart, I wish there might be some masterly attempt to reproduce, in art or literature, what is proper to them, a kind of beauty and grandeur, which few of the everyday crowd have hearts to feel, yet which ought to leave in the world its monuments, to inspire the thought of genius through all ages.[44]

3 Assimilation and Interracial Marriage in Lydia Maria Child's *The First Settlers of New-England*

The second work under consideration, *The First Settlers of New-England: or, Conquest of the Pequods, Narragansets and Pokanokets* (1829), was written by Lydia Maria Child during a crisis in Georgia between the Cherokees and the white settlers, which, in 1830, led to the ratification by the Senate of the *Indian Removal Act* under Jackson's presidency.

This book, printed by Munroe & Francis, a small publishing house in Boston, was not her first attempt to address the Native Americans' cause. Child, who had the opportunity to get in direct contact with some Indian tribes during her childhood that was spent in Maine, from the early 1820s devoted much of her intellectual efforts to defending Native peoples throughout her life. In addition to the articles published in magazines for young readers, (such as *The Juvenile Miscellany*, the first successful American children's magazine that she edited), her first historical novel, *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times. By an American* (1824) describes the origins of American history from a female point of view. It portrays the interracial marriage between a young Puritan woman and a Native American man and represents her first attempt to undermine the traditional exceptionalist Puritan historical narrative on the founding of the United States. Worthy of mention are also the many articles she published in the *Massachusetts Journal*, a radical political newspaper founded by her husband David, which became a channel of opposition[45] to the *Indian Removal Act* and even brought him, in 1831, a personal letter of thanks from the Cherokee Indian Chief John Ross.[46]

Although it appears to be a book dedicated to a younger audience, *The First Settlers of New-England* reveals its great political relevance because it is actually a revisionist history of American colonization

41. Ibid, 233.

42. Steele, *Transfiguring America,* 158.

43. Bellin, "Native American Rights."

44. Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes*, 196.

45. David Lee Child's articles published in the *Massachusetts Journal* claimed the Cherokees' right to sovereignty of the land but, arguing that "these native proprietors must disappear from the scenes of human action," they implicitly accepted the assumption that the Indians were destined to extinction. After Child's marriage to David, described by the biographer Karcher as a "political partnership," the editorial policy of the *Journal* changed in support of the claims of the Cherokees and, more generally, of the right of all Indians to life and possession of land without any reference to the "vanishing Indian" myth. According to Karcher, this can be seen as a sign of the great influence that Child had on her husband and on the editorship of the magazine. Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 12–13.

46. In the letter, written on February 11, 1831, John Ross thanks David Lee Child "for the honorable and generous feelings you have expressed in sympathy for the sufferings of the poor Cherokees." John Ross, "Letter to David Lee Child," February 11, 1831, Papers of Lydia Maria Child, ca. 1827–1878, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

that highlights the contradictions underlying the creation of the nation and the devastations carried out by English Puritans.

In the introduction, Child explained the many reasons why she wrote this book. By using a historical approach, she aimed to show readers that Indians had welcomed the Pilgrim Fathers in a friendly and courteous way. She criticized much of the historiography,[47] which was "desirous of proving the origin of the war to have been just."[48] "The Indians have been strangely misrepresented, either through ignorance or design, or both; and men have given themselves little trouble to investigate the subject."[49] According to Child, a major issue with historiography was that sources were written by the winners, so they only told and documented part of the truth, as seen in the following quotation:

> We receive all our information from those who committed the guilty deed, and therefore must conclude that nothing is left untold that would in any measure lessen the odium of these dark transactions, or lessen the offences of our ancestors.[50]

Her goal, she clearly stated, was also to illustrate the positive characteristics of the Native Americans and to prove, "from the most authentic records," that the treatment they received by those she defined as "the usurpers of their soil" was "in direct violation of the religious and civil institutions which we have heretofore so nobly defended and by which we profess to be governed." According to Child, the United States had "the finger of scorn" pointed at it, "for having so grossly violated the principles which form the basis of our government." "This crooked and narrow-minded policy which we have adopted in reference to the Indians," she affirmed, referring to the *Indian Removal Act*, "will assuredly subject us to the calamitous reverses which have fallen on other nations, whose path to empire has been marked by the blood and ruin of their fellow-men." Therefore, according to Child, it was precisely the Indian Question that revealed to the American people the underlying contradictions of their country, which was created by proclaiming the principles of freedom and equality of all citizens and, instead, was expanding through repeated wars of extermination and colonization. The government's attitude towards the Native Americans would lead the country to its ruin.[51]

What led to the colonization of the Americas, according to Child, was exclusively the Europeans' "strong desire to possess the land and drive out the heathen inhabitants."[52] Thus, she explicitly challenged the religious foundations of American exceptionalism, advocated by the Puritans, described as belonging to "a sect" who believed they were "a chosen people, and, like the Israelites, authorized by God to destroy or drive out the heathen, as they styled the Indians."[53] The first settlers "believed it to be for the glory of God to take away the lives of his creatures."[54] They demolished "social happiness and confidential intercourse," gave "force and scope to the most hateful passions"[55] and allied with each other to fight their common enemy, the Indians, "regardless of the precepts of our benign Master, and the ties which bind man to his fellow beings."[56] Furthermore, in the same manner as the desire for conquest had been the foundation for the establishment of the American colonies, according to Child "this disposition has been transmitted to their descendants."[57]

47. Among the historiographical works cited by Child, I mention John Winthrop's Journal, *History of New England* (1630–1649), William Hubbard's *Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New England* (1677), and Thomas Prince's *Chronological History of New England* (1736).

48. Lydia Maria Child, *The First Settlers of New-England: or, Conquest of the Pequods, Narragansets and Pokanokets. As Related by a Mother to Her Children* (Boston, Munroe and Francis, 1829), 138.

49. Ibid, 13.

50. Ibid, 58.

51. Ibid, III–IV.

52. Ibid, 22.

53. Ibid, 31.

54. Ibid, 90–91.

55. Ibid, 94.

56. Ibid, 137.

57. Ibid, 23.

Also Child underlined that "the natives of this country are fast disappearing [...] and will in all probability be soon blotted from the face of the earth."[58] However, contrary to Fuller's beliefs, in Child's opinion this was neither a natural phenomenon nor written in destiny. Indeed, their disappearance derived exclusively from the expansionist and destructive policies pursued by the U.S. government, as Child states: "It is, in my opinion, decidedly wrong, to speak of the removal, or extinction of the Indians as inevitable."[59] So, what solutions did Child offer for saving the Native Americans from the ongoing process of extinction caused by the white settlers?

Contrary to Fuller, who saw in the union between the Native Americans and the American settlers the inevitable decadence of both races, Child supported interracial marriage as the only solution for resolving the American racial conflict. She argues,

> There are many who affirm that by intermixing with the natives, the whites would have lost much of their peculiar character, and the result must have (of course) been highly detrimental; nevertheless, I am free to confess that in my opinion we should have gained more than would have been lost.

Since, according to Child, interracial marriage would bring enhancement on both sides, what she proposed was not a mere Americanization of the Natives, but a cultural and anthropological exchange between the Indians and the white settlers that would bring, in addition to the salvation of Native Americans, also a broader moral regeneration of the nation. It was precisely the Indian Question that "involved the honour and humanity of our country."[60]

Furthermore, according to Child, interracial marriage between the descendants of the Puritans and the Native Americans would have broader political relevance, not only in domestic politics but also in international politics. It would save the country "from the hordes of vagrants, who have been allured to our shores, like vultures by the scent of prey, that they might seize on the spoils of the natives whom we have destroyed."[61] What Child was referring to are the working-class European immigrants who endorsed Jackson's Democratic Party and the slave traders of the South, in exchange for the right to vote and a supposed formal equality. Furthermore, she supported a multiracial republic in which the Native Americans had a strategic political role, because they also represented an instrument of defense against the European proletarian threat.

> Though we might not be able to boast, 'the glorious result of ten millions of white inhabitants,' the red men who would have formed a part of our population, would have been to us a wall of defence; neither would the innocent blood we have so profusely shed, which cries aloud for vengeance, subject us to the fearful retribution which has fallen on the guilty nations who have established themselves on the ruins of their fellow men.[62]

Child was addressing those who affirmed that it was impossible to carry out assimilation policies because they believed that the Indians, as qualitatively inferior beings, were "incapable of becoming a civilized people,"[63] as well as fully exploiting the American lands, stating that:

> If it be admitted, that we have a right to take the land of the natives, because they do not improve it in the manner we think best; it goes to prove, that all, who do not possess houses or lands which they do not occupy themselves, especially grounds devoted to pleasure or hunting, may be compelled to resign them to those who have no settled habitations or possessions, and thus an equal distribution of property take[s] place, which would subvert all our institutions and incitements to industry or distinction.[64]

58. Ibid, 42.

59. Ibid, 281.

60. Ibid, 282.

61. Ibid, 65–66.

62. Ibid, 66.

63. Ibid, 259.

64. Ibid, 254.

She mentioned the case of the Cherokees, who had adopted "our arts, our religion, and husbandry," established an ever-growing school system, founded a bilingual magazine, turned to agriculture and trade, established a public road system, adopted the Christian religion as the "religion of the nation" and, above all, implemented a republican constitution based on the U.S. model, and argued that the American government should allow them "to retain what is left of their native inheritance."[65] According to Child, they had been deceived by Americans because they had to give up a considerable part of their land, which was being definitively stolen from them, along with all the improvements they had made over the past thirty years, described as follows: "they are now urged to quit their territory, with all their improvements, and retire to the western wilds, where they must erelong miserably perish, to gratify the insatiable cupidity of the Georgians." However, it is clear that Child reaffirmed traditional racial hierarchies and patterns of white supremacism when she argued that, by bargaining with the officers of George Washington, "their venerated father," and embracing American customs and traditions, the Cherokees became "a civilized community."[66]

Child stated that the *Indian Removal Act* was "a policy of death and desolation" and "a system of cruelty, fraud, and outrage, which has no parallel."[67] She quoted the words of the Ohio congressmen Samuel Finley Vinton and John Woods, who had denounced the precarious conditions in which Native Americans lived as a result of the various removals that had been carried out in previous decades by the American government.

> While we are talking about our justice, our generosity, our feelings of humanity for the Indians—in the same breath we say, that our citizens—that the American People—with ruthless violence and injustice are trampling the weak remnant of these once powerful nations in the dust. If we cannot protect them within the limits of our State Governments, in sight of our Courts of Justice, and within reach of the arm of the laws, we cannot protect them when placed beyond the limits of any organized civil government.[68]

Moreover, Child pointed out,

> "I devoutly trust that our Government will not gain pusillanimously compromise with the sordid avaricious Georgians, and bargain their honour and integrity for being allowed to compel, in their own way, the unfortunate Indians to abandon their country, which had been most solemnly guarantied to them and their posterity.[69]

Child trusted that, when men understood the wrongs committed against the Indians, they would awake from the torpor of indifference, which she judged to be the great evil of her time and would join the cause of the Native Americans. She claimed to be "cheered by the hope, that men of talents and integrity, when they find that no hostile design was projected against the white men, until every pacific overture had failed of success, will be aroused from the torpid indifference with which they have hitherto witnessed the unexampled fate of the Indians, and nobly and fearlessly stand forward in their defence."[70] In this process, American children and youths, whom the book addresses, played a leading political role, as such they should understand their moral obligation towards a country that had betrayed the principles underlying its foundation. Consequently, Child wrote:

> I ardently hope that this unvarnished tale, which I have offered to view, will impress our youth with the conviction of their obligation to alleviate, as much as is in their power,

65. Ibid, 259–260. See also William G. McLoughin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Theda Perdue, "The Conflict Within: Cherokees and Removal," William L., ed., *Cherokee Removal. Before and After* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), *55*–74.

66. Child, *The First Settlers of New-England*, V–VI.

67. Ibid, 262–263.

68. Ibid, 264.

69. Ibid, 281.

70. Ibid, IV–V.

> the sufferings of the generous and interesting race of men whom we have so unjustly supplanted.[71]

If the children who read Child's narrative were "able to incite a general interest in their favour" among their "young friends," "we may confidently expect that the rising generation will strive to meliorate their condition."[72]

4 Conclusion

Racial conflict is a constant element within U.S social and political history. Understanding the historical paths it has taken over the centuries and how it has shaped American society and politics, revealing itself to be a catalyst of change, is crucial in order to shed new light on the intrinsic contradictions of American political culture that, even today, remain partially unsolved.

Looking into the history of American expansionism in relation to the Indian Question offers an interesting perspective of analysis for understanding how racial conflict has been interpreted and addressed during the nineteenth century. Particularly fascinating are the ways in which nineteenth-century American women used literary means politically to describe this conflict within and beyond U.S. borders, offering interpretations and solutions that often differ, and even contrast, with each other. At a time when the ideology of domesticity and the concept of Republican Motherhood were the main theoretical foundations for the role of women in society, they used literature in an instrumental way to challenge the theory of separate spheres and influence public debates. Also, Margaret Fuller and Lydia Maria Child, through their literary works, questioned the policies implemented by various U.S. governments in the wake of an exceptionalistic nationalism that resulted in wars of extermination and colonization at the expense of Native American populations. However, their books reveal the limits of their humanitarian approach to the Indian Question.

As mentioned above, both women criticized the process of colonization that had led to the conquest of American territory and denounced the atrocities and cruelties committed against the Native Americans, who were described many times as being benevolent and welcoming towards the white settlers. However, while Lydia Maria Child considered colonization to be a violation of the Indians' rights to life and to the possession of the land of their ancestors, Margaret Fuller interpreted it as a necessary step in the process of building a new egalitarian society that would provide physical and spiritual prosperity for all Americans.

Child viewed marriage between Native Americans and whites as a crucial instrument for resolving American racial conflict since she perceived it as the only means that would guarantee the improvement of both races, the reduction of crime and violence and, therefore, a moral regeneration of the entire American society. Fuller, on the contrary, saw amalgamation as the cause of progressive degradation for both sides, which, because of union, would lose the best characteristics of each. At the base of their different approaches, there is a diverging interpretation regarding the Native populations' lot. Indeed, Fuller believed that the Indians, belonging to a lower stage in the hierarchy of races, were destined to disappear in light of the progress brought by the 'white man.' Their extinction appeared to be inevitable and part of an inexorable process written by destiny. It is for this reason that, besides a moralistic sympathy, the question was not taken up at a political level but remained at a purely theoretical level according to her proposal of a musealization of the Native American culture that was functional to the constitution of a white American memory, created for whites and built on the ashes of a non-white people that was vanishing. Child, on the contrary, believed that the extinction of Native Americans derived from the policies carried out by the U.S. government. Her struggle was political and, therefore, she attributed a political meaning to interracial marriages.

Both books are another confirmation of the intertwining of issues of race, gender and class in American history. For both women, expansionism and the Indian Question were indicative of the underlying fractures in American society that had torn the country apart, not only along the line

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid, 44.

of race, but also that of gender and class. Although Fuller regarded the exploration of the West as an opportunity to denounce gender inequality and the logic of a patriarchal system that governed male-dominated Native American and white societies, Child exploited the subject to also point out the problem of immigration and the emerging class conflict resulting from the European proletarian threat.

However, it is important to highlight the observation that the reasoning of both women was based on the belief in an alleged qualitative difference between Native Americans and white settlers that mirrored the wilderness/civilization dichotomy. Indeed, according to the two women, if one admitted the possibility that Indians could become civilized, this could happen only if they embraced the habits and customs of the whites, as in the case of the Cherokees as mentioned by Child, therefore, within Eurocentric models. In most cases, Native Americans were described as pure and savage, part of that wilderness that first colonization and later continental expansion were slowly destroying due to the advance of the white man. From both texts emerges a more or less explicit white supremacism that had deep roots in the European Enlightenment and that would contribute to influence the birth and sedimentation of that scientific racism that, in particular, starting from the second half of the century, would be used to justify all domestic and foreign policy decisions related to racial issues. A white supremacism that only reinforced the imperialistic and expansionist logics that were meant to be challenged.

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