

The Trickster Archetype in North America

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Introduction

The “Trickster” is one of the many different character archetypes identified by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung¹. While the Trickster is often associated with the folktales of the Native Americans, he can be found in many stories told around the world. From the Akan God of Stories, Anansi, to the cartoon character, Bugs Bunny, the trickster archetype has taken on multiple forms across a variety of cultures. The many different embodiments of the Trickster remain unique to each individual culture while sharing similar traits with one another. The Trickster is sly and cunning. He can outwit any who are foolish enough to stand against his silver tongue. Often the Trickster is seen as a rogue or a rake. He has been cast out or looked down upon by the rest of society because of the ravenous appetites of his ego. He only cares for himself and has no worries about the repercussions of his actions. The Trickster can be mischievous and even malicious at times.

In Carl Jung’s book, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung uses the spirit Mercurius², to describe the common motifs of the trickster. He writes, “A curious combination of typical trickster motifs can be found in the alchemical figure of Mercurius; for instance, his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of tortures, and last but not least—his approximation to the figure of a savior” (Jung 1980, 255). Often the trickster character displays divine or supernatural powers, such as the ability to shapeshift into any manner of being³. Among some oppressed cultures such as the Native Americans or enslaved African Americans, the Trickster provides anecdotal relief to a grim reality of oppression. Other stories of the Trickster are told to warn the reader to be weary of those who would try to take advantage of them, such as the tales of the Yankee Peddler⁴.

Methodology

The following research paper will be using the anthropological view of categorization of folklores according to their typology in order to compare similar stories among the different cultures that inhabited the Northeast of early America. This paper will focus on the folktales of the Europeans colonists of New England and the Native American tribes of the Northeast, (primarily the Algonquins as well as some Iroquois). The folktales of enslaved African Americans have also been included. Although most of the slave trade in America took place in the South there were still plenty of slaves in the North especially during the beginning of colonization. Most of the slave tales gathered for this paper originate from southern regions outside of the northeast. They have been included in this study because it was likely that these tales were told among both norther and southern enslaved African Americans. The objective of this paper is to show the similarities of the Trickster tales among each culture. It will also detail how the Trickster tales differ between cultures as well as provide possible reasons for these differences.

¹ While the term archetype has been in used well before Carl Jung and his analytical psychology it is Jung who is credited with coining the term archetype as we know today. In his book *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, Jung states, “The contents of the personal unconscious are chiefly the feeling-toned complexes, as they are called; they constitute the personal and private side of psychic life. The contents of the collective unconscious, on the other hand, are known as archetypes.” (Jung, 1973. 4.)

² Mercurius is a world creating spirit used in several of Carl Jung’s alchemical writings such as the *Mysterium Coniunctionis an Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*. (Jung 1970)

³ The Norse god Loki is well known for his ability to shapeshift. He has used this power on man and gods alike. One of the more well-known examples of this would be the tale of how Odin got his eight-legged colt Sleipnir the glider.

⁴ Yankee peddlers were traveling salesmen of Connecticut during the 19th century.

The first step for this project was dedicated to compiling sources that fit the criteria of the topic. The types of sources used for this paper can be split into two different categories. The first kind of sources used in this study were the trickster tales themselves. Most of these were found in different collections of folktales that have been published over the years, many of which were collected by the American Folklore Society⁵. The second type of sources were more academic in nature and focused on the history of the time as well as the trickster archetype, such as the works of Carl Jung. The gathering of sources was done over the course of a 5-month period. It was while gathering sources that this project ran into its first unexpected set of roadblocks. Many of the folklore collections were gathered, compiled, and published by White European/ Americans, such as the work of Charles G Leland⁶. Very little of the tales found involving the Native American Tricksters were written by members of the Native America culture. This poses a problem from an anthropological viewpoint. Folktales are developed within a specific social structure and paradigm. The meaning of each folktale is influenced by the social structure within which it was created. For example, while the Trickster can be portrayed in many cultures as a rabbit, the reasoning for the use of this form may differ from culture to culture. When comparing stories between cultures it is important not to make assumptions, regardless of how similar two stories might be. Anthropologists refer to this as viewing reality through cultural lenses. Social scientists must do their best to remove what they think they know about a culture and try to see things through the lenses of the culture they are studying. This is far easier said than done especial when working with cultures that have been destroyed or rewritten. It can become hard to know what is a true element of a culture and what elements have been imposed on them via the paradigms of other groups. An example of this would be what has happened to the culture of many of the Native American tribes.

There were several major factors to consider when it came to finding Native American texts in their original form. First, much of Native American culture was of an oral tradition. Tales were spoken from one generation to another and still are today. This oral telling of tales makes it hard to find written copies of the stories told among tribes. Another key factor that has been mentioned before is the fact that much of the Native American culture was destroyed or muddled by white American colonization. It became harder for Native Americans to keep their culture alive as more and more whites settled the New World. Some Native American tribes were forced to assimilate into the “white man’s” culture while many others were wiped out completely. When asked about the sacredness of native texts in their original form, Dr. Darren J Ranco, a professor of anthropology and the Coordinator of Native American Research at the University of Maine, noted there may be another reason for the lack of Native American trickster tales. Dr. Ranco and other anthropologists believe that it may be hard to find trickster tales from the Northeastern tribes in their original language. In an interview conducted for this project Dr. Ranco explained this reasoning further. He said, “Some of the circulation/ sacredness issues are related to the texts in the original languages, as far as we know.” (Dr. Ranco, Darren, email to author, October 18, 2022). In his book, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, anthropologist and folklorist, Paul Radin, and his assistant Sam Blowsnake add support to this belief by showing how only certain members of a tribe would have the rights to tell certain stories. Radin writes, “That the elder Blowsnake knew the Trickster myth is unquestioned. This does not mean, however, that he would narrate it, even to his children, unless, traditionally, he had the right to do so” (Radin 1969, 111). Radin shows how it would be highly unlikely that these sacred texts would have been made available to those outside of the tribe. He also argues that those who had the rights to tell these tales would never think to change the telling of the tales due to this sacredness.

⁵ The American Folklore Society was founded in 1888 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They are a non-profit organization dedicated to researching and providing resources for the study of folklore in the United States of American and around the world.

⁶ Charles Godfrey Leland was born on August 15, 1824, in Philadelphia. Leland was an American writer and was a man of many talents. He is best-known for the “Hans Breitmann Ballads. In, *A Bibliography of the Works of Charles Godfrey Leland*, when talking about the wide scope of Leland’s work, author Joseph Jackson writes, “A glance over the items will show that Leland was really a man of many sides but that all of his sides led to cultural improvement” (Jackson, 1871-1884, 262).

With all these factors in mind the following methodology was applied in order to overcome these hindrances in finding native sources. First, in order to get a better understanding of how native stories were told, the scope of Native American stories that were read for this project were widened. While not directly included in this study, tales outside of the Trickster archetype, as well as the stories of non-Northeastern tribes were observed in order to gain a wider perspective of how tales were told within a tribe⁷. Next, these stories were compared to the works of non-native writers, such as Leland in order to see where their interpretations may vary from those of the tribe. An example of this can be seen in Leland's book *The Algonquin Legends of New England*. (Leland 1885) Throughout the book Leland compares the tales of the Algonquins to that of the Norse mythology saga. Often, he uses terms that remind the reader of European fairy tales such as sprite or fairy to describe the animistic views of the Algonquin tribe. While Leland is trying to put his stories into a context his white readers may understand, these terms originate outside of the native Algonquian language and give the tales more of a European context. In Native American stories written by those within the culture, such as *Iroquois Stories*, written by James Bruchac⁸, these terms are nonexistent. When reading them they have a strong effect on the way the story is perceived. Finally, Thanks to the work of the Library of Congress several recordings of Native artists performing live stories were found. These recordings provided a first-hand look at how these stories would have been performed among Native American tribes⁹. The solutions above were used to overcome the roadblocks of this project and help provide a deeper understanding of the topic.

The designation table, found in Appendix A, was created for this project in order to identify reoccurring motifs throughout the Trickster tales. This system of designation is a simplified version of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index (ATU Index). This index was originally created by Finnish folklorist Antti Aarne in 1910 and was later added to by American folklorist Stith Thompson as well as German folklorist Hans-Jorg Uther. The ATU categorizes stories based on reoccurring motifs found throughout the folktales. This index primarily focuses on folktales originating from Ireland to India and do not include Native American tales. The following system uses elements of the ATU Index but shifts the focus to the tales of North America.

The first step to this process was to begin reading Trickster stories from different cultures and identify the various motifs. In each trickster story there are normally at least two main characters involved. One is of course the focus of this papers, the Trickster. The other character that appears in trickster tales is what this paper will refer to as the "victim." This is the character who falls prey to the Tricksters' schemes and lies. After gathering sources and noting the reoccurring motifs, the motifs were divided into categories and sub-categories. Each was given a set of letters and numbers as a form of a designation. For example, throughout the folktales presented in this paper, the Trickster exudes the gifts of divine or supernatural powers. This motif is the main motif so it is designated with a capital letter followed by a period. This motif can be broken into several sub-motifs based on what kind of powers are used. These sub-motifs are designated with a number followed by a period. Within each sub-motif there can also be an additional sub-category which is designated with a lower-case letter followed by a period. Looking at the designation table in Appendix A, we can see that the first motif on the table is, The Trickster shows divine or supernatural powers. This is our first main motif so it is given the designation ["A."]. The table indicates that this motif is broken into sub-motifs based on what kind of power is present. For example, if the next motif present is "The Trickster can Shapeshift" this sub-motif is given a designation of a number in this case ["1."]. Finally, there is one more subcategory under this motif; this is whether he turns into an animal, human, or plant. In this example he turns into an animal so this would be

⁷ *Telling Our Stories* by Louis Bird and the Passamaquoddy Tales archived at the university of Maine are both collections of tales written about Native American by Native Americans. While these books did not include Trickster tales, they were used as references when trying to figure out the authenticity of the structure of tales told by non-tribal members.

⁸ James Bruchac is a well-known Native American writer who is a member of the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe.

⁹ When it comes to storytelling, the spoken word is only a fraction of the performances. The oral telling of tales is usually accompanied by expressive face and hand jesters as well as the beating of a drums and music. All of this is lost when the story is put on paper. The following is a link to one of the performances recorded by the Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197580/>

given the designation ["a."]. After each motif and its subcategories has been given labels, what is left is the designation for this reoccurring motif. The designation would be written as ["A.1.a."]. When this is done to a complete story, what is left is a list of motifs that can be compared to other stories. This will be used throughout the paper to show the similarities and differences in the makeup of the stories. A complete list of the stories used and their designations can be found in Appendix B.

Native American

Given that the Native Americans were the first of the three cultural groups used in this paper to inhabit the Northeastern shores of America, it is fitting to begin this study with them. As of December 26, 2022, according to the National Congress of American Indians website, the oldest and largest American Indian organization in the United States, "There are 574 federally recognized Indian Nations (variously called tribes, nations, bands, pueblos, communities, and native villages) in the United States." Out of these 574 tribes 34 of them can be found in the northeast. The map in Appendix C comes from the Britannica website and shows which tribe inhabited which regions of the Northeast. As mentioned earlier in the paper, most of the stories come from the Algonquian and Iroquois Nations. The Trickster takes on many forms throughout Native American culture. In his article "The Trickster as Selfish-Boffoon and Culture Hero." author Michael P. Carroll writes, "There are literally dozens of tricksters who appear in the myths of the North American Indian tribes. American scholars, however, have tended to group these tricksters into seven distinct categories, on the grounds that all the tricksters within each category are simply different manifestations of the same mythic character, who has spread to different tribes through a process of cultural diffusion" (Carroll 1984, 107). These seven manifestations are specific to designated regions. To the tribes west of the Mississippi comes one of the more well-known Native American tricksters, "Coyote." In the Northeast "Nanabush" holds the title of Trickster. In the Pacific Northwest the Trickster takes to the skies as the "Raven." To the tribes of the Southeast the Trickster takes on the form of "Rabbit." Among the Siouan tribes the Trickster has two main forms. One of these forms is that of "Hare" while the other is that of "Iktomi." The last of the seven trickster forms is known as "Napi" by the Blackfoot people of Montana. Given that most of the folktales included in this paper are from the Northeast, the Trickster in our Native American tales will mainly take on the form of Nanabush, The Great Rabbit. While not on Carroll's list, it is worth noting that the legendary folk hero of the Wabanaki people, Glooscap¹⁰, has times when he dons the mask of the Trickster.

In the tale "Glooscap Grants Three Wishes," found in *American Indian Myths and Legends*, selected, and edited by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, (Erdoes and Alfonso 1984, 365-367), three men set out to find Glooscap. When they finally find him, they are each granted one wish. One man being simple and only wanting enough to survive asks to be a great hunter. Glooscap gifts the man with a magic flute that draws animals to him. The first man goes on to live a happy life and never goes hungry again. The second man being a man of huge sexual appetite asked for the love of many women. Glooscap asked the man how many women he wanted to love him. When the man did not specify a number, Glooscap gives him a bag that is tightly tied shut. He tells the man not to open the bag until he returns to his village and the second man heads for home. Not being a very smart man, he forgets Glooscap warning and opens the bag before he gets home. Instantly hundreds of women pore out of the bag and smother the second man to death. The third man loved to tell jokes and make people laugh. He asked the great Glooscap for the ability to make a funny sound much like passing of wind, that would make all who heard laugh. Glooscap gives the man a magical root. He tells the man not to eat it until he returns home and boils it. The third man leaves but before long becomes hungry. He eats the root before getting home to boil it. To his delight when he opened his mouth a great noise rang out. The third man burst into tears with laughter at the sound. As the days went on, he was unable to catch any food because every time he opened his mouth the noise would boom out and he would scare away his prey. By the time the third man made it back to his village he was half starved to death. At first the people in his

¹⁰ Here are several variant forms of spelling for the folk hero Glooscap, Gluskabe, Glooskap, Gluskabi, Klouskap, Kluskap, Kloskap

village thought the sound he could make was funny, but over time people became annoyed. Eventually the third man was forced out of his village because of the sound. He is so sad and lonely that he goes off into the woods and kills himself. While Glooscap normally takes on the role of the Folk Hero archetype, in this tale Glooscap takes on the form of a passive trickster. He is present only for the “striking of the deal,”¹¹ then he is gone. Once his trick is played, he is no longer an active part of the story. This is different from tales like “The Adventures of Great Rabbit” (Leland 1885), where the Trickster is actively using his wit to maneuvering his way in or out of trouble.

In Native American folktales, it is not uncommon for the animals to assume human traits. Often the animals will appear in an anthropomorphic form. They wear clothing and stand upright on two legs just like a man would. While keeping in mind that tales are unique to the culture they are created in, similarities could be drawn to the folktales of the African American slaves. Many of the stories brought to the new world by the African American slaves have animals who act much more like their human counterpart than a wild animal. The trickster figures of Brer Rabbit and Nanabush are often depicted standing upright on their hindlegs and wearing clothing. In the Native American folktales’ animals are not the only ones who sometimes take on human traits. Even the trees, rivers, and mountains can act as humans do. In the tale “How Beaver Stole Fire from The Pines” (Erdoes, Ortiz 1984, 343-344), told among the Nez Perce people of Idaho, it is said that the Pine trees held the secrets of fire and guarded it jealously until Bever stole it. The trees could walk and talk with the other inhabitants of the forest. The animistic views of both Native Americans and enslaved African American breathe life into all things found in the world. From the tallest tree to the lowliest pebble all things in the world appear to contain a soul. This is one of the major differences between the Native Americans /enslaved African American, and colonial folktales. The Native American culture as well as the tribal traditions of the enslaved African American both had deep roots in nature. It is only logical that the stories told among these cultures would take on the shape and form of the world they see around them. It would not take long observing a rabbit in the wild to see that they must be quick and clever in order to survive. These traits would make rabbit an obvious choice to represent a trickster figure among these cultures. It is interesting that both the Native Americans and African American Slaves use the rabbit as one of their trickster forms. While the figure of Brer Rabbit¹² can be trace back to the tribal folktales of West, Central and Southern Africa further studies are needed to see how much if any of the Brer Rabbit stories told among enslaved African American were influenced by the Native American trickster Great Rabbit.

Sometimes a similar tale can be found among multiple cultures but with slight differences. The story “The Adventures of Great Rabbit” (Leland 1885), mentioned above is a perfect example of this. “The Adventures of Great Rabbit” told among the Algonquins is almost identical to the Iroquois story “Rabbit and Fox” (Bruchac 1985, 74-78)¹³. The designation table created for this project was used to show how these two stories compare to one another. The full designation number for each tale has been included in the reference below¹⁴. These two stories both tell the tale of how Rabbit used his wits to outsmart a predator. As we can see from their designations, they start out almost the same. They both start with [(E.)(F.1.)(A.4.)]. This means both these tales start with the Trickster as the target of someone or something bigger and meaner than himself, [“E.”].

¹¹ This is one of the reoccurring Trickster motifs. It is the section designated as [B.] in the motif designation table found in Appendix A.

¹² Brer Rabbit was first popularized in the Uncle Remus tales by author Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908).

¹³ While the Iroquois and Algonquin would both be considered a part of the Native American tribes of the Northeast, both can and should be considered as separate cultures. Even though they are both native tribes and may hold some similarities each Native American Tribe has its own vibrant and unique culture.

¹⁴ The story “Rabbit and Fox” was given the designation of, [(E.)(F.1.)(A.4.)(A.2.)(K.)A.1.a.)(A.3.)(K.)(G.)(A.1.a.)(A.3.)(K.)(A.1.c.)(G.)(K.)(A.3.)(A.2.)(K.)(L.))

“The Adventures of Great Rabbit” was given the designation, [(E.)(F.1.)(A.4.)(A.3.)(B.4.)(C.)(A.2.)(A.1.a.)(G.)(K.)(A.3.)(A.2.)(A.1.a.)(G.)(K.)(A.2.)(A.1.a.)(A.3.)(K.)(A.2.)(A.1.a.)(K.)(G.)(A.2.)(A.1.a)(H.3.)(L.))]

Then next we are shown the wants or needs of the Victim, ["F.1."]. Then finally the Trickster sense the danger or desires of others ["A.4."], which in this case was the want of Fox/ Wildcat to eat Rabbit. It is at this point that element of the stories begin to differ. In the Algonquin tale the process of making a deal or contract is being included, (This is the section designated in the Algonquin story as [(B.4)(C.)]. In the Algonquin tale Wildcat swears by his long tale that he will catch and kill Great Rabbit. According to the Algonquin legend Wildcat's failure to catch Rabbit causes his long tale to fall off leaving him with a small bob. That is why Wildcat is known as Bobcat today. While in the Iroquois story Fox makes no bargain and just wants to eat Rabbit. The following sequences of events in each of the two tales, involve Rabbit trying to get away from Fox/ Wildcat by tricking him. These sequences very slightly from one another and are mostly due to fact the Algonquin portrayal of the trickster seems to have more magical abilities or what is called "m'teoulin,"¹⁵ than their Iroquois counterpart. This can be seen in the variations of ["A."] designations in each tales given set of recurring motifs. When we look at the differences at this point in the stories, we get a glimpse of how the written translation of these stories may have been influenced by white Europeans/ Americans. At one point in the Algonquian tale, Great Rabbit manipulates reality so that when Wildcat comes along, he finds a church where a pastor is giving a sermon. This scene is not present in the Iroquois story. The concept of a pastor giving a sermon about damnation in a church is one of European making. Church, pastor, or sermon are all words that seem to be imposed upon the tale by its white recorder. In the Iroquois tale "Rabbit and Fox" the interaction with the preacher is replaced by the meeting of a medicine man, which seems far more original to Native American culture. It could be that the Iroquois tale is just an older purer form of the Algonquin tale. Given that the story of "Rabbit and Fox" was recorded in 1985 by Joseph Bruchac and "The Adventures of Great Rabbit" was recorded by Charles J. Leland in 1884 this seems unlikely. Other than the fact that these tales are told by two different Native American tribes, there is a better explanation for the differences. As mentioned before Leland was an American writer and Joseph Bruchac, while being American had Native roots. Joseph Bruchac learned story telling first-hand from his grandfather who was a member of the Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe. It seems more probable that Leland being an outsider, edited the tales he recoded to fit within the paradigm he and his white readers were familiar with. A Further study would need to be done in this field in order to further identify if it is just mere coincidence that multiple cultures use the same figure to represent their Trickster or if it is a part of an unconscious collective, like Jung suggests. The next section of this paper will delve into the cultural group whose Trickster share the most in common with the Native American Trickster, the African American slaves.

African American

The next trickster tales this paper will focus on come from the coasts of African. According to an article found on PBS.com, author Henry Louis Gates Jr. states that, "Between 1525 and 1866, in the entire history of the slave trade to the New World, according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, 12.5 million Africans were shipped to the New World" (PBS 2022). Out of these 12.5 million, it is estimated that around 1.8 million slaves died in the crossing of the Middle Passage¹⁶. A map showing the paths these slaves took has been included in Appendix D. Many of the slaves brought to the New World were taken from the coasts of East and Central West Africa¹⁷. It is clear to see from the previous mentioned map how the many different cultures of African were blended together to become what we know as African American slave culture today. From the map in Appendix D, we can see that while the majority of the slaves taken from Africa found their ways to the shores of the West Indies, over 150,000 slaves were brought to the Northeastern region of America.

Out of the many trickster figures to come out of Africa none is more well-known than Anansi the spider, the Akan god of Stories. Tales of his cleverness can be found throughout West Africa, but stories of the spider originated in Ghana. Anansi has many of the same traits as the rest of the world's tricksters. He is as sly and

¹⁵ M'teoulin appears in several Native American folktales and refers to magic or spirit power in the Algonquin language.

¹⁶ The Middle Passage was the name given to the rout the slave ships took from African across the Atlantic to the New World.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that over 500,000 slaves were also taken from the region of Mozambique and Madagascar.

cunning as Great Rabbit and has an ego to match that of the Norse god Loki. In the tale, "Why They Name the Stories for Anansi," told in *African American Folktales*, selected, and edited by Roger D. Abrahams, the reader is shown the extent of the spider's ego. In this tale Anansi decides that all the children's tales should be named after him. Anansi goes to Master King to make his request and Master King tells him if he can bring the wise Blacksnake back to him on a pole, he will name all the stories for the spider. This story is unique in the fact that the Trickster is the recipient of the bargain. In other stories we have seen the Trickster is the one who makes the bargain. The first few times Anansi tries to capture Blacksnake he fails. The snake is too smart to be fooled by simple traps. When Blacksnake asks Anansi why he keeps trying to catch him, Anansi uses his clever wit to outsmart the snake. Anansi tells Blacksnake that all the other animals in the forest were saying that Mr. Yellowtail Snake was the longest but Anansi told them that Blacksnake was the largest. Anansi convinces Blacksnake to let him tie the snake to a long pole so they can show everyone just how long he really is. When Anansi comes back to Master King with Blacksnake stretched out tied to a pole, Master King declares that all tales be called Nansi Stories. This story shows the reader the true nature of the trickster. He is willing to trick anyone if it boosts his ego. He is selfish and wants nothing more than to be glorified or put on a pedestal for all to see. The use of the spider as a trickster figure can also be found in some Native American folktales. Among the Assiniboine people the trickster Iktomi takes on the form of a spider. The tribes of the Western plains also use the spider to represent their trickster. Again, it is easy to see why the spider would be picked to represent the Trickster. Spiders spin webs and wait for their prey to fall into their trap. This is similar to the actions of the Trickster. He will spin his web of deceit and wait for his victim to get caught. We can see how the stories of the Akan people were influenced by the world around them, and much like the stories of the Native Americans were rooted in nature.

Sometimes in folktales trickster figures from different cultures come together in one tale. In the story "Trouble Coming Down the Road," found in *African American Folktales*, the figures of Spider and Rabbit both appear. In this story Anansi the spider asks Rabbit if he has ever met up with trouble, to which rabbit replied he had not. Anansi tricks Rabbit first by making him cross paths with Hunter who almost shoots Rabbit. Then Anansi gets Rabbit in trouble with Tiger by making Tiger think Rabbit hurt his babies. When Rabbit hides in a hole Anansi tells Tiger to get him a stick so he can get Rabbit out of the hole. While Tiger is away Anansi gives Rabbit some pepper to blow in Tiger's face when he looks in the hole. When Tiger comes back Rabbit blows the pepper in his face blinding him. Anansi and Rabbit are left laughing at tiger as he runs away blind. This tale is interesting because the figure of Rabbit, who is known as a trickster among other cultural groups is playing the role of the victim in this story. Until the end of the tale where Rabbit becomes part of the trick with the pepper, he is the one being targeted by the Trickster's schemes. The joining together of multiple trickster figures from different cultures in one tale is similar to the colonial tale "Jack-O-My Lantern: A Maryland Version," found in *A Treasury of American Folklore*, edited by B.A. Botkin. In this tale Jack, a Trickster folk-hero originating from England, uses his wit to outsmart the Devil, another well-known colonial Trickster. A further study would need to be done in order to figure out why a given culture would choose one animal to symbolize the trickster over the other, when both are present in the culture.

Trickster tales hold a unique role among oppressed cultures, such as the enslaved African American or Native Americans. Among these cultures the trickster offers an antidotal relief from the oppression of the "white man." Born out of the system of oppression came the legendary slave folk-hero and trickster figure Big John. While there is no concrete evidence that Big John ever really existed, tales of how outsmarted the masters were widespread among African American slaves. In the tale "Big John the Conqueror," found in *A Treasury of North America Folktales*, compiled and annotated by Catherine Peck, Big John convinces the masters that he has the power to tell the future. In the story Big John sees the Master's wife throw out a wash bucket full of water. Unbeknownst to her, she tosses out her diamond ring with the water. When Big John saw this, he tried to pick up the ring but a turkey comes along and gobbles it up. When the whole house gets up in arms over the lost ring, Big John tells Master to kill the turkey and he will find the ring inside. When master kills the turkey and finds his wife's ring inside, he thinks Big John is a fortune teller. One day the Master makes a bet with another

plantation owner. Master bets his whole plantation and everything on it, that Big John can tell the future. The two plantation owners plan to meet up the next day. When Mater and Big John arrive most of the town is crowded around a big metal tub that is turned upside down. The other plantation owner tells Big John to tell him what is under the tub. When Big John cannot think of an answer, he throws up his arms and said, "You got the old coon" (216)¹⁸. When he said that his Master started to whoop and holler because Big John was right. Underneath the tub was a big old racoon. To celebrate their new wealth Master takes his wife to Philadelphia, but before he leaves, he gives Big John his freedom and leaves him in charge of the plantation. As soon as the Master and his wife leave Big John sends word to the slave at the neighboring plantations telling them his master is gone. He invites them all to come to the big house for some fun. Unfortunately for Big John master and his wife snuck home early to spy on Big John. When the Master saw that Big John had killed all his hogs for a feast and smoke all his cigars, he was furious. He told Big John he was going to hang him. While Master went to find a rope, Big John told his friend Ike to clime the tree with a tinder box and to strike a match every time Big John asked for a sign. Big John asked the Master if he could pray before the master hangs him and the master agrees. Big John asks for God to give him a sign if master should let him go. Right at that moment Ike, hiding in the tree struck a match. Thinking it was God answering Big Johns prays the master swears to free Big John and all the other slaves. The character of Big John is unique as a trickster figure. One of the main traits of the trickster is his self-centered ego. Often the trickster in only out for themselves and would have little care for what happened to those around him. Big John is one of the trickster figures who walks the line of another well-known archetype, the folk-hero. In the end of the story, he is not satisfied with just his own freedom and takes on the role of the savior for the other slaves. It is interesting to see how the Trickster seems to cross archetypes into the folk-hero among oppressed culture groups. The self-centered attributes that are usually found in the Trickster archetype are toned down among these folk-hero tricksters. Tales such as those told of Big John hold a dule purpose among the oppressed people who told them. They are not just funny tales told to pass the time. The Big John tales and others like them offered a way for the oppressed people who told them to "stick it" to their oppressors. It would have been far too dangerous to speak outright against the masters but a slave could tell tales of Big John with the masters' being none the wiser to the hidden insults. Out of the three cultural groups used in this paper the tales of the African American slaves hold the most in common with the tales of the Native Americans. The next section of the papers will show how the European/American folktales that took root in the Northeast have a few major traits that set them apart from the tales of the Native Americans and enslaved African Americans.

Colonial Europe

As this paper has shown, the Native American and enslaved African American cultures were rooted in the natural world around them. Their characters of the Trickster take on the form of real-world animals that share similar traits to the trickster archetype. These animistic views of the Trickster seem to fade as he is brought to the New World. The figure of Rabbit and Spider are replaced with a new Trickster figure. In the earliest days of North American colonization most of the East coast was under the rule of the British¹⁹. Along with the British, the French and the Spanish also had a foot hold in the New World. All three of these cultures have different trickster figures that would have been brought with them to the shores of the New World. Figures such as Reynard the Fox, a medieval trickster of France, and Jack, a well-known trickster of English origins, take a backseat to a more dominant Trickster in the New World. By far the most prevalent trickster figure found in folktales told by the colonial Americans is that of the Devil. If the Native American and African American cultures were rooted in nature, then it is safe to say that the culture of the early American colonists was firmly rooted in the Christian faith. Many of the colonists that settled in the Northeast were Puritans that had fled Europe in hopes of creating a society that was based in their new faith. The stricter religious views of the

¹⁸ The use of the term coon here is a reference to the politically incorrect term once used to describe African Americans. No offense is meant in use of this term here.

¹⁹ The map in Appendix E shows European colonization of the Americas between 1490-1750, found on the World History Encyclopedia website.

Puritans did not allow for the animistic views of the Native Americans and enslaved African Americans. The playing of tricks on someone for your own gratification as well as the selfish wants and desires of the Trickster were not traits the Puritan faith would deem as appropriate. Instead of making the trickster a figure who walks the line of hero and deceiver, the trickster becomes something more evil or sinister. Instead of the less harmful tricks of Nanabush or Anansi, the Devil is out to trick man for his soul. Many of the trickster tales involving the Devil seem to be told as warnings against the evils of sin. The story "The Devil and the Card-Players," found in *A Treasury of New England Folklore*, a group of men decide to play some cards. Knowing the evils of card playing the men decide they will only play for a little. One of the men suggests that they light a candle and play till it goes out. The rest of the men agree and begin their game. When the morning comes around and the candle is still burning the men realize they had been tricked by the Devil. He had kept the candle burning all night as to tempt the men into darkness. The Devil's actions in this tale are like the passive actions of Glooscap as seen earlier in "Glooscap and the Three Wishes," with one major difference. Glooscap granted the wishes and played his tricks because it was fun. The Devil makes his deals and plays his tricks to claim the souls of men. In this tale the Devil never makes himself physically present and still the cardplayers find themselves entangled in his web of trickery.

The Devil himself is not always the one doing the tricking. There are several tales that tell the stories of brave men who dared to attempt to outsmart the devil. Usually this is attempted in hopes of gaining unbound riches or eternal life. Sometimes these men are successful and other times it is the Devil who gets the last laugh. In the tale "Jonathan Moulton and the Devil," found in *A Treasury of New England Folklore*, a real-life local hero of New Hampshire, General Jonathan Moulton²⁰, steps into the realm of myth when he goes toe to toe in a battle of wits against the Devil. In the tale the General declares that he would sell his soul in return for unbound wealth. The Devil always knowing the desires of man appears to Moulton and offers him a contract. In exchange for Moulton's soul the Devil would give him untold riches. The contract says that Moulton should place a pair of boots next to his fireplace and each day the Devil will fill them with gold coins. After he signs the contract and the Devil leaves, greed overtakes Moulton. He decides to cheat the Devil by cutting off the ends of the boots so that they can never be filled. When the Devil comes to fill the boots, he finds that no matter how much gold he poured into the boots they would not fill. When the Devil realizes he has been tricked he burns Moulton's house to the ground. At first Moulton is furious but then he realizes that everything will be fine because the gold will still be there when the fires die out. Much to his dismay though, when the fire finally dies out, not a speck of gold is to be found anywhere. This story stands as a warning that even the greatest of folk heroes can fall prey to the tricks of the Devil. The trickster tales involving the Devil teach a different lesson from the trickster tales of the Native Americans. The trickster tales of the Native American and enslaved African American often presented explanations for how things became the way they are. An example of this would be the story of Rabbit and Wildcat told earlier in this paper²¹. In the colonial folktales these explanation stories are replaced with the warning tales like that of "Jonathan Moulton and the Devil."

Just like when the trickster figure of Rabbit falls victim to Anansi the spider in the African American tale, "Trouble Coming Down the Road," sometimes the Devil finds himself the victim of an even greater Trickster. This is the case in the story "Jack-O-My Lantern," found in *A Treasury of American Folklore*, edited by B.A. Botkin²². In this tale the Devil crosses paths with another well-known trickster, Jack. The character of Jack comes from English origins and is another one of the Tricksters who will at times take on the role of the folk hero. The most well-known Jack tale is of course "Jack and the Beanstalk," which dates back to 1734. The

²⁰ Jonathan Moulton was a real living historical figure. He was born on July 21, 1726 in Hampton, New Hampshire and was a military general during the Revolutionary War. Tales of Moulton told throughout New Hampshire slowly turned the man into a living legend. ([Jonathan Moulton - Moulton Museum](#))

²¹ According to the story, When Wildcat fails to catch Rabbit, his long tale falls off and became a little bobtail and that is why he is known as Bobcat. (Leland 1885)

²² This tale is a Maryland version and has been recorded using "old timey" spelling. An example of this is the spelling of Devil as Debble. (Botkin, B.A. 1944).

saying, “Jack the lad” used in English culture refers to a brash, cocky young man: interestingly these are both traits of the Native American, African American, and colonial Tricksters. In “Jack-O-My Lantern,” the Devil comes to claim Jacks soul. Jack tricks the Devil into giving him more time. At first, he convinces the Devil to turn himself into a nickel so they can buy a drink but when the devil turns into the nickel Jack traps him in his pocketbook that has a cross on it. Everyone knows the Devil cannot stand crosses. Jack promises to let the Devil go if he gives him more time. The Devil agrees to give him one year and Jack lets him go. The next time the Devil comes for Jacks soul, Jack tricks the Devil into climbing an apple tree. While the Devil is in the tree Jack traps him in it by etching a cross on the trunk. Again, Jack bargains to let the Devil go but only if he promises to never come after him again. The Devil agrees and Jack lets him go again. When Jack dies the angel at the gates of Heaven will not let him in so he goes to the gates of hell. But when the Devil sees who it is that has come to his gates, he is afraid. He thinks Jack will try and trick him again so he tells him to go back to where he came from. When Jack asked how he was to find his way home in the dark the Devil gives him an ember from the fire to light his way. While many tales use the Devil as the figure of the Trickster, the story above has the Devil take on another archetype. Much like how the Algonquin folk-hero Glooscap dons the role of Trickster and Folk-hero, the Devil can take the form of both the Trickster and the fool.

There is one final main difference between the trickster tales of the European colonists and the enslaved African Americans and Native Americans. The Trickster figures of the European colonists, excluding the Devil, have no M'teoulin or magical power. They cannot change their form or manipulate reality like Great Rabbit and cannot speak to the flora and fauna like Anansi. They lose their animal forms and become simple men. A logical explanation for this is that there is no place for things such as magic in a society that was built around a conservative Christian faith such as the Puritans. In a culture dominated by religion the animistic and mythical traits of the Trickster fade and instead of a divine mystic being like Loki, we are left with the humanized figure of the Yankee Peddler. Much like how the Native Americans looked to the world around them to create their trickster figures the European Colonists did the same. The difference is that when they looked around their society it was not the image of rabbit or spider they turned to for the representation of their Trickster. Instead, it was a figure who was well known for his ability to strike a deal even when there was none to be had. In the 19th century the Yankee Peddlers were the door-to-door salesmen of the time. A person would need to be wary when the Yankee Peddler came a knocking. If they were not careful, the Peddler would take them for all they were worth. In the tale “The Yankee Peddler and the Innkeeper,” found in *A Treasury of North American Folklore*, a Dutch innkeeper, a character who is often the butt of jokes in early American tales, find himself the victim of the Trickster. In this story the Yankee Peddler finds that he owes the Innkeeper \$10.00 for his stay at the Inn. Instead of paying for his stay he tricks the Innkeeper into paying him \$10.00. He convinces the Innkeeper that he can turn cider into wine for \$10.00 now and \$50.00 later when he comes back. The Innkeeper is so excited about the premise of turning cheap cider into expensive wine so he agrees. In the end the Yankee Peddler leaves with his money and the Innkeeper finds himself stuck in the cellar with his fingers plugging two holes the Yankee Peddler drilled into the barrel of cider. Much like the figure of Jonathan Moulton the Yankee Peddler is a real-world figure who has stepped into the world of legend. In this tale the Trickster is not an anthropomorphic being with magical powers to shapeshift or manipulate reality. He takes on the form of a simple man. The Yankee Peddler may possess an abnormal sense of cunning but at his roots is still just a man. The shift of the Trickster out of the mystical and into everyday life is by far the greatest difference that sets the colonial trickster tales apart from the tales of the Native and African Americans.

Conclusion

Out of the three cultural groups, the (European colonists, Native Americans of the Northeast, and the enslaved African Americans), it is the latter two that have the most in common. This is primarily due to them sharing a more animistic view of life. The trickster figures in these cultures appear in the form of creatures found in nature and tend to possess more magical power than their colonial counter parts. The Trickster tales told among the Native American and enslaved African Americans serves a dual purpose. Not only do these tales

tend to give an explanation to things in the world, they also provide antidotal relief from white colonial oppression. The colonial trickster folktales on the other hand stand as a warning against the damnation of the soul. This paper has demonstrated that while each one of the cultural groups are distinctly unique the tales, they tell of the Trickster hold many similarities. Further study would need to be conducted in order to identify if this is due to cultural diffusion or if the similarities in the tales are proof of a collective unconscious such as Jung observed. This project has also demonstrated that there is much to be learned from the folktales of different cultures. Each cultures' stories provide a window into their world that allow social scientists to catch a glimpse into their paradigm. Folktales tell the reader about the social structure of a culture as well as a look into the practices and beliefs of that culture. While this paper has provided a thorough explanation of the Trickster archetype there is room for more research to be conducted that would further develop our understanding of the trickster figure in folk tales.

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Appendix A

Taxonomy of reoccurring motifs

Designation	Recurring Motifs
A.	Trickster shows Divine / supernatural powers
1.	Trickster can shapeshift
a.	<i>Shapeshifts into a Human</i>
b.	<i>Shapeshifts into an Animal</i>
c.	<i>Shapeshifts into a Plant</i>
2.	Trickster can manipulate reality
3.	Trickster can Travel long distances quickly
4.	Trickster can sense danger or desires of others from far away
B.	Trickster makes deal / pact with someone
1.	For money
2.	For extended / eternal life
3.	For victims' soul
4.	For goods / services
C.	Deal is made with a stipulation
D.	Trickster refuses to names himself
E.	Trickster starts off as the Target or Prey
F.	Victim has a need / want
1.	Money / material
2.	Power
3.	Eternal / extended life
G.	Victim is delayed
H.	Trickster uses his wit to get...
1.	Monetary item
2.	Victims Soul
3.	Cause victim to break contract
I.	Victim tricks the Trickster
J.	Trickster gets the last laugh
K.	Victim falls for Tricksters scheme
L.	Victim loses in the end

Appendix B

Motif Lists

- **Glooscap Grants Three Wishes:**
(B.)(F.1.)(B.4.)(F.1.)(B.4.)(C.)(F.1.)(B.4.)(C)(A.2.)(K.)(K.)
- **Cheating the Devil:**
(E.)(A.4.)(B.4.3.5.)(H.)(I.)
- **The Devil and the Card-Players:**
(E.)(B.3.)(F.)(I.)
- **Adventures of Great Rabbit:**
(E.)(F.1.)(A.4.)(A.3.)(B.4.)(C.)(A.2.)(A.1.a.)(G.)(K.)(A.3.)(A.2.)(A.1.a.)(G.)(K.)(A.2.)(A.1.a.)(A.3.)(K.)(A.2.)(A.1.a.)(K.)(G.)(A.2.)(A.1.a)(H.3.)(L.)
- **Rabbit and Fox:**
(E.)(F.1.)(A.2.)(K.)A.1.a.)(A.3.)(K.)(G.)(A.1.a.)(A.3.)(K.)(A.1.c.)(G.)(K.)(A.3.)(A.2.)(K.)(L.)
- **Jonathan Moulton and the Devil:**
(F.1.)(A.4.3.)(D.)(B.1.3.)(A.2.)(I.)(J.)

Appendix C

Trible map of the Northeast

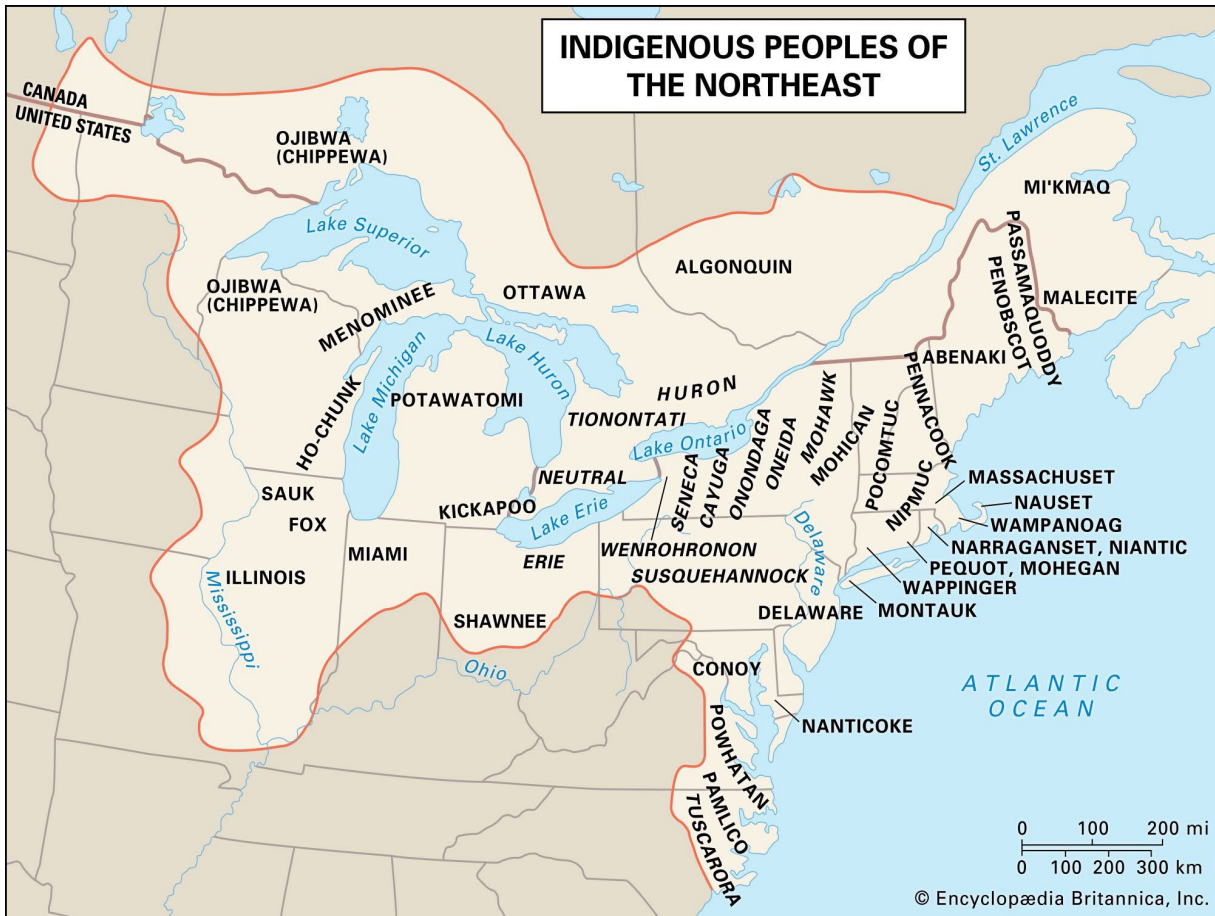


Figure 1: Map of Indigenous Peoples of the Northeast. <https://cdn.britannica.com/42/5542-050-17C18313/Indigenous-peoples-Northeast-Eastern-Woodlands-Indians-Great-Lakes.jpg>

Appendix D

Map of slave travels across the Middle Passage.

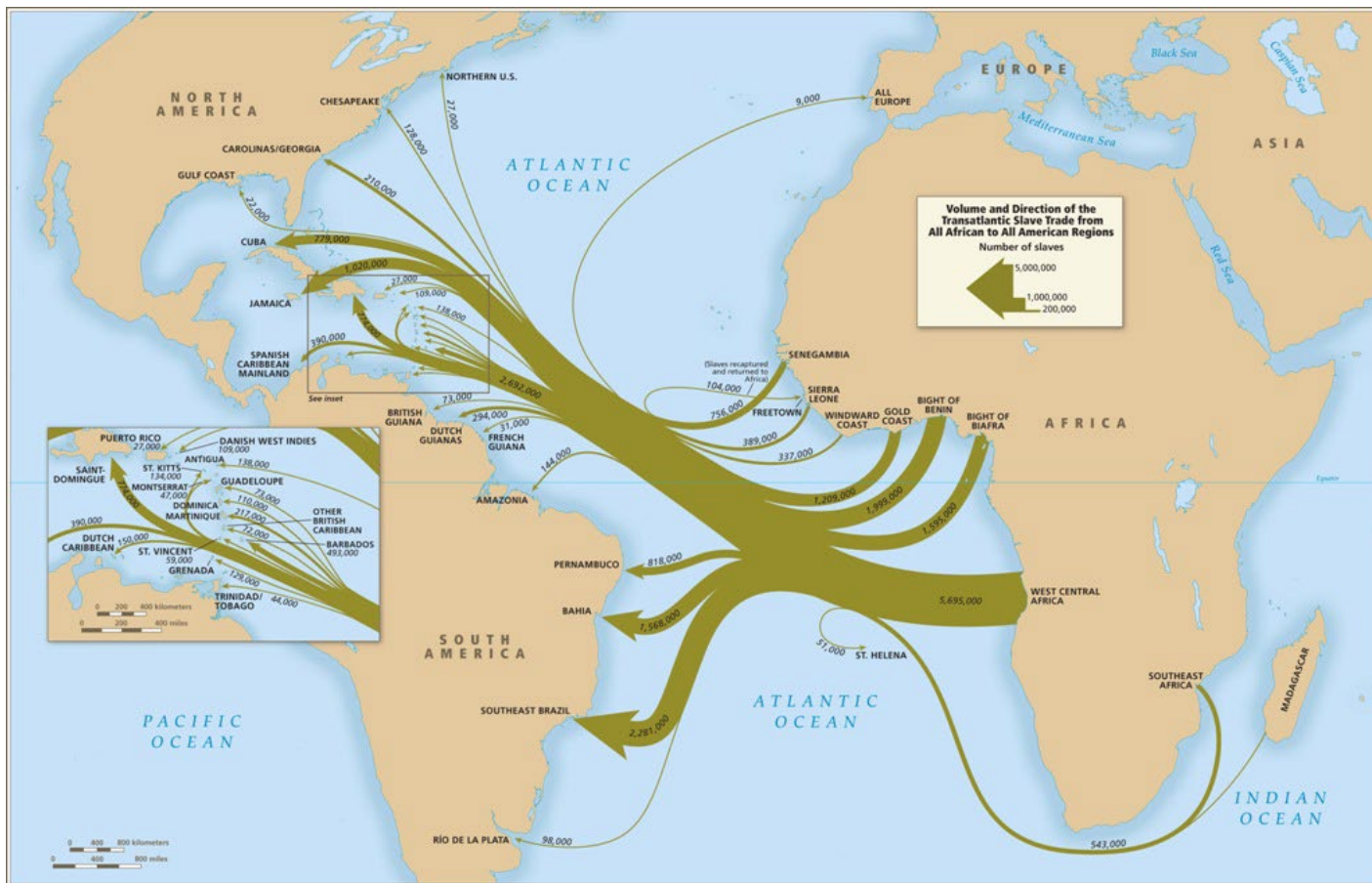


Figure 2: Map of the Middle Passage. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/static/images/assessment/intro-maps/09.jpg>

Appendix E

European Colonization of North America



Figure 3: European Colonization of North America. <https://www.worldhistory.org/uploads/images/14633.png?v=1641583802>