

"there is no such
thing as was, only is"
(faulkner): the
haunting effects of
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Written in 1812, the last line of each verse of the Star Spangled Banner, which later became the National Anthem for the United States of America in 1931, reads " O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!" (Francis Scott Key) It could be argued that the United States of America was not home to the free until after December 1865 when the abolishment of slavery was added to the United States Constitution. Up until then, African Americans were bought and sold as slaves and had no freedom until the Confederate Army were defeated in the American Civil War. Similarly, the Native American Indians, who were the original inhabitants of the land that became the United States of America, had their freedom taken away when many tribes were unable to pay the land fees that the government enforced upon them after the Dawes Act of 1887, causing many to lose their reservations and disperse to other areas, often splitting tribes up. Both histories of these races continue to haunt the United States of America as many descendants of those that suffered still carry the stories with them through the generations. To ensure that these atrocities are not forgotten, writers use the power of literature to tell these stories as a way of remembering the suffering of those who were discriminated against.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) tells the story of a haunted house which acts as a metaphor of the haunting of the past atrocities experienced by the African American slaves. Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) provides a story surrounding a young Native American Indian girl who has supernatural powers, but is set during the time when the tribes were starting to disband due to their inability to pay their land fees. Both novels are gothic in nature due to their treatment of hauntings of the past and both use magical realism

to tell fictional stories set in the time of real events. This encourages the reader to not only enjoy the fictional stories told, but also allows them to gain a knowledge of these terrible times in history and to ensure that the memories of those affected are not forgotten. Being an African-American woman, Toni Morrison experienced racial discrimination when her family suffered racial abuse whilst she was growing up in Ohio. Her own father had witnessed the lynching of two African-American men in his past and was traumatised by this. Morrison can identify with the past haunting the present and she chose to write a novel which brings the past and present together. Interestingly, as Ramos states below, the actual story is based on a true event, adding further poignancy to the novel. " While *Beloved* is ultimately a work of fiction in the form of a ghost story, it nonetheless started from and is based on, as critics remind us, a true story actually lived by a certain Margaret Garner, who decided to kill her children and herself rather than be taken back to slavery." (Ramos, p. 6) Choosing magical realism allows Morrison to provide a realistic setting, keeping historical facts accurate, but also allows a supernatural element into her story which fits in with the metaphorical haunting of the memories of an extremely dark time in American History.

Morrison uses the past in two ways. Firstly, published in 1987 but set in 1873, shortly after the end of the American Civil War, the story is based over a century before it was written. Secondly, the use of flash backs takes the reader to an earlier time before slavery was abolished, allowing Morrison to demonstrate how the characters are haunted by their own pasts and describes the events that led them to be traumatised. The interweaving of

the past and present within the novel allows the reader to learn about the horrors that the slaves endured as well as an understanding of the emotional effect it has on their current lives, that they are scarred both physically and mentally. Morrison uses several sharp examples of the abuse, torture and killings that the slaves endured. " Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world." (Morrison, p. 7). Using the imagery of nature and the word ' beautiful' to describe a scene where boys have been hanged, creates a striking image in the reader's mind of the beauty of nature against the image of death. " Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree." (Morrison, p. 20) Again, Morrison uses nature as a symbol of the torture endured by the slaves. Her back was whipped so badly that the scars look like a tree. This is a stark reminder that these were human beings who were part of the world, along with all of nature, but were treated in a barbaric way. With the use of flash backs, the reader learns that the protagonist, Sethe, killed her own baby daughter, and tried to kill her three other children, rather than let them be taken into slavery. " I took and put my babies where they'd be safe." (Morrison, p. 193) This act displays just how horrific slavery was and that Sethe would rather see her children dead than have them suffer the same atrocities that she went through as a slave. Morrison makes no attempt to hide just how horrific the past was for African American slaves. Her novel makes numerous references to the past haunting the present for all the characters. The supernatural haunting in the novel is the ghost of the baby that Sethe killed. This allows the reader to understand the traumatic and long lasting effect that the past still holds over those who were victims, and also how this past is still held in the minds of Americans today.

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Ramos identifies that the subject matter in this novel continues to haunt the United States of America and that the horror of it has to be dealt with sensitively. "How then to proceed beyond the more paralyzing aspects of such history? To keep a respectful distance from slavery, from its traumatizing horror, even as one acknowledges it as historical fact, as more than mere history but as lingering, malignant ever-presence - this is the paradox the central characters in *Beloved* must live with in order to go on living at all." (Ramos, p. 17) "Her past had been like her present - intolerable." (Morrison, p. 4) Although slavery had been abolished, the events of the past are so traumatic that the present is just as painful due to the constant memories. Having experienced such horrors, it is difficult to lead a normal life thereafter. "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief." (Morrison, p. 6) This demonstrates how wide spread the haunting of the past has become and the amount of death that slavery caused. "Comes back whether we want it to or not" (Morrison, p. 16) Sethe understands that she cannot control the memories of her past and that they will constantly haunt her whether she wants them to or not. The past cannot be forgotten. All Sethe can hope for is that her daughter, Denver, will never have to endure what she did. "To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay." (Morrison, p. 51) She does not want to let the past damage her daughter's future. After the abolishment of slavery, African Americans were free to live amongst the white people and Sethe wants to ensure that her daughter has a much better life than she had. Slaves were a commodity to white people. They were bought and owned, to do with as the owner pleased. "Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own [...] but they have to have as many

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children as they can to please whoever owned them." (Morrison, p. 247)

Slave owners wanted the slaves to reproduce so that they would have more slaves to bring into the world. They would be raped and beaten whenever the slave owner wanted. They were treated as animals rather than as humans. " Her price was greater than his; property that reproduced itself without cost." (Morrison, p. 269) The use of the word ' property' illustrates how the slaves viewed themselves and understood that women were more valuable as they could produce more slaves. They were breeding machines. " That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill or maim you, but dirty you." (Morrison, p. 295).

Morrison ensures that the actions of the white people in the past are remembered and that their treatment of the slaves was nothing short of barbaric.

Morrison also highlights the problem of the Klu Klux Klan. Although slavery was abolished, there was still a great deal of racial abuse of the African Americans and there remained the very real danger of being caught by the Klan. " Eighteen seventy-four and white folks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty seven lynching's in one year alone in Kentucky [...] black women raped by the crew." (Morrison, p. 212) Although the government had abolished slavery, it had done nothing to control the racism which was still rampant throughout the United States of America. Whilst the white people could not enslave the African Americans, they were still able to physically and verbally mistreat them. Again, this is something that still continues, on a far less horrifying scale than the Klu Klux Klan, but it is still evident in today's world. The white people were still the dominant race

and controlled what happened to the African Americans. When Sethe tries to bury her mother-in-law in their own cultural tradition, she is unable to because of the white people's rules. "Which he tried to do, but was prevented by some rule the whites had invented about where the dead should rest." (Morrison, p. 201) The African Americans were still the 'others' despite the amended constitution. "White people believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle." (Morrison, p. 234) Sethe's mother-in-law understood the danger faced by the white people, even after the abolishment of slavery. "The lesson she had learned from her sixty years a slave and ten years free: that there was no bad luck in the world but white people. 'They don't know when to stop.'" (Morrison, p. 122) Again, this demonstrates how the African Americans view themselves as 'others' and understand that they will never truly be free from racial discrimination, no matter what laws are passed. The only hope within the novel is that the characters can continue their lives the best they can, despite being haunted by the past. They will endeavour to get through life despite what the past has done to them. "Nothing better than to start the day's serious work of beating back the past." (Morrison, p. 86) Their everyday life involves dealing with the memory of the past, but carrying on regardless of it, and not letting the past traumas affect the rest of their life. "Me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow." (Morrison p. 322). This is Morrison's last message of hope that there can be some kind of promising future for the African Americans who survived slavery and to make a new world for the generations to come. Louise Erdrich is part Chippewa Indian and, like Morrison, is eager to tell the world about the abolishment of her ancestors through literature.

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Erdrich did not experience the same kind of racial discrimination that Morrison faced growing up, as the Native American Indians were not treated in the same way as the African Americans. The Government wanted the land from her ancestors so that they could build and expand the ' American Dream'. Native American Indians were allowed to keep their reservations as long as they could afford the land fees which were imposed by the Government. However, by 1953, Congress passed a resolution in which all Native American Indian tribes would be disbanded and their land would be sold, effectively abolishing entire tribes and forcing them to live in Urban America. This is another example of the white people treating another race as ' others' and considering themselves as superior, even though the American Indians were the native people of the land, there before the settlers arrived. Tracks is set during the First World War when the American Indians were suffering from an epidemic which was killing off many of their people, as well as facing eviction from their reservations for not paying their land fees to the government. Ahmad reflects on the cultural and historical significance of the novel when he states " Its particular emphasis on communal responsibility and survival in the face of insurgent white culture makes it a significant literary document." (Ahmad, p3) This was a very bleak part of American History, one which still haunts the people of the United States of America today. The use of magical realism is also prominent in this novel. The American Indians were known for their spiritual beliefs and rituals and the story focuses on a young girl who has supernatural powers. Ahmad highlights Erdrich's use of magical realism in the novel when he says "

Tracks weaves two strands - realistic and magical - in an attempt to seek the actualization of the hybrid reality confronting the Native American subjects.

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(Ahmad, p. 7) Like Morrison, Erdrich chooses to place her story around realistic events but allows the story to include magical and spiritual moments. Again, there are two timelines in this book.

Published in 1988 but set in 1912-1924, Erdrich's book transports its reader back in time to the start of the 20th Century. However, due to narrative flash backs, the reader also goes further back in time to see the memories of the narrators to gain an understanding of what the American Indians were losing to the white people. The past is once again haunting the present. One of the narrators, Nanapush, is an older Native American Indian who is sharing his past with his granddaughter, Lulu. He is passing on the stories of his life to ensure that their people and traditions are not forgotten. He wants to keep the past alive so that his ancestors will be remembered by future generations. Nanapush has seen a lot of death and change throughout his years. " I was considered an old man. I'd seen enough to be one. In the years I'd passed, I saw more change than in a hundred upon a hundred before."

(Erdrich, p. 2) This is a direct reference to how much the white people have had an effect on his people's lives. As soon as the settlers arrived in America, their lives were disrupted and eventually abolished, before then they were living happily and peacefully on their own land. " I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot." (Erdrich, p. 2) It is clear that their traditions are being stopped and that the life that they knew is being taken away from them. The land and the animals once belonged to his people but this has been taken by the white people. Nanapush is distrustful of the Government, as he understands that they are there to take from his people. " I've seen too much go by [...] Land is the only thing that lasts life to life. [...] And as for

government promises, the wind is steadier." (Erdrich, p. 33) Through his long life he has learnt that the white people want their land as it is of great value. Whilst the American Indians value traditions and spiritual religion, the white people value money and material wealth. He understands that they are there to take the land from them and that they are not going to support their people. " There were so few of us who even understood the writing on the papers. Some signed away their land away with thumbs and crosses." (Erdrich, p. 99) This implies that some of his people were tricked by the government into signing away their land. The government mistreated the Native American Indians and used their weaknesses to get what they wanted. The Native American Indians are so spiritual that it is unthinkable to them that their sacred burial grounds would be bought and built on. " She said the paper had no bearing or sense, as no one would be reckless enough to try collecting for land where Pillagers were buried." (Erdrich, p. 174) This demonstrates how little respect the white people had for the culture and beliefs of the American Indians. They did not care about the spiritual significance of the land. They merely wanted to buy it to build on. This is something that still haunts people today, as many believe that the land should have been kept sacred. " She's living in the old days when people had respect." (Erdrich, p. 174) The response here shows that some American Indians were only too aware of what the white people wanted. The past traditions are beginning to be lost.

Erdrich details many of the Native American Indian traditions throughout the novel. " By then I'd traded candles and ribbons for the thing I needed from Moses, who made the dreamcatcher." (Erdrich, p. 80) Dreamcatchers were a

commonly used device invented by the Native American Indians and were used as a protective charm. Here Erdrich is ensuring that details of her ancestor's culture are being shared. " I began to sing slowly, calling on my helpers." (Erdrich, p. 101) The Native American Indians believed in the spirits of their dead ancestors and considered these spirits sacred. On several occasions in the novel, these spirits are mentioned. This illustrates how important the past is to the American Indians and they use storytelling as a method of keeping the past alive for the generations to come. In this novel, the past takes on a more spiritual form, a supernatural haunting. Nanapush fears for the future generations who he believes will forget the old traditions and culture. " The trembling old fools with their conjuring tricks will die off and the young, like Lulu and Nector, return from the government schools blinded and deafened." (Erdrich, p. 205) He knows that the white people will transform the younger generations into their culture and make them conform to the ' American Dream'. He feels the past slipping away from him, as much as he is trying to keep it alive. " Whereas the elder brother never lost his tie to the past, the younger already looked ahead." (Erdrich, p. 209) There is a constant feeling of the past being gradually lost throughout the novel, which gives this text more importance as a device to bring back the past to the readers. Ahmad praises Erdrich for the detailed history and education that this novel provides to the reader. " Erdrich has a clear vision of the Native life and knows perfectly well that their historic contemporary life is impossible to conceive without taking a look at the history of the allotment of lands, brutal confiscation of lands, pathetic lives into the reservations and the gradual loss of culture, identity, traditions, rituals and even religion." (Ahmad, p. 3) By the end of the novel, Nanapush has

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accepted that the past cannot be carried into the future and that the white people will eventually take over. He can only hope that his story telling will keep his heritage alive. " That's when I began to see what we were becoming [...] a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates [...] a tribe of pressed trees." (Erdrich, p. 225) The reader can only feel empathy towards Nanapush and his people who were pushed out of their own reservations and forced to live in a new way.

Erdrich's own story telling has ensured that the memory of her ancestors will continue to live on. Both these novels are important texts which demonstrate that even though times have changed, the past still continues to haunt us and should not be forgotten. It is imperative that we do not forget the sufferings endured by the African Americans and the unfairness of the abolishment of the Native American Indians. Two races were treated as ' others' and inferior to white people and it is critical that their stories do continue to haunt us to ensure that these events do not take place again and that we can learn from their tragic histories.

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