

From Exclusion to Inclusion—A Shift in the Perception of Native and Asian Americans through Graphic Stories: A Comparison of Political Cartoons from the 1800s to *Trickster*, *American Born Chinese*, and *Level Up*

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By comparing political cartoons from the late 1800s to graphic novels published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one can trace the changes in social acceptance of Native and Asian Americans and examine the role tricksters hold in overcoming stereotypes and encouraging these cultural groups to rise above being othered by society through teaching morals. Political cartoons that are used in this comparison include Thomas Nast's "Move On!," "Making White Men Good," "Celestial," and "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner" that show some people during the late 1800s believed in equality for all cultural groups but failed by including excessive visual labels that othered Native and Asian Americans. Works such as "The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves," published in *The Daily Graphic*, and George Frederick Keller's "A Statue For Our Harbor" include racist views of Native and Asian Americans and were used to incite fear and hatred of these groups. Categorized by cultural emphasis, these political cartoons are paired with one of three graphic novels: *Trickster: Native American Tales A Graphic Collection* edited by Matt Dembicki, *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, and *Level Up* by Gene Luen Yang and illustrator Thien Pham. These three books introduce trickster figures as characters that represent cultural ideals, teach important morals, and assist with overcoming stereotypes strongly portrayed in late 1800s political cartoons.



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by

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## Introduction:

Historically, Native and Asian Americans have struggled for societal acceptance and citizenship in the U.S.; however, as seen through a comparison of 1800s political cartoons and three contemporary graphic works, this struggle has greatly shifted in the last century and a half. In the 1800s, Thomas Nast drew political cartoons that depicted both groups and emphasized their struggles by using excessive and inaccurate visual identifiers. Although Native Americans and Asians were characters in many political cartoons of the 1800s, few artists referenced both groups in their work. Other political cartoons from the 1800s incorporated several cultural stereotypes that were often used to incite fear of the Native and Asian Americans. Today, graphic novels with Native and Asian Americans as main characters challenge the othering caused by this imagery. Trickster figures appear in several contemporary graphic novels to help challenge these stereotypes. *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*, edited by Matt Dembicki and published in 2010, comprises trickster tales from different Native American tribes. In Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*, published in 2006, the main characters are trickster figures who seek societal and self-acceptance while mocking stereotypes. Published in 2011, *Level Up*, written by Gene Luen Yang and illustrated by Thien Pham, highlights acceptance among a multicultural group who overcome social stereotypes as they pursue their dreams and struggle with their immigrant parents' expectations.

This study compares these three contemporary graphic novels to political cartoons from the late 1800s and examines the stereotypes present in these works while analyzing their impact. Through close readings of the graphic books a shift in perspective towards Native Americans and Asian Americans emerges. Political cartoons of the 1800s, regardless of intentions and hidden meanings, are inundated with racial stereotypes. These stereotypes became the accepted and even

expected norm. Published in this century, *Trickster*, *American Born Chinese*, and *Level Up* combat these stereotypes by offering acceptable images as representative of their culture and even mocking some of these stereotypes. *Trickster* shows many animals as tricksters in the short stories emphasizing the importance of nature in various Native American tribes. As with many tricksters in *Trickster*, the existence of the Monkey King, the primary trickster in *American Born Chinese*, can be traced back several centuries in Chinese culture. Other tricksters develop in this graphic novel as a sort of new age trickster that emerge to represent the Asian American culture and conquers centuries-old stereotypes. *Level Up* overcomes stereotypes and the act of othering by introducing readers to a multicultural cast of characters. Yang and Pham introduce a new trickster in the form of the angels that teach the main character a valuable lesson concerning achieving one's own destiny while also meeting the parental goals - a struggle seen among many immigrant children.

The trickster figure has been an elusive creature through various literary studies. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty list six specific characteristics, of which one alone may identify a trickster: ambiguous and anomalous, deceiver and trick-play, shape-shifter, situation-inverter, messenger and imitator of the Gods, and sacred and lewd bricoleur (34-42). After listing these characteristics Hynes and Doty explain that "while many specific trickster figures appear to have most of these characteristics, a particular figure may occasionally have only one or two" (45). Deanna Reder and Linda Morra argue that instead of studying and defining the trickster in a vacuum, the trickster needs to be studied in relation to its culture. Tricksters vary greatly across cultures and adapt as time passes. Here, I do not attempt to re-define the trickster but merely show how tricksters are present in these graphic novels and how they assist with eliminating stereotypes for Native and Asian Americans.

During the 1800s, Native and Asian Americans were “othered” by the white majority. The concept of “othering” has been explored by theorists in a variety of situations usually in relation to colonialism. Aimé Césaire discusses the effect of colonialism on creating and oppressing the Other. Césaire argues that the driving force behind colonialism is that the Other represents everything that exists beyond colonial culture. He states that “the conclusion is inescapable: compared to . . . other lesser breeds, Europe and the West are the incarnation of respect for human dignity” (70). This especially applies to the Native American’s situation in the late 1800s when they were being “othered” by the white majority that colonized their lands. Although the Chinese were immigrants and not victims of colonialism per se, they were also marked as “other” in the late 1800s. According to Peggy Ochoa, the dominate culture defines what and who is considered the Other. She interprets Edward Said's definition of Othering in his essays on “Orientalism” as “a process whereby powerful Western nations for centuries defined the terms of interaction with their African and Asian colonies, and even with other non-Western nations, as a Manichean struggle between light and dark, good and bad, enlightened self and irreconcilable ‘other’” (108). The definition of the Other, ultimately, is anyone who is not the ideal individual in any given country, society, or environment. What is considered ideal can be defined by race, culture, political beliefs, religious beliefs and actions. This perspective was reinforced by political cartoons published during the 1800s which used stereotypes to further emphasize the difference between people. The impact of these cartoons on society and certain cultures exists for over a century. *Trickster*, *American Born Chinese*, and *Level Up* are three graphic works that battle the societal perception of “othering,” allowing a shift from exclusion to inclusion.

A variety of political cartoons from the late 1800s are used in comparison to the three contemporary graphic books that show how attitudes towards Native and Asian Americans can be traced and show a shift from regression to progression. Thomas Nast, “the Father of the American political [cartoon]” included both Natives and Asians in his images. Nast created detailed drawings and emphasized stereotypes with all races in his cartoons (Halloran 289). “Move On!” and “Making White Men Good” address social relationship between Native Americans and whites. “Celestial” shows interactions between the Chinese and whites. “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner” confronts issues of intercultural amalgamation. Nast’s cartoons were designed to convince readers of equality; however, his use of stereotypes emphasizes differences between cultures and others Native Americans and Chinese. John Wilson Bengough drew “‘Christian’ Statesmanship” in response to the lack of assistance provided to the Native Americans. Here, Bengough shows stark differences between Natives and whites. While his concern is for the Natives, his use of stereotypes deepens the cultural divide. “The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves,” published in *The Daily Graphic*, used stereotypes and blatant racism to incite fear of the Native American population. George Frederick Keller’s “A Statue For Our Harbor” utilizes a racist view of the Chinese immigrants to convince the white population of the Chinese man’s intent to steal their jobs and ruin the U.S. Regardless of the cartoonists’ intent, these racial and stereotypical images contribute to the oppression of the Native and Asian Americans in the late 1800s. Three contemporary graphic novels that work against these stereotypes are *Trickster: Native American Tales A Graphic Collection*, *American Born Chinese*, and *Level Up*. *Trickster: Native American Tales A Graphic Collection*, edited by Matt Dembicki, is a graphic collection of Native American stories from oral storytellers. Composed of Native American traditional trickster tales, these stories primarily show animals.

By using animals, these images are very different from the works by the political cartoonists and the other two graphic novels. Because of this, it becomes more than a visual comparison of physical characteristics; it becomes a representation of the various Native American tribes.

*American Born Chinese*, written and illustrated by Gene Luen Yang, directly confronts stereotypes concerning Asian Americans. *Level Up*, written by Gene Luen Yang and illustrated by Thien Pham, avoids using visual stereotypes to define cultural groups. To avoid physically defining characteristic, Pham uses watercolors to avoid using too much detail in characters.

Unlike his goals in *American Born Chinese*, Yang addresses intercultural concerns in *Level Up*.

Chapter 1, Comparison of *Trickster: Native American Tales A Graphic Collection* to Political Cartoons and the Emergence of the Trickster Figure as the Native American Voice” discusses society’s historical perception towards Native Americans and how this has shifted from one of exclusion to one of inclusion, including how the Native American trickster figure has emerged as a cultural representation for Native Americans. It includes an examination of Thomas Nast’s “Move On!” and “Making White Men Good” as well as John Bengough’s “Christian Statesmanship” to show stereotypes and society’s perception of Native Americans during the late 1800s. A contrasting political cartoon titled “The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves” is included to show an alternate perspective and to lay the foundation for the stereotypes graphic artists today have struggled against concerning Native Americans. A comparative analysis includes *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*, edited by Matt Dembicki, which shows the shift in perception as well as the emergence of the Native American identity in images through the use of the trickster figure. This graphic collection primarily depicts animals as trickster. In this way, the animals become a representation of Native American cultures and not a direct comparison of stereotypes relating to people.

Chapter 2, “Overcoming Stereotypes Through the Monkey King as an Asian American Voice in *American Born Chinese*” explores works by Thomas Nast, George Keller, and Gene Luen Yang. Nast’s work “Celestial” challenges the white working class perception that the Chinese are stealing jobs from the white working man. Nast encourages equal working opportunities for the Chinese as well as the rights of citizenship. George Keller challenges Nast’s perspective and incites fear of the Chinese immigrants’ ability to bring ruin to the U.S. Gene Luen Yang must overcome these stereotypes in his graphic novel *American Born Chinese*. By including Asian American characters and tricksters, Yang confronts these stereotypes. He uses a traditional Chinese trickster, the Monkey King, and Chinese American characters to twist these stereotypes into a comical topic.

Chapter 3, “A Glance at Multiculturalism in *Level Up* and Nast’s ‘Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner’ Inciting Hope for Equality” navigates the stereotypes involved in the multicultural realm of cartoons. Yang and Pham create characters from a variety of cultures in *Level Up*. When compared to Thomas Nast’s “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner” a shift in the way cultural differences were portrayed in cartoons in the 1800s and how they are portrayed now becomes visible. Additionally, a new trickster figure emerges to challenge centuries-old stereotypes.

These chapters bring together in comparison the quality of otherness Native and Asian Americans have been confronted with, and challenge its existence through a comparative analysis of 1800s political cartoons to the graphic works *American Born Chinese*, *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*, and *Level Up*.

## Chapter 1: Comparison of *Trickster: Native American Tales A Graphic Collection* to Political Cartoons and the Emergence of the Trickster Figure as the Native American Voice

Comparing the political cartoons “Move On!” and “Making White Men ‘Good,’” by Thomas Nast, “‘Christian’ Statesmanship,” by John Wilson Bengough, and “The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves,” from *The Daily Graphic*, to *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*, edited by Matt Dembicki shows a progressive perspective of the Native American image. *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*, published in 2010, is a compilation of stories shared by Native Americans for many generations reinvented in the form of comics. Each story is a Native American trickster tale that has been passed down through Native American tribes for centuries through oral storytelling. Although the political cartoons by Nast and Bengough are meant to encourage acceptance of Native Americans, their cartoons emphasize differences between Native Americans and whites. Unlike Nast and Bengough, illustrations in *The Daily Graphic* objectified Native Americans as savages. Together, these images laid the foundation for the existence of negative images of Native Americans in comics that marked them as other. *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection* changes that presence from one of white perspective to one of a Native perspective by incorporating animals as their tricksters.

Two cartoons by Thomas Nast emphasize Native Americans who are othered by the white majority and government but who, in Nast’s opinion, deserve equal rights. “Move On!,”



1: Thomas Nast, "Move On!" *Harper's Weekly*. From HarpWeek. (1871, April 22).

printed in *Harper's Weekly* on April 22, 1871, is a detailed comic depicting a Native American man who is being pushed away from the voting polls by a white man. Men crowd around a wooden booth labeled "The Polls" with an American flag flying as they shove their votes into a container. The scowling Native American appears angry but not aggressive. The white man is pushing him towards the natural landscape where trees, cliffs, canyons, and teepees exist. The underlying notion is that this is where the Native American man belongs – away from white civilization and on land that has been reserved for him. Clearly the white man is telling the Native American man to "Move on!" He is not welcome at the polls any more than he is welcome in town. Nast, in addition to the political implications in this image, asks the question "Has the Native American no rights that the naturalized American is bound to respect?" He is openly mocking the concept that the naturalized American has more rights than the Native American and encourages his readers to question the same concept.



2: Thomas Nast, "Making White Men 'Good.'" *Harpers Weekly*. From HarpWeek. (1879, December 6).

Similarly, Nast’s comic “Making White Men Good,” challenges the inequality that exists between Native Americans and the white majority. “Making White Men Good,” printed in *Harpers Weekly* on December 6, 1879, shows two white men seated behind a desk and three Native American men standing, two holding rifles. The famous Uncle Sam is seated at a desk where a picture of a dead Native American, complete with a feather headband, with the writing “a good Indian” above him is drawn. The implication is that the only good Native American is a dead one. The caption indicates the words of the Native American named Little Hatchet: “Me know nothing about White River massacre. White man bad; steal, kill, get drunk, and lie. Me good – make pale face ‘good’ too.” Spoken, these words sound kind enough and any viewer/reader who misses the writing on the desk would misinterpret the meaning behind Little

Hatchets words. Nast's meaning in this comic is that he does not accept the violent behavior of white and Native American men. Uncle Sam's stance in this image is one of unfair treatment towards Native Americans and is representative of the government's actions towards them. Nast shows that violence towards Native Americans will only result in further violence developing an unending cycle that improves nothing.

Both of these comics are detailed drawings that send readers a hidden message encouraging others to accept equality. Readers can clearly see facial expressions, body posture, lines and folds in clothing and details in the surroundings. By presenting his opinions with these details and using stereotypes, Nast is emphasizing differences between Native Americans and whites, effectively othering Native Americans despite his good intentions. His audience of non-native readers anticipated and expected to see Native Americans drawn as they are in these cartoons. Nast's message would have caught his readers by surprise. Nast's opinion that Native Americans should be assimilated instead of pushed to reservations was not a popular opinion during the 1870's and 1880's. Nast used detailed drawings as a tactic to draw in his readers to convince them to listen to his message. However, his use of stereotypes backfires and emphasizes distinct differences between Native Americans and whites adding to the othering of Native Americans. Through the details of his hidden meanings, Nast ultimately pushed his primary political motive: Native Americans should be assimilated and allowed citizenship (Kennedy).

John Wilson Bengough is another political cartoonist known for depicting Natives in a sympathetic light during the late 1800s. "Christian' Statesmanship" was published in *Grip* in 1888.



**"CHRISTIAN STATESMANSHIP."**

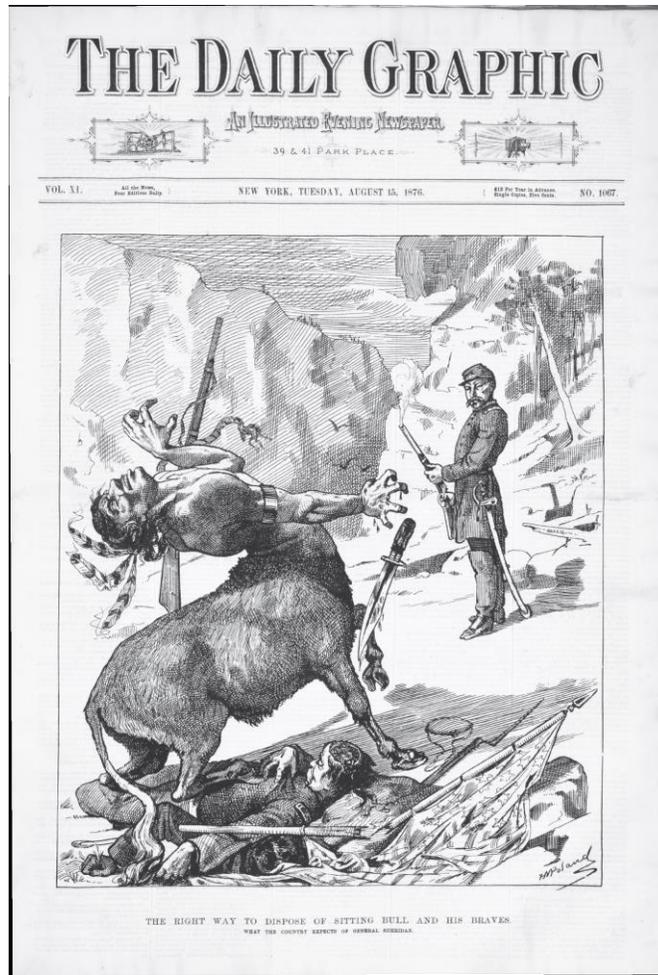
*Sir John.*—INDIANS STARVING? OH, WELL, THEY'RE NOT "FRIENDS OF DEWDNEY," YOU KNOW. I'LL SEE THAT *you* DON'T COME TO WANT, THOUGH, MR. CONTRACTOR.

3: John Wilson Bengough, "Christian Statesmanship." *Grip*. From Sir John A. Macdonald Library. (April 1888).

In the image, the Native family is drawn with little detail but they are clearly frail and slouch in a stance of defeat. The mother holds her starving child who is so limp he may already be dead while the other child manages to lean against her in a sitting stance. A community of teepees stands in the background next to a sign that reads "Starved by a 'Christian' Government." The two white men to the right of the image are symbols of the government. The man on the right is

the contractor responsible for ensuring the land is developed according to the government's desires. He is collecting money bags from both the Natives and the government. The government man ensures the contractor that although the Natives are starving he will ensure that the contractor "won't come to want." Bengough's lack of detail in drawing the Natives mirrors how they are seen by the government as a lesser people. Although, his signature is on the side of the Natives as a symbol for his support and compassion for them, Bengough does not imply ideas of equality as Nast does. Christina Burr discusses Bengough's annoyance with his "'Christian' Government" but also identifies his inability to assist these people. She writes: "Self-serving politicians and greedy monopolists were blamed for the widespread suffering among Native peoples . . . Despite his concern for Native peoples . . . Bengough offered little by way of concrete suggestions about how . . . to alleviate their suffering" (Burr). Unlike Nast, Bengough's sympathy for the Native people was limited to sympathy. Bengough drew his concerns for the Native people's situation but did not offer an alternative plan of action to improve their situation. Nast, on the other hand, incorporated elements encouraging equal rights for Natives including the right to vote and the opportunity to assimilate.

*The Daily Graphic* published a blatantly racist image of Native Americans titled "The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves" in 1876.



4: "The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves." *The Daily Graphic*. (1876, August 11).

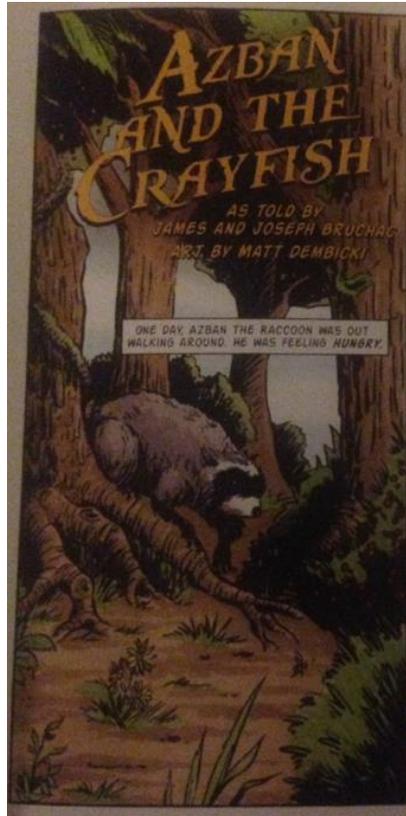
A far cry from the images published by Nast and Bengough, this cartoon was published after a battle between the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes over George Custer's men and portrays Native Americans as more animal than human (Coward 201). Not only was the Native American drawn as an animalistic savage, his actions also prove horrifying. The patriotic soldier lying on the ground beside an American flag has been horrifically scalped by the man-beast and in return, the man-beast has been shot by another soldier. This is the "right way" to deal with the Natives who are a nightmarish threat. On these aspects of this image, John Coward writes, "Violence from savages of this sort demanded greater violence. In this case, retribution was carried out by an erect, uniformed, and stern-faced soldier, an idealized personification of the nation itself" (201).

Gone is Nast's image of Uncle Sam being unfair towards Native Americans with his implications that the only good Indian is a dead one. Instead, this image shows the soldier as a patriot for ending this Native threat. The Native American is transformed from the man among teepees with a feathered headband to a savage, impending, beast that threatens all non-natives. These opposing views caused by societies fear of change and that which is different prove citizens were uncertain of how to interpret the presence of the Native American resulting in confusion that lasts for over a century.

These political cartoons laid the foundation for Native Americans in images by portraying them with stereotypes to separate them from the white majority. These are the assumptions Dembicki and his group of Native storytellers and non-Native artists were working against while creating *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*. This book combined the efforts of Natives and non-natives giving the text what Kaleigh Cline refers to as "multiple voices" within each story that are intermingled (21). The composition of this book is living proof of the shift in perspective of the Native Americans from the late 1800s to its publication in 2010. During the 1800s it would have been nearly impossible for non-natives to work with Native Americans on a common project. First, Native Americans would not have trusted non-natives with their traditional stories. Second, because Native Americans did not have equal rights, it would have been difficult to publish any work by a Native American. Third, the kind of working relationship portrayed in *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection* between natives and non-natives would have been hindered by lack of trust. The purpose of these cartoons published in the 1870's and 1880's was primarily political. According to Matt Dembicki, the purpose of *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection* was to provide "a bridge for readers to learn more about the original people of this land and to foster a

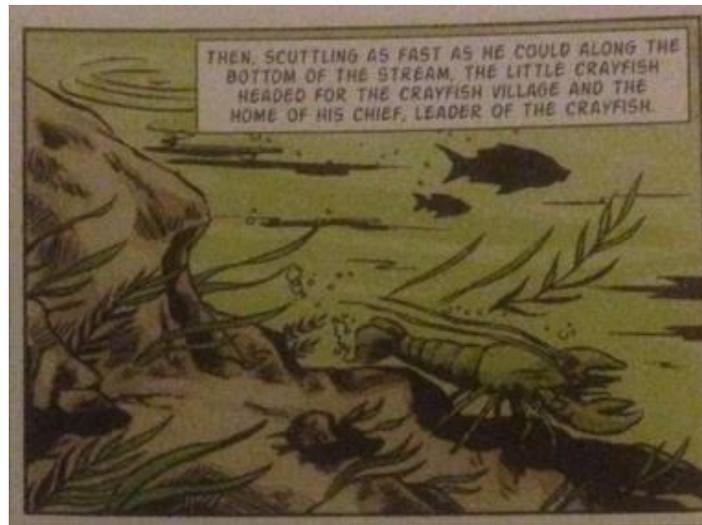
greater appreciation and understanding among all inhabitants” (225). This graphic book is intended to introduce Native stories to a predominately non-native population and hopefully foster a sense of appreciation for differences among people and cultures. Whereas Nast, Bengough, and *The Daily Graphic* focus on details, this graphic collection is a variety of artistic styles portraying varying degrees of semi-realistic and iconic/cartoon drawings. The focus of most stories is an animal, not a Native American person. This is representative of the Native American culture in which many tricksters are animals. As an oral tradition, the trickster tales highlighted in this graphic novel have changed through the centuries in ways that have not necessarily been recorded as these stories currently are. With each new oral storyteller a story may have been changed and with each telling the interpretation may be different. The meaning interpreted from these stories now will differ from how these stories were interpreted during times of forced reservation and assimilation

Through a visual comparison, several stories in *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection* are drawn with similar levels of detail to Nast, Bengough, and *The Daily Graphic* which emphasizes important Native American symbols and values. “Azban and the Crayfish,” by James and Joseph Bruchac and artist Matt Dembicki, displays Azban the raccoon in great detail within the forest.



5: "Azban and the Crayfish," *Trickster*, page 33

Throughout the story, readers are drawn to the pop of red among the berries in the bushes, captured by the subtle dragonfly swooping over the lake, awed by the trees that tower over Azban, and intrigued by the grass that grows from under the rocks in the water. Among these are other subtle touches found in nature such as the mushrooms and flowers scattered throughout the forest. As seen in image 5, the opening frame, Raccoon is searching for food. Readers see tall trees with detailed roots and bright red berries in the bushes as well as flowers and clumps of grass scattering the dirt floor of the forest. Dembicki uses his artistic eye for natural detail to show a stark contrast between the colorful forest and the shades of green in the



6: "Azban and the Crayfish," *Trickster*, page 39

world of the crayfish. Image 6 shows a frame from the story that details the underwater life of the crayfish. Readers are privy to the intriguing grasses that grow from under and around the rocks in the water as well as the fish that swim among the crayfish and even the small cave-like holes the crayfish use as homes. By emphasizing these features through detailed drawings, Dembicki is also emphasizing the important role nature holds among Native American tribes. Additionally, he is highlighting a place readers (such as those who live in cities) may not be familiar with. In this way he is “othering” the environment just as late 1800s political cartoons “othered” Native Americans. Through the use of animals, stereotypes are non-existent in this graphic collection. Instead, emphasis is placed on the importance of and what can be learned from the natural environment. An important symbol that is emphasized through these details is in the crayfish. The crayfish eyes change during this story. In the beginning, the crayfish eyes are against the head in sockets. However, when Azban the raccoon pretends to fall over dead, the little crayfish in the water stares so hard at Azban to confirm he is truly dead that his eyes pop out of his head onto stalks. This becomes a symbol for one of the morals of this story: life is always changing and one must adapt by also changing.

One crucial difference between *The Daily Graphic*, Nast, and Bengough's work and *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection* is the use of the trickster figure to act as a voice for Native Americans and share lessons important to their culture. The Native American's are heard through the use of the trickster characters and the morals they teach. In "Azban and the Crayfish," the crayfish's lives were changed when their eyes became stalks off of their heads. This symbolizes their ability to adapt. When Azban the raccoon is unsuccessful at catching a crayfish, he plays dead in hopes of luring out a crayfish. Once all crayfish believe he is truly dead, they proceed to dance around his body in celebration until they are too exhausted to move. Azban then jumps up and eats all the crayfish. Azban the raccoon tricked the crayfish into thinking he was dead and after they celebrated his death he ate them. The moral of this story involves telling the truth, not bragging, and to not celebrate others' misfortunes.

Historically, this trickster story would have held different meanings for Native Americans thus reinforcing their independent opinion in its telling. When colonist first came to the Americas, Native American storytellers may have used this story as a way to convince others that the new colonists should be welcomed and a friendship should develop instead of celebrating any misfortunes they may experience. Otherwise, the colonists may trick the Native Americans out of their land just as Azban tricked the crayfish to come out of the water. Unfortunately many colonists did not offer kindness in return and, referring to the Native Americans as savages, took the land and harmed the Native Americans. Told in the late 1800s, when Native Americans were being denied the right to vote and the freedom to live where they wish, this story could have also been a warning that if a positive relationship does not exist between the Native Americans and the white men, then the Native Americans will continue to be denied rights and freedoms awarded to others. Another interpretation of this story is that Azban

represents the white men of centuries ago who, regardless of Crayfish's (or the Native American men) behavior, plans to take what is needed for survival for their own purposes.

In "Coyote and the Pebbles" the trickster figure creates a situation in which Mother Nature shares a cultural lesson. In this story, nocturnal animals ask for more light at night and are instructed by Mother Earth to take the shining pebbles from the water and draw their portraits in the sky. This story addresses the importance of not being selfish. When the animals were instructed to gather the glowing pebbles to make portraits in the sky Coyote was not present. When he realized what the other animals were doing, he rushed to gather as many pebbles as he could hold. Then he scrambled to find a place in the sky for his own portrait insisting that his "drawing will be the largest and the best!" (Dembicki 9). He repeatedly calls the others selfish. When he finally finds a space large enough for his own portrait using more pebbles than the others used he rushes to the space but trips, spilling his pebbles into the sky where they collide with all the others. He ruins the other's portraits. Coyote selfishly sought the largest space and the most pebbles for his portrait so his would be the biggest in the sky. This story serves as a warning for others to not be selfish. The primary moral is expressed by Mother Earth when she is calming the other animals after Coyote's selfish actions. She tells them, "Healing can happen. By looking at yesterday and its consequences, one can change tomorrow" (17). By accepting what has happened, one can heal and improvements can be made. Through years of persecution by non-natives, this lesson would have served as inspiration for Native Americans to hope for a healing change as described in this story. Like the explanation pertaining to crayfish's eyes in "Azban and the Crayfish," this story explains where the stars came from and why Coyote howls at night. Each night Coyote howls at the moon asking for the night animals to have another chance to draw their portraits in the sky.

Like “The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves,” the images in “Coyote and the Pebbles” also depict Native Americans as animals but with less savage qualities. This shows the Native American view concerning the important connection between animals and humans without transforming the Native American into a grotesque creature. Instead of the beast-man from *The Daily Graphic*, the artist of “Coyote and the Pebbles” drew people with subtle qualities of the animal they can transform into.



7: "Coyote and the Pebbles." *Trickster*, Page 9.

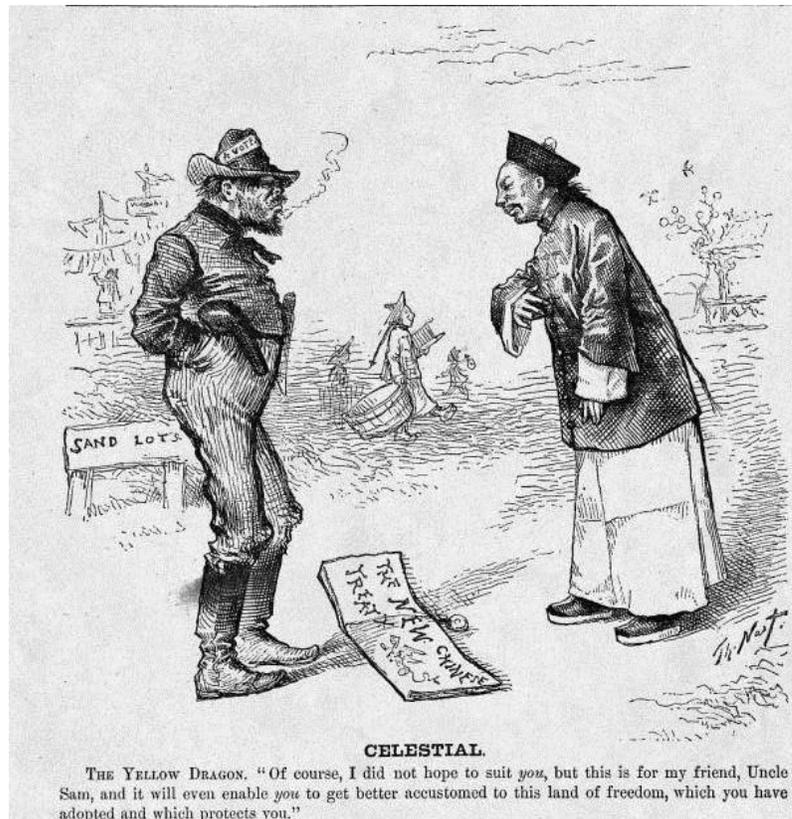
Image 7 shows Raven and Coyote in their human forms. Ravens dark hair and dress are covered with feathers from her animal form. Her chin and nose are sharp resembling the beak of her animal form. Coyote’s hair and hat hang like the ears of a coyote while his face has subtle lines resembling a coyote’s whiskers. Compared to the image of *The Daily Graphic* Native Americans have shifted from a violent beast capable of scalping a man to shape-shifting creatures. In this way, the image of the trickster reinforces the Native Americans individuality by humanizing them. By comparison, these stories emphasize what is culturally important to the Native American people. They avoid stereotypes and concerns with differences between cultures by focusing on morals.

The emergence of the Native American trickster figure in graphic writing has given Native Americans a stronger cultural identity than they had in works like Thomas Nast, John

Bengough, and *The Daily Graphic*. Nast and Bengough drew comics that were sympathetic to the Native American's situation of suppression and inequality. Bengough's work shows that he was angry with the government for not doing more to assist the Native people as a Christian government should. However, his comics did little to offer Natives self-representation or to offer any ideas on how their situation could be improved. Nast's images offered ideas of equal citizenship for Native Americans, specifically the rights to vote and live where they wish. *The Daily Graphic* introduced fear-inducing images of the Native American. By comparing their works to *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*, one can see the shift in perceptions concerning Native Americans. In *Trickster*, Native American story tellers avoid issues of stereotypes through the use of trickster figures to share morals emphasizing kindness and acceptance in an attempt to obliterate the "otherness" that once divided these people from society.

## Chapter 2: Overcoming Stereotypes Through the Monkey King as Asian American Voice in *American Born Chinese*

Nast's "Celestial" and George Frederick Keller's "A Statue for Our Harbor", both published in 1881, include stereotypes of Chinese immigrants that Gene Luen Yang confronts in *American Born Chinese*, published in 2006. Just as Nast sympathized with the Native Americans, his concern extended to the unfair treatment of the Chinese moving to the U.S. in the 1800s. In contrast, George Frederick Keller's "A Statue for Our Harbor," singles out Chinese immigrants as the cause of economic problems within the U.S. Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* addresses self-actualization and self-acceptance within the Chinese American community. Yang's graphic novel addresses self-actualization and self-acceptance within the Chinese American community and issues of racism in the U.S. and how, as a society, these prejudices can be overcome. An analysis of these three works outlines how the use of stereotypes in cartoons has changed from damaging and expected to satirical and comical.



8: Thomas Nast, "Celestial." *Harper's Weekly*. (1881, February 5).

Nast's "Celestial" presents Chinese stereotypes, but emphasizes the importance of equality and opportunity for prosperity. First appearing in *Harper's Weekly* on February 5, 1881, it depicts a white man and a Chinese man discussing the right to work in the U.S. Between them lays a damaged sign with a dragon and the words "The New Chinese Treaty." In the background are three Chinese men.. All three are wearing hats and their hair is in a queue style. These men appear happy, non-threatening members of society who are willing to work in jobs others may prefer not to do (such as laundry). The Chinese man addressing the white working man wears traditional Chinese attire and queue. He leans forward in the gesture of a respectful, polite bow with his right arm crossing his chest. The caption reads: "The Yellow Dragon. 'Of course, I did not hope to suit *you*, but this is for my friend Uncle Sam, and it will even enable *you* to get better accustomed to this land of freedom, which you have adopted and which protects you.'" The

white man stares directly at the Chinese man with his hands in his pockets and slouching posture. His clothes and beard make him appear grungy next to the clean attire of the Chinese man. He is scowling and it appears he is smoking although no cigar or cigarette is present. It seems he is “blowing smoke” at “The New Chinese Treaty” and at the idea of offering the Chinese man citizenship, equal rights, and the opportunity to prosper. The words “a vote” are written on his hat emphasizing his right to vote. Thomas Nast signed his name clearly on the right to show he supports the Chinese immigrants’ desire for equality. He draws the Chinese in a way that exhibits several Asian stereotypes. By including and emphasizing these stereotypes, he grabs the reader’s attention. These images were expected by the readers of this time and although Nast does nothing to squash stereotypes with his comics, he does appeal to his audience. In doing so, a broader range of readers during his time would pay attention to his comics even if they did not initially agree with his opinions. However, this attention to detail emphasizes differences between the Chinese and the white working man in this image thus further othering the Chinese.

These stereotypes are also exhibited by George Frederick Keller in “A Statue for Our Harbor” which implies that the Chinese were a negative force in the U.S. This comic was published in *Wasp* as a mockery of the current immigration concerns. The Statue of Liberty was not in place at the time this was published. This image implies that the Chinese immigrants and their culture are not welcome. The Chinese man stands with one foot propped up on a skull representing a dominance of the white man potentially resulting in his obliteration. His tattered clothes hang off him and he wears his hair in a queue. His left hand holds an opium pipe while his right hand, presumably holding a torch, and face extend towards the sky.



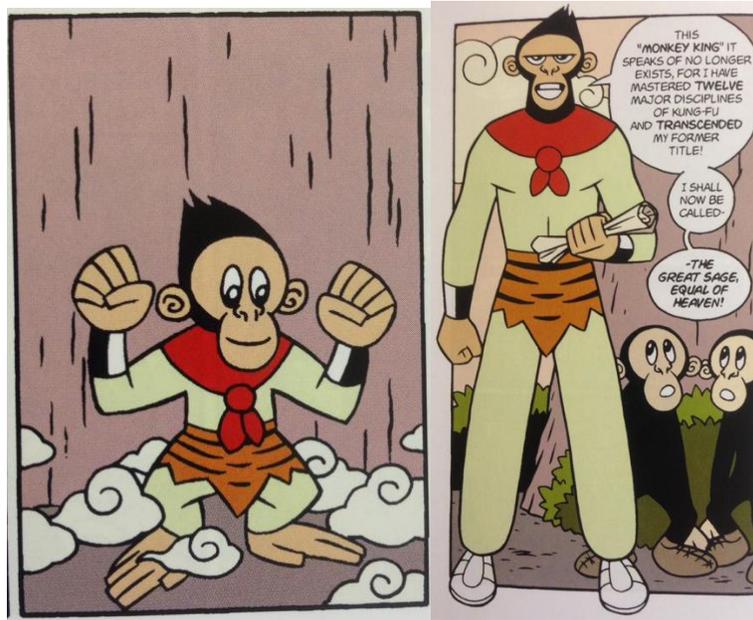
9: George Fredrick Keller, "A Statue For Our Harbor." *Wasp*. (1881, November 11).

To ensure his audience does not miss his message, Keller uses light surrounding the Chinese man's head to highlight the words "Filth," "Immortality," "Disease," and "Ruin to White Labor." The clouds part in the background revealing a full moon with a sneering face resembling the face of the Chinese statue. This image of the Chinese became the stereotypical basis for all

future graphic works including Chinese and Chinese Americans: filthy, invading beings whose goal was to steal jobs from the white man and ruin the U.S. government and economy. Although Nast's work involving the Chinese showed stereotypes, his goals were very different from Keller's. Nast sought equal working conditions and rights for the Chinese as well as the right to vote. Keller saw the Chinese as an impending force to be feared by U.S. citizens and who needed to be destroyed before they could cause further damage to the country.

In *American Born Chinese*, Yang works against these stereotypes by addressing the struggle for self-acceptance among Chinese American youth and the desire to be free from peer-pressure through the use of trickster figures that make physical changes to themselves to try to fit what they believe is the ideal. The first is the Monkey King. Lan Dong wrote, "this graphic novel transforms traditional Chinese folklore and transplants the celebrated character of the Monkey King in contemporary Chinese American context" (Dong 232). The use of a character from traditional Chinese folklore makes him a familiar character for Chinese American readers. The Monkey King rules the monkeys of Flower Fruit Mountain and saved them from the Tiger-Spirit, making the mountain a safe place for monkeys to live and thrive. However, the Monkey King wants more than to rule Flower-Fruit Mountain. He desires immortality and to achieve the status of a god. To become a god he studies the arts of kung-fu and is capable of four disciplines essential to obtain immortality: fist-like-lightening, thunderous foot, heavenly senses, and cloud-as-steed (Yang 10-11). Because he considers himself a deity, and because he has the ability to visit the heavens, the Monkey King crashes a heavenly dinner party for gods, goddesses, and demons only to be mocked for being a monkey and not wearing shoes. Angry by their rejection, he attacks everyone in the room crying, "DIE!" (16). The moral in this short story is the importance of self-realization and self-actualization. The Monkey King aspired for greatness,

however, when he returned home after the incident in heaven he suddenly realizes how strong the smell of monkey is at his home. He does not accept that he is a monkey and that his home should smell like monkey. He insists that he is greater than a monkey and this is the root of his unhappiness. The moral concerning self-acceptance is reinforced throughout this graphic novel but is taught by different trickster's experiences.



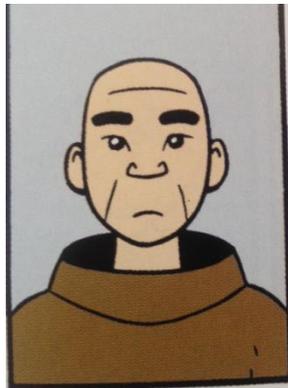
10: The Monkey King in *American Born Chinese*. page 11      11: The Monkey King in *American Born Chinese*. page 60.

Although a moral is present in this segment of the Monkey King's experiences, his story does not end here. The moral is reinforced through the continuation of his story and his involvement in the lives of other tricksters. Angry that he was laughed at by the gods, the Monkey King dedicates the next forty days to acquire the "four major disciplines of invulnerability," to be invulnerable to fire, cold, water, and wounds (57). After another forty days, he acquires the "four major disciplines of bodily form," giant, miniature, hair-into-clones, and shape-shift.

The Monkey King now requires the monkeys of his kingdom to call him "The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven" (60). He no longer looks like the other monkeys. His physical changes

are clear through the images in the graphic novel. As portrayed in the first image, the Monkey King was introduced as the same size as his fellow monkeys, walking on bent legs and uncovered feet. After transitioning to The Great Sage Equal of Heaven, he is tall like a human and walks without the typical monkey slouch. He also wears shoes like a human. As this new, greater monkey, he then proceeds to bully the gods on his quest to convince them he is worthy of being a god and wants them to believe he is. Eventually the creator, Tze-Yo-Tzuh, steps in to stop the Monkey King. He reminds the Monkey King that he is a monkey. The Monkey King argues with his creator insisting that he can crush him as he did other gods. After repeated attempts to remind him that he is just a monkey, Tze-Yo-Tzuh buries the Monkey King under a mountain of rock where he is held for five hundred years. Now the trickster has been captured and, after rebelling against his own creator, has refused to acknowledge the lesson he needs to learn – to accept and be true to himself. This is the primary moral of the story of the Monkey King: this trickster’s journey teaches that it is not always easy to be true to oneself but that it is necessary. After five hundred years Tze-Yo-Tzuh gives the Monkey King another chance to make this realization.

Tze-Yo-Tzuh sends the monk, Wong Lai-Tsao, who has found favor in the creator’s eyes through his selfless acts, on a journey to the west but sends him to recruit the Monkey King first.



12: Wong Lai-Tsao in *American Born Chinese*. page 140

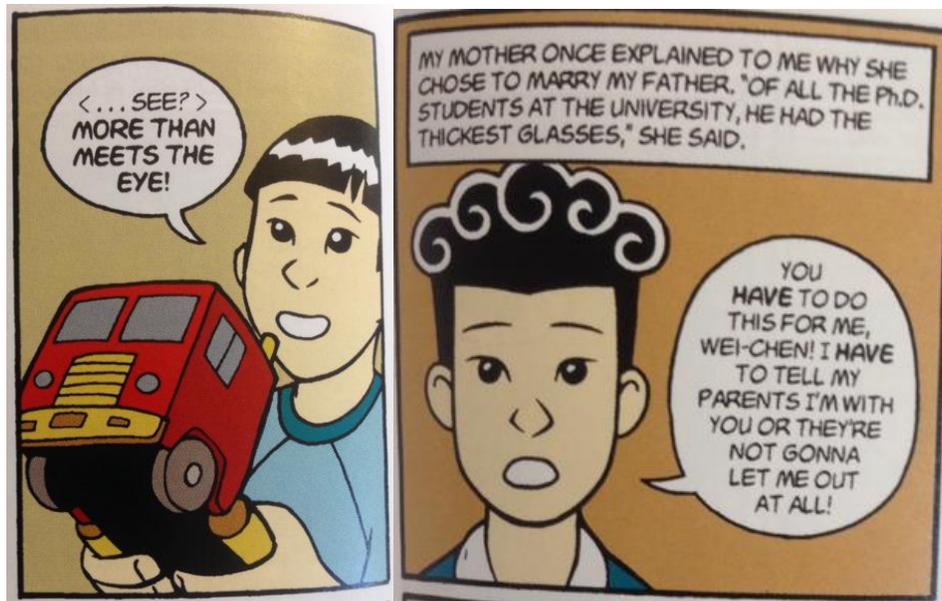
Wong Lai-Tsao is a modest monk. He is drawn with dark eyes that are shaped like other Chinese characters in this graphic novel. His age is shown by simple lines on his cheek and forehead to represent wrinkles. He has two dark, thick eyebrows. Unlike the Chinese in Nast's comic, Wong Lai-Tsao is not seen bowing to others although his role as a monk is to serve others. Nast's representation of Asians is more detailed leaving little to the imagination. Yang's images are more iconic allowing the use of imagination to build more details around the characters. This difference may also be tied to purpose. Nast's purpose was to relate to voting adults and carry a message related to his political agenda. Yang's images of trickster figures are for all ages to enjoy. The difference in artwork also implies Nast believed in some of the stereotypes his images portray. Some even argue over whether Nast ever actually met a Chinese person or if he just drew the Chinese with the same stereotypes depicted in other cartoons. John Kuo Wei Tchen writes, "Nast's exposure to living and breathing Chinese . . . was probably quite limited. His drawings indicate familiarity with the representational conventions of Chinese in literature and on stage, but not much other knowledge" (211). Nast's images may be derived from other images he has seen of the Chinese proving that a stereotypical image of the Chinese was very common during his time period. Yang combats these images today by drawing a more iconic image of Chinese characters for most of his characters.

The Monkey King at first refuses to help Wong Lai-Tsao, insisting that he is trapped under the pile of rock. The monk points out that if the Monkey King reverted back to his true form, he would be small enough to escape the rock pile. It takes the monk being nearly eaten by demons to convince the Monkey King he should convert to his original form to help the monk. After saving the monk, he agrees to join the monk on his journey to the west. Here, we see the trickster change form to escape his trap. His behavior and insistence that he was greater than a

monkey tricked him into thinking he was truly trapped when all he needed to do was return to his true form to be free. The creator only wanted the Monkey King to realize the importance of being happy with who he is. Once he learned this, the Monkey King becomes an advocate for helping others realize this important lesson. This desire for freedom mirrors the desires of the Chinese of Nast's time. They also sought freedom from prejudice and the opportunity to be accepted as fellow citizens among the U.S. society. Nast's comics worked to portray this possibility by drawing comics that depict the Chinese as harmless and helpful members of society. The Chinese in the 1800s U.S. did not wish to change their traditions or themselves to be accepted in a new country. They simply were seeking the opportunity of equality and prosperity.

Jin Wang is the second trickster figure Yang uses to show the importance of achieving self-acceptance to ultimately obtain freedom from peer pressure and internal conflict. Jin Wang is a Chinese American whose alter ego is blond-haired, light-eyed, athletic Danny. Jin transforms himself to Danny because he wants to fit in at school and be what he feels, by U.S. standards, popular. We see the start of this transformation when Jin changes his hair style in hopes of gaining the attention of a girl he has a crush on. By becoming Danny, Jin squashes his true identity and tricks others into believing he is someone he is not – including himself.

Jin Wang, before transforming into Danny, befriends Wei-Chen Sun in elementary school. Wei-Chen is a new student from Taiwan who is also a trickster. Together, they navigate the pressures of middle school including first dates and crushes. Prior to becoming Danny, Jin Wang changes his own image in an attempt to win the attention of a girl at school.



13: Young Jin from *American Born Chinese*. page 28

14: Teenage Jin from *American Born Chinese*. page 163.

On the left is an image of a younger Jin, before the pressures of his peers began to impact his decisions. On the right is an image of Jin after he has decided to curl his hair like a more popular boy at school. His eyes and ears are similar to Wong Lai-Tsao's. When compared to Wong Lai-Tsao, Jin is drawn with a longer face and smaller nose and eyebrows befitting a younger child. These similarities are due primarily to the simplicity of these characters drawings. They also accentuate the difference in Jin's hair when he decides to curl it. These images lack the detail of Nast's work giving readers the opportunity to see beyond stereotypes and think of these Asian American characters as individuals and wonder about the circumstances they face in life. Although Jin does go on a date with his school crush, comments from the popular boys at school crush his self-esteem. This along with a fight with his best friend, Wei-Chen, pushes his transformation to Danny. Just as the Monkey King began his transformation after being ousted from Heaven, Jin transforms into Danny after being ousted by students at school. He then uses his new looks to deceive other people and himself.

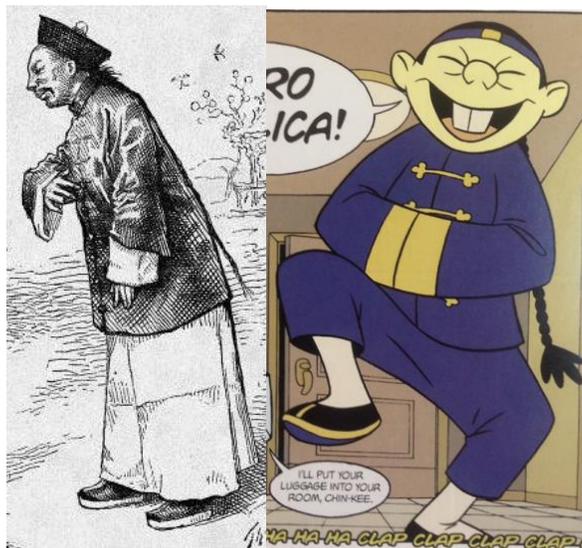




16: Chin-Kee in *American Born Chinese*. page 48.

Dressed in a kimono, Chin-Kee wears his hair in a queue. Danny’s father carries three huge Chinese food take-out boxes that represent Chin-Kee’s luggage and symbolize the burden of racial stereotypes that Chinese characters carry in the U.S. Anne Cong-Huyen and Caroline Hong show that the majority of Chin-Kee’s scenes are “lined at the bottom with ‘ha’s’ and ‘clap’s,’ a visual applause that is a staple of TV comedies and indicates we are not to take Chin-Kee seriously” (85). Unlike Nast, whose cartoons both employ and fight against stereotypes. Yang avoids misunderstandings and ensures readers interpret Chin-Kee as a satire of racial stereotypes. The images themselves become a mock stereotype. Min Hyoung Song describes Chin-Kee’s appearance as having “a big grin, pronounced buckteeth, eyes so small they are never seen except as a bold black line, sickly pale yellow skin, and a queue” (80). She also discusses how he “begins to embody not only nineteenth century stereotypes about the Chinese coolie but also late twentieth century ideas about Chinese American youths as stellar students” (81). He symbolizes everything Jin suspected his classmates thought of him which makes him

self-conscious about being himself and ultimately pushes him to transform into Danny. Readers compare Chin-Kee to the other Asian American characters and realize a realm of stereotypes exist concerning the Asian American image. In this way, society is pushed to take ownership of these stereotypes and work with Asian Americans to eradicate these concerns.



17: Chinese man in Nast's "Celestial." 18: Chin-Kee in *American Born Chinese*, page 48.

The image Chin-Kee portrays is eerily similar to the image the Chinese in Nast's comic held. Men in both images wear their hair in the queue. They also appear extremely happy with big grins. Their eyes are small and squinty with extreme facial features such as a pointed nose and chin or buck teeth. They both wear a traditional Chinese kimono and stand with their arms in a subservient and peaceful fashion as though they are going to bow at any moment. In the 1800s, Nast used these stereotypes to appeal to the audience in his venture to convince others of the need to provide the Chinese with citizenship and opportunities for freedom. More presently, Yang uses these stereotypes in a satirical fashion to show this is no longer an accurate or acceptable image of a Chinese American.

Chin-Kee is also a trickster but he is not a new trickster in this graphic novel. Chin-Kee is actually the Monkey King in disguise. The Monkey King has chosen to visit Jin/Danny to help

him. He tells Jin, “I came to serve as your conscience – as a signpost to your soul” (Yang 221). When Jin is wise enough to ask the Monkey King’s advice of what he should do, the Monkey King shares with Jin the moral he learned through his early experiences as a trickster saying, “I would have saved myself from five hundred years’ imprisonment beneath a mountain of rock had I only realized how good it is to be a monkey” (223). Through their actions and experiences as tricksters, Jin and the Monkey King realize the importance of being true to themselves. Yang wanted to teach that the Chinese should be allowed to be themselves and still accepted as equals and citizens.

Wei-Chen, the third trickster in this story, learns a different lesson. Through the Monkey King’s conversation with Jin, it becomes apparent that Wei-Chen is the Monkey King’s son. He has been sent to live among humans for forty years to test his virtue; he is to avoid committing the bad habits of humans. Wei-Chen tells this father that he refuses to serve the humans because of their selfishness and instead will spend the rest of his years among people doing what he wishes. Jin later finds him and he has a fancy car, wears expensive jewelry, and smokes. The Monkey King sought Jin to teach him the lesson he had learned; now Jin seeks Wei-Chen hoping to share the same lesson with him. But Jin teaches Wei-Chen a new lesson. This is their first meeting since their argument. Wei-Chen realizes that people make mistakes but should be forgiven because they can learn from them and change.

The three tricksters in *American Born Chinese* represent the Chinese Americans. They are from various worlds but each struggles with the same problem: they want to be someone different. Through their trickster ways they change themselves but ultimately learn the importance of self-acceptance. They also challenge the existence of stereotypes used by political cartoonists such as Nast and Keller in the late 1800s and encourage society as a whole to assist

with combating these stereotypes. By comparing these artists and their work with cartoons, we see that the image of the Chinese American has changed over the past century to reach beyond common stereotypes and even challenge them as seen in the satirical use of Chin-Kee by Yang. A shift has occurred from concerns with accepting others and allowing fair opportunities for others to self-acceptance and freedom to be oneself.

### Chapter 3: The Multicultural Presence in *Level Up* and “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner” Inciting Hope for Equality

Thomas Nast’s “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner” and Yang and illustrator Pham’s *Level Up* encompass a variety of cultures and offer symbols of hope for equality and acceptance. Created over a century apart, these two works embody similar ideals and hopes for society. Through the use of different artistic styles, Nast utilizes stereotypes to emphasize differences between cultures while Pham and Yang highlight cultural traits. Like *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection* and *American Born Chinese*, the graphic novel *Level Up* develops a line of trickster characters designed to teach morals concerning the Chinese American identity and culture.



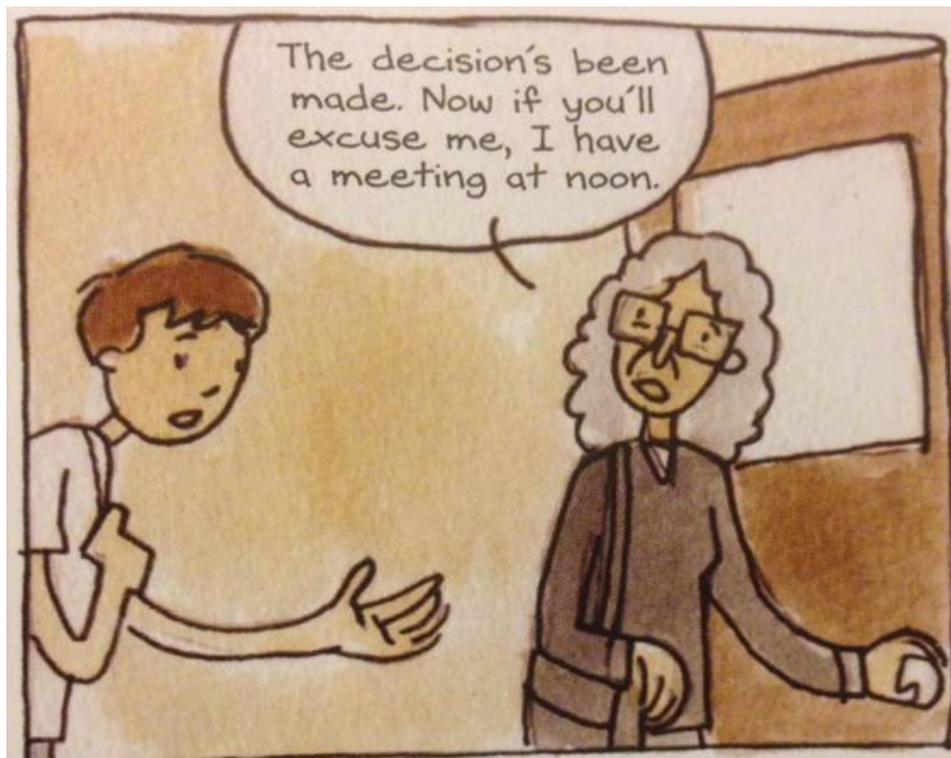
19: Thomas Nast, "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner." *Harper's Weekly*. From HarpWeek. (1869, November 20).

Thomas Nast’s “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner” imagines a time when people from various cultural backgrounds can come together for a meal as equals without prejudice. Clearly,

Nast envisions this as the American ideal of cultural amalgamation and hopes that one day all immigrants will be U.S. citizens with equal rights. Seated around the table are Chinese, Arabs, Native Americans, Africans, French, Italians, Spanish, Irish, and British. Uncle Sam carves the turkey and Columbia is seated between the Chinese and African families. Their presence represents the U.S. government and the country as a homeland for all people and signal Nast's hope that the U.S. government will encourage and support cross-cultural understanding. Nast uses exaggerated stereotypes with all cultures represented in this thanksgiving dinner. The Chinese family, like the men in "Celestial," is dressed in traditional Chinese attire and has stereotypically traditional hairstyles – a bun with chopsticks for the mother and the father and son wear their hair in a queue. The African man speaking with Columbia has skin so dark it is shiny as seen in the white patches on his forehead and cheek. His wife covers her hair with a cloth. A Native American man stands out at the back of the table and, like the Natives in "Move On!" and "Making White Men Good," wears a large feather in his headband. Germans, Spaniards, Italians, Arabs, Irish, British, and French are scattered around the table and identifiable by their clothing, facial hair, or facial features. Compared to other political cartoons, this comic is focused on a hopeful future for all cultures. Three portraits, of current and past presidents, hang on the wall above the table as if they were overseeing the gathering. The portrait on the right is the current president Ulysses Grant, with the words "15<sup>th</sup> Amendment" hung on a sash above. Abraham Lincoln hangs on the far left, where his words "with malice toward none and charity to all" are finely written beneath. The center portrait depicts George Washington. The presence of these three well-known political figures, along with Uncle Sam and Columbia as symbols of the U.S. reinforces Nast's hope that the government and all citizens of the country will embrace his values of equality, prosperity, and acceptance for all people. When compared to

current U.S. leaders, it is ironic that the majority of the U.S. political leaders today are white men. Nast's goals of equality have only extended as far as social acceptance among communities, not in government leadership positions.

Like Nast's "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner," Yang and Pham's *Level Up* includes characters from a culturally varied background. The main character is a Chinese American named Dennis Ouyang. The graphic novel follows his coming-of-age story as he struggles with school, family, friends, and ultimately acceptance – acceptance of the demands placed on him by family as well as acceptance of his own desires and abilities. The first character introduced to Dennis that represents the multicultural presence in this graphic novel is the Dean of his college Dr. Rodriguez.



20: Dennis with Dr. Rodriguez in *Level Up*, page 23

Based on her grey hair we can deduct that she is an older woman presumably with years of experience in academe. Her name implies she is of Hispanic descent. Her features, however, are not necessarily indicative of this assumption.



21: Takeem in *Level Up*. page 49.

Takeem, pictured above, becomes Dennis' best friend in college and they spend countless hours playing video games. He is drawn with dark skin and square eye glasses. His love of video games ultimately pulls Dennis away from his school work, causing his poor grades. After Dr. Rodriguez informs Dennis he is no longer allowed at school, Dennis meets four angels, who become his guides in achieving grades strong enough to be accepted into medical school.



22: The Angels in *Level Up*. page 37.

These four angels are diverse in their own way. Each has a different hair color and type and two are male while two are female. Just as the Monkey King in *American Born Chinese* changed himself to Chin-Kee to guide Jin back from his identity crisis as Danny, these angels guide Dennis through his struggle to develop independence and choose a career path in life. Dennis realizes these angels are representative of his father as they are from a card his father gave him before passing away while Dennis was still in high school. With the help of his new team, Dennis becomes more devoted to his studies and gets accepted into medical school.



23: Cathleen, Hector, Ipsha, and Dennis in *Level Up*. page 66.

On his first day, he makes three new friends: Ipsha Narang, Hector Martinez, and Cathleen Rhee. Ipsha is Indian. Surgeons are as much a part of her family tree as her genetic make-up; her father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all surgeons. She is in medical school to carry on the tradition. Hector Martinez is Hispanic. A bad car accident motivated him to pursue a medical career. Cathleen Rhee, nicknamed Kat, has “German rocket-scientist smarts and Korean pop star looks” (66). Kat was inspired to become a doctor when she and her father were saved by an anonymous doctor after being attacked during a robbery. Dennis is thrown into a culturally diverse group of committed students who are motivated by their own pasts to become doctors.

Comparing Nast’s comics with *Level Up* shows a shift from focusing on acceptance, equality, and prosperity to an emphasis on the parent-child interaction and how much of what is learned about the Asian experience comes from the view of the child’s parents. The reasons

Dennis and his friends are in medical school are representative of their relationships with their family. In an interview in *PW Comics World*, Yang discussed the way immigrant children learn about their culture through their parents' eyes and must discover a way to combine this identity with the "American identity" of "following your heart" (Scorzato). Yang opines "the children of immigrants . . . [are] very aware of the sacrifices that [their] parents made . . . in order to give [them] the life [they're] living now" (Scorzato). He also describes how many immigrants' children feel as if they must repay a debt to their parents because of these sacrifices. Finding a way to balance this need to repay a debt with their own desires is a struggle mirrored by Dennis and Ipsha; however, it is challenged by Kat. Dennis pursues a career in gastroenterology because the angels tell him it is his destiny. He does not question it because he sees it as a direct suggestion from his father and wishes to please his father. When he tries to explain this to Kat during class, she tells him "that's bullcrap . . . you make your own damn decisions. Choose your own damn destiny" (92). Dennis begins to wonder if he is on the right path in his life. Later, Kat brings it up again challenging Dennis to grow a backbone. This upsets Ipsha, who explains to Dennis that he is right to pursue gastroenterology for his father because his family defines him. This interpretation of fulfilling obligations to parents is rooted in Ipsha's Indian culture through the eyes of her parents. Kat, who is German and Korean, does not share this opinion. She admits her father wants her to run the family business, a laundromat, but instead she chose to pursue a medical career. Like Ipsha, Dennis has accepted the obligation of living up to parental expectations. Ipsha explains to Dennis that "everything [he has] comes from [his] family" (98). Dennis pursues a career in gastroenterology because he always wanted to make his father proud of him. However, he learns that his father really only wanted him to be happy. Dennis is able to have a conversation with his father, and he realizes that his father made promises to his parents

and uncle that he could not keep. However, one promise was made to Dennis – to make him a better man. He tells Dennis “a happier man is a better man” (129). Dennis’ father did not want him to become a gastroenterologist – that was a promise Dennis’ father made to others. His father only wanted him to be happy because that happiness would make him a better man. This leads Dennis to quit medical school and search for his own happiness in the world. Yang and Pham show that acceptance, equality, and prosperity are still important today. However, they emphasize new struggles among immigrant families such as the struggle for children to live up to parental expectations while also fulfilling their own dreams.

Like *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection* and *American Born Chinese, Level Up* includes trickster figures to represent Chinese Americans and other children of immigrants. Yang’s desire to emphasize the struggle between the children of immigrants to fulfill their parents desires while also achieving their own goals is taught by these trickster angels. The angels exhibit three of the trickster qualities outlined by Hynes and Doty: deceiver and trick-play, shape-shifter, and messenger of the Gods (34-42). As angels, these tricksters appear to be a messenger from heaven assigned to ensure Dennis achieves his destiny. The angels teach Dennis that he must take control of his own destiny. He needs to forgive his father and himself for any regrets he may have. These angels join Dennis after he was kicked out of school. They confront Dr. Rodriguez and convince her to allow Dennis a second chance. They then persuade Dennis to give up his games and he gives everything to Takeem. He spends his undergraduate years in class and at home studying. Once he is accepted to medical school, he does not even have the chance to celebrate because the angels tell him it is time to pack and move to the next stepping stone on the path to becoming a gastroenterologist. They teach Dennis the importance of staying focused to achieve his goals. Once Dennis joins medical school, he

makes friends with three other classmates and they begin studying together. The angels become overbearing, insisting that he study at home like he did before, but Dennis enjoys his friendship until the confrontation with Kat. Once he starts studying at home, the angels are convinced he has found a renewed sense of purpose. But in actuality, Dennis is becoming burned out. By telling Dennis what to do and smothering him, these tricksters are tricking Dennis into realizing that he needs to become more active in determining his destiny. Once Dennis realizes this, he confronts the angels and tells them he no longer wishes to attend medical school. The angels respond by shouting that he's grounded causing Dennis to run away. As the angels chase him, they shape-shift into ghosts and in typical pac-man fashion, Dennis dubs himself the "little yellow man" and eats them (132). Each ghost links Dennis to a promise his father made to someone else. Three of these promises were made to family members to become a doctor. These are the promises Dennis' father broke because he did not become a doctor but an engineer. The final promise Dennis' father made was when Dennis was a baby and his promise was to make Dennis a better man. In this way, the tricksters teach Dennis the importance of keeping his promises. They become a symbol for struggles among children of immigrants. Through their constant nagging of Dennis to push himself harder to fulfill his father's dream, they portray the struggles children of immigrants feel to live up to their parents' expectations.

Nast creates detailed drawings in his comics that emphasize stereotypes to define different cultures whereas Pham uses watercolors and a more relaxed art in *Level Up* that de-emphasizes stereotypes. Avoiding details in his characters, Pham differentiates characters by the shapes of their faces, their heights, and the pigmentation of their skin. In *Level Up*, most of the reader's ability to determine the ethnicity of the characters comes from their names or statements made about them. Pham avoided painting Dennis with exaggerated stereotypes and instead used

language to challenge stereotypes. When Dennis discovers the angels are ghosts that link him to a memory with his father, he thinks of himself as the “little yellow man” (132). The appearance of the ghosts immediately draws readers’ minds to the popular game Pac-man. However, this statement also refers to a stereotype that originated in the 1800s when the Chinese who came to the U.S. were seen as threat to other workers and were dubbed the “yellow peril.” For this reason, the man in “A Statue for Our Harbor” has yellowish skin. These yellow references are included in a subtle way to show that while some stereotyping still exists, its existence is humorous. Yang relates Dennis to a yellow video game character created by an Asian man. This comparison to a yellow character draws on historical stereotypes but also pokes fun at the stereotype. In this way, Dennis’ similarities to pacman are satirical. Dennis’ skin is not painted yellow.

The angel/ghosts are similar to other tricksters. Both the ghosts and the Monkey King/Chin-Kee from *American Born Chinese* are trickster figures responsible for guiding a Chinese American through difficult developmental years. These tricksters instill a sense of self-confidence in their non-trickster counterparts. Like the animal tricksters in the stories in *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection*, the actions of the ghosts teach morals. Chin-Kee challenges cultural stereotypes whereas the ghosts address cultural traits pertaining to responsibilities within families. Each approaches their role of trickster differently but all effectively help others learn important lessons.

The difference in the use of stereotypes between Nast and Pham proves a shift has occurred in the way Asian Americans and other cultures are viewed. The concept that any non-white is considered “other” has shifted to a greater level of inclusiveness for all cultures. It has become a time to celebrate differences between cultures, not other groups because of them.

Nast's vision of "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner" has become less of a hope and more of a reality. Nast uses the queue, kimono, and bowing gestures as stereotypical symbols of the Chinese. These symbols no longer exist in cartoons as a way to define a character as Asian. Similarly, stereotypes are not needed to symbolize other cultures.

Both of these works highlight the goal of integration and intercultural friendships. Nast envisioned people from all parts of the world sharing a dinner and giving thanks together. Pham and Yang developed a world in which peers from a variety of backgrounds come together and develop friendships. Both works also highlight the possibility of success regardless of ethnicity. Yang and Pham's diverse characters all share equal opportunity to become doctors and seek successful careers. The ghosts as tricksters represent the struggle felt by many immigrants' children to live up to their parent's expectations while achieving their own dreams. Nast spotlights the opportunity for "universal suffrage" at the centerpiece to the dinner table. Separated by over a century, these works have much in common regarding acknowledging and accepting diversity. What Nast created as a dream in "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner," Yang and Pham made a reality in *Level Up*.

## Conclusion:

Native and Asian Americans have been othered by society to the point of exclusion by the white majority. Racist stereotypes were rampant in the political cartoons published in the late 1800s. Although Thomas Nast's works were in support of equality and acceptance of Native and Asian Americans, he still incorporated these stereotypes. Other political cartoonists of the 1800s used these stereotypes to incite fear and hatred. Artists and writers of *Trickster: Native American Tales, A Graphic Collection*, *American Born Chinese*, and *Level Up* have worked to combat these stereotypes. They have also incorporated the trickster figure to aid in the emergence of the Native and Asian American voice in opposition to these stereotypes.

The perceptions of Native Americans have shifted since the 1800s. This shift is apparent when comparing 1800s political cartoons "Move On!" and "Making White Men Good" by Nast, "Christian' Statesmanship" by Bengough, and "The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves" from *The Daily Graphic* to *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection* published in the 2010. The stereotypes present in Nast's comics cause viewers to see many differences between the white majority and Native Americans. Although Nast advocated for equality and citizenship for the Native American people, his use of exaggerated stereotypes caused his readers to other Native Americans. Bengough's "Christian' Statesmanship" has similar effects. Drawn as people in need of a government to protect and support them, the Native Americans appear sick and poor next to the fat wealthy contractor. Bengough's intentions were to show how the government was failing to help people in need; however, he effectively othered Native Americans and made them appear less human in this work by leaving out detailed features such as faces. *The Daily Graphic's* "The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves" has no positive intent concerning the Native American people. Depicted as half-man,

half-beast creatures, Native Americans in this image came across as a group to be feared and destroyed, not assisted or assimilated. In comparison, *Trickster* is written by Native Americans and consists of age-old trickster tales that have been passed down through the oral storytelling tradition with Native American tribes. Many of the short stories included in this graphic collection of stories portray animals, emphasizing the importance of nature for Native American cultures. A direct comparison between *The Daily Graphic's* "The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves" and "Coyote and the Pebbles" from *Trickster* shows two different animal forms for Native Americans. This also shows the shift in the societal perception of Native Americans. "The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves" political cartoon encouraged fear of the Native Americans. "Coyote and the Pebbles" shows Native American tricksters who can shift from animal to human form. In both forms, the trickster appears ordinary. The human form of coyote has lines on his face to represent whiskers. In his animal form, he appears to be an ordinary coyote. Gone is the grotesque image of a half-beast man with monstrous facial features and hands. The Native American is normalized in the images in this tale while the traditional trickster figure is emphasized through shape shifting qualities. Additionally, the artist of this tale shows details in the forest around Coyote. As a compilation of Native American trickster tales, this graphic collection serves as proof of the shift from Native Americans as other to them being accepted by society. Through this book, the trickster becomes a public figure for Native Americans as their tales are shared with society encouraging acceptance for all.

Just as perceptions of Native Americans have shifted, perceptions of Asian Americans have also shifted. This becomes visible through comparisons of Nast's "Celestial," Keller's "A Statue For Our Harbor," and Yang's *American Born Chinese*. "Celestial" and "A Statue For Our

Harbor” broach the subject of who has the right to work in the U.S. These political cartoons, although published in the same year, offer opposing views on the topic. Both cartoons incorporate stereotypes in their work that other the Chinese. This is not the effect Nast sought; he pushed for equality and prosperous opportunities for the Chinese. Keller, on the other hand, purposefully othered the Chinese. His political cartoon was designed to incite fear among the white working class of the Chinese immigrants. Published over a century later, Yang’s *American Born Chinese* confronts these stereotypes. Chin-Kee is the embodiment of many of these stereotypes. His fashion resembles the Chinese men in Nast and Keller’s work. He also embodies stereotypes that have developed since the 1800s, such as the Asian nerd, by answering all the teacher’s questions in class eagerly and correctly. Through his interactions with his cousin Danny/Jin, Chin-Kee portrays all the qualities Jin fears he has and by which his peers judge him based on these stereotypes. This fear is so great that he changes his persona by becoming Danny. However, he learns that even as the popular, well-accepted Danny he cannot achieve all his desires. Yang tackles the struggle with acceptance by peers and self-acceptance for Chinese American youth. He uses Chin-Kee’s persona to poke fun at racial stereotypes that began centuries ago. Chin-Kee pushes readers to realize the many stereotypes that exist concerning Chinese culture. By interacting with Jin/Danny, this trickster makes it clear these stereotypes can be damaging to Chinese Americans and invites society to defy these stereotypes instead of reinforcing them.

*Level Up* emphasizes the importance of intercultural friendships and includes characters from several cultural backgrounds as friends, teachers, mentors, and administrators. Published over a century before *Level Up*, Nast’s “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner” portrayed various cultures sitting together for a meal. In this image, Nast included stereotypes to show differences

between people of different cultures as a celebration of these differences among a united group. By comparison, the characters in *Level Up* interact with each other on a regular basis. Once in medical school, Dennis meets with his friends often. Together, they represent Chinese, Indian, Korean, German, and Spanish backgrounds in their friendship. Unlike Nast, Pham avoids the use of stereotypes in his watercolor illustrations. In this way, he shows that there are more similarities than differences among various cultures. In addition to including a cultural amalgamation, Yang and Pham address concerns among immigrants' children to live up to parental expectations. For Dennis, trickster angels appear to ensure his destiny to become a gastroenterologist is fulfilled. Unlike the Monkey King, who is a traditional Chinese trickster, the angels emerge as new tricksters. They fulfill three characteristics outlined by Hynes and Doty: they are messengers from Heaven, they deceive Dennis, they shape-shift into ghosts. These angels smother Dennis and become so pushy that he realizes he must make his own decisions concerning his life instead of attempting to fulfill someone else's dream for his life. In this way, these trickster angels highlight issues among today's Chinese American youth and offer insight into ways to handle these pressures.

The political cartoons of the 1800s are riddled with damaging stereotypes that other non-white groups. *Trickster: Native American Tales, a Graphic Collection, American Born Chinese,* and *Level Up* offer images that combat these stereotypes showing that they should not be used to identify a cultural group. The trickster characters aid in this process and encourage society to look beyond common stereotypes and seek understanding of various cultural ideals to achieve inclusiveness for all people. Just as the Monkey King served as a "signpost to [Jin's] soul," may his story, and those of the other tricksters outlined here, serve as a signpost to all souls as society

works to abolish stereotypes and move further towards acceptance of all cultures (Yang, *American Born Chinese* 211).

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