Ceremony- A Book Report Including Indian Culture And Mythology Essay, Research Paper

FEAR=DESTRUCTION

They fear

They fear the world.

They destroy what they fear.

They fear themselves.

They will kill the things they fear

all the animals

the people will starve.

They will fear what they find

They will fear the people

They kill what they fear (Silko 136).

Leslie Marmon Silko uses these three short passages taken from an ancient Indian story included in the novel Ceremony to express and convey the idea that the white man s fear was the primary factor contributing to their negative actions toward the Indian people. The ancient Indian story that the passages are pulled from also explains how Indian witchery led to the invention of the white people and all the evil inside of them, causing them to destroy the world and everything else that inhabits it.

When the wind blew the white people across the ocean, thousands of them in giant boats (Silko 136), they were faced with the unfamiliar culture of the Indian people. Besides the fact that the Indians were in their way of expansion and development, the white man feared what they found. They feared an unknown language that they had never heard before and could not understand. They feared rituals and ceremonies that seemed strange and suspicious. They feared a social unity of sharing and togetherness that they found alarming and intimidating.

The Indians woke up one morning to find that the lands they once belonged to were no longer theirs. The deeds and papers said the land now belonged to the white folk. It was taken away from them by sheer physical force, stolen, and they were sent away to live on reservations. Tayo was a part of the Laguna Pueblo reservation.

As a young kid on the Laguna Pueblo reservation, Tayo and the other children were sent away to white schools, and it was mandatory that they did not speak in their native tongue or take part in any of their old ways. The teachers told them to forget what they had learned back on the reservation, that they had no reason to believe the superstitious stories any more. Now they should believe in books and science because they explained the causes and effects (Silko 94). The white man feared the different culture of the Indians, and they wanted the Indians to forget their past so they could easily influence them and make them conform to the white ways. An Indian story says,

Their evil is mighty

but it can t stand up to our stories.

So they try to destroy the stories

let the stories be confused or forgotten.

They would like that

They would be happy

Because we would be defenseless then (Silko 2).

For example, one day Josiah found a bunch of dead flies in the house and confronted Tayo about it. Josiah asked why he did it and Tayo replied that the teacher at school said flies are bad because they carry sickness and disease. The white teachers had taught him something against his culture because Indians are supposed to respect all life forms on the earth. Josiah told him the story of how the greenbottle flies are special messengers and how he should remember the story next time he thinks about killing a fly or any animal for that matter.

Old Betonie, the medicine man, recalled a time when the white people were extremely fearful of Indians. He said, I was at the World s fair in St. Louis, Missouri, the year they had Geronimo there on display. The white people were scared to death of him. Some of them even wanted him in leg irons (Silko 122). Instead of appreciating Geronimo for his unique culture, he was disrespected and treated as a freak show exhibit. The white people did not try to learn about his background or interact with him because they were too fearful to look past his differences and accept him as a fellow human being.

The white man introduced alcohol (firewater) to the Indians in an attempt to control them, manipulate them, and take advantage of them. As the Indian people became more dependent on the alcohol, the white man fed the addiction with more alcohol, more bars, and more liquor stores. The Indian people turned to alcohol to ease their pain and to drown their sorrows, which corresponded perfectly to the plan the white people had in mind. The Indians abandoned their culture and forgot about the ways of old, leaving them in a vulnerable position for the white man to move in and take over. The Indians no longer worried about stories, customs, or ceremonies. Their new mission was to get drunk. With culture, tradition, and togetherness missing from the Indian people, their uncorrupted lifestyles were now tarnished with the ill effects of vomiting cheap wine and participating in prostitution. The power and unity they once shared with each other had disappeared, and the sacred ground they appreciated and respected was no longer under their control. The land was now in the hands of the white man, which would lead to devastating abuse, pollution, resource depletion, and eventually destruction.

The ancient Indian story said, They will fear the people and They will kill what they fear (Silko 136). The white man was so extremely fearful of Indians as well as other people from foreign lands that they felt it was necessary to develop a powerful army to protect their interests and defend themselves. They built up their arsenal with guns, bombs and missiles. Eventually they developed what would be the most dangerous and devastating weapon on the face of the earth, the atomic bomb. Top scientists and experts in the field of nuclear fusion met together in top-secret laboratories deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the Government took from the Cochiti Pueblo, and created the highly sophisticated nuclear weapon (Silko 246).

Up here

In these hills

They will find the rocks,

Rocks with veins of green and yellow and black.

They will lay the final pattern with these rocks

They will lay it across the world

And explode everything (Silko 137).

In order for Tayo to complete his ceremony he ironically had to use an ore rock, streaked with powdery yellow uranium (Silko 246). Uranium was a main component used to make the atomic bomb. When the atomic bomb explodes it kills all life forms in its path, leaving radioactive waste to ensure there will no longer be life. If the Indian story is true, a nuclear war will be the human event to end all human events.

Works Cited

Silko, Leslie Marmon. Ceremony. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.