

The last samurai essay sample



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Samurai are a group of powerful warriors that existed in Japan until the late 1800's. In the film "The Last Samurai" we have the opportunity to learn more about the positive characteristics of them. Samurai is very compassionate and they humbly express that emotion. Perhaps the most important trait of the Samurai, is discipline. The Last Samurai is a war and drama film, based on a true story depicting honour and courage. Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise) is an American civil war veteran who carries moral scars of his victory against the native Indians. He drowns his guilt in alcohol until his old commander drags him into meeting with Prince Mitsui, a Japanese businessman who offers Algren to train the Japanese government army. At that time Japan was led by Emperor Meiji who had a vision of modern army. He had ideas of improving the performance of the army through the latest fire-weapons and implying war strategies. And this is the moment when the conflict arises since the old Japanese samurai society stands against this rapid transformation.

Led by Katsumoto a few hundred samurai, rebel and are ordered to be eliminated. This is when Algren comes to demonstrate the power of the weapons and allow American traders to sell weapons to the upgraded Japanese army to fight against those rebels. During the first encounter between them, Algren falls and is captured by the enemy. He is then taken to the samurai village up in the mountains where he learns to interact with them, discovers their culture and observes their fighting methods. During his "captivity", a friendship is born between Algren and Katsumoto. They learn to understand each other's cultural discrepancies and adapt to each other's characters. Captain Algren says in the film that Samurai are the most

disciplined people he has ever met. Throughout the movie, the Samurai were shown to be extremely polite. They are very polite even to a man who has killed a very close person from their family. In the movie Taka is very polite to the person that killed her husband.

Algren becomes so impregnated with the values that the samurai defend, that he practically becomes more than just one of them and ends up leading them along sides Katsumoto into battle facing his own battalion. Compassion is an emotion that the Samurai have mastered. It is a feeling that occurs when seeing others in physical, mental or emotional pain. The respect and compassion go hand-in-hand and if a samurai felt compassion for anyone they would do whatever is possible to make the sufferer feel better.

Katumoto, for example, felt remorse towards Algren and he offered him a chance to commit Seppuku. This is an honourable custom for the Samurai to end their own life after defeat. Even though Algren declined, Katsumoto gave him a temporary place to live, his sister Taka's home. It was her husband that was killed by Algren during the battle. To let your enemy live in your closest family member's home is a true act of compassion.

There are two main protagonists in the plot: Algren and Katsumoto. They are representatives of two very different cultures which hardly have anything in common. They display different types of leadership which are closely correlated with their cultural differences. Algren has got a fiery personality which contrasts to Katsumoto's reserved and introverted one. When the samurai enjoys moments of silence, the captain is frustrated with his non-talkative guard. There are many variations in behavior that can be explained with regards to their conception of personal space and traditions. Algren's

impulsive behavior often drives him to make decisions that are not in his best interest. Katsumoto takes his time before making a decision but this time makes the decision wiser and more rational. The spirituality of the Japanese culture as well as their values are omnipresent in all aspects of their lives.

Algren is amazed by their devotion to the perfection of their everyday tasks and is intrigued with the spirituality that emanates from their beliefs. While he is living among them he is surprised to discover the meaning of the word “ samurai”: to serve. This is one of the major discrepancies between the two men and this is the aspect of leadership that Algren learns from Katsumoto. As the plot develops, the relationship between the two grows from enemies, prisoner and oppressor, teacher and student, partners with common interests, even reaching the friendship state. This infusion of values leads to the situation when we see an inverted situation in which Algren attends Katsumoto’s moment of weakness. In the scene with the final battle, Katsumoto confides in his friend seemingly afraid of the outcome. The emperor had previously refused to consider his proposal, which broke Katsumoto’s faith and hope for a common understanding. In this situation, Algren actively listens to the inner fears of the great leader and in a very directive way, attempts to motivate him and re-enforce hope and optimism “ It’s not over yet”.

All through this movie, Algren displays values of a charismatic leader that is not however always admired for his choices. Even in his moments of weakness, Captain Algren’s leading skills are still clearly embedded in his identity. As the character develops, many aspects of leadership can be

observed through the ideals that he represents. First of all, honour is somehow the dominant value in the plot as it encompasses truth beyond practicality and efficiency. This is one of the concepts that Captain Algren learned during the time he spent with the samurai. In the plot, honour is frequently interlinked to courage and can be admired in the struggle of the warriors and their leaders as much in personal battles or field wars. As Algren confronts Katsumoto, he discovers a spirituality, consisting in loyalty, heroism, courage, justice, courtesy, compassion and sincerity. The following observation is a chronological overview description of some of the leadership traits that were revealed through Algren's behavior in different scenes. In each situation, the interaction between characters is explained and the aspects of leadership underlined. A few quotes:

“ What does it mean to be Samurai: To devote yourself utterly to a set of moral principles; to seek a stillness of your mind, and to master the way of the sword.” - Nathan Algren Samurai are absolutely devoted to what they do and to who they serve. Their master or teacher is like their god. Failure is unbearable for them, they would rather die instead of live with the memory of unsuccess.

“ There is so much here I will never understand. I've never been a church going man, and what I've seen on the field of battle has led me to question God's purpose. But there is indeed something spiritual in this place. And though it may forever be obscure to me, I cannot but be aware of its power.”

- Nathan Algren What Algren means is that once felt the atmosphere in the Samurai village, he opened his mind to things that were unaccountable for him. After touching upon the samurai culture he is changed, he sees the

world with his inner eyes. He has new sensations for thoughts, feelings, morality, loyalty, honour. He does not take war the way he took it before. Now he is an honourable man and warrior, proud of himself, not ashamed of his previous deeds.

“ Katsumoto: You believe a man can change his destiny?

Nathan Algren: I think a man does what he can, until his destiny is revealed.”

“ Emperor Meiji: Tell me how he died.

Nathan Algren: I will tell you how he lived.”

In these quotes it is obvious that we meet the new Captain Algren. He now believes in destiny, this is the most important part of a human's life. He honours life, not death. He is certain that deeds are important and they are reasons for living a worth life. Deeds are what stay after a person is gone and they speak of what kind of person they have been while on earth.

Conclusion:

This analysis portrays the characteristic traits that represent the leadership attitudes of Nathan Algren, the main actor in the synopsis. However, another character is worth being also studied in his positions, principles and uncommon behaviors. Katsumoto, the Samurai rebel, is the incarnation of a true leader whom followers respect and admire to the point where they would be willing to devote their lives for him out of conviction and affection. A relevant point to the interaction between the two types of leaders is one of the most important features of leadership perpetuity. That is one of the reasons that caught Katsumoto's attention during his first encounter with Algren, watching him persevere in the fight till the end. Katsumoto saw in <https://assignbuster.com/the-last-samurai-essay-sample/>

him the spirit of a leader, and the film's plot witnesses the evolution of the link between the two men. When the relationship reaches a certain trust and maturity, Katsumoto's attitude towards Algren become that of a teacher, a trainer, a guide. Katsumoto takes the responsibility of steering Algren and molding his character to conduct him to become his successor. This is how Algren himself becomes "The Last Samurai".