

The poisonwood bible: marxism and american arrogance towards congo



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Arrogance has proved to cause more harm than good in history, specifically between the United States and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United States and the Congo have a very chaotic past, with the US constantly trying to interfere with the Congolese' decisions. The USA, in this case, is unable to admit to their faults within their system. Kingsolver uses the Poisonwood Bible to show the consequences of intervention into another culture. Their religious and cultural interference is representative of the interference of the United States. This book also contains the Marxist thought, which " refers to the political and economic theories of Karl Marx. He believed that history was largely determined by the struggle between the ruling classes and the oppressed classes, which had conflicting interests." The story is told through the eyes of an American mother and her four children who were brought to the Congo in 1959 by their Baptist minister father. The Poisonwood Bible is a political allegory used to show the American arrogance and Marxism through three of the narrators, Nathan, Rachel and Ruth May.

Nathan Price's arrogance and disrespect reflect the attitudes that the Americans had towards the Congo. He is unable to see himself as incorrect and refuses to change his views or opinions. He shows his disrespect and stubbornness with the Underdowns, the people who welcomed and send supplies to the Prices, warned him about the independence movement. Nathan brushes them off and insults the Congolese by saying " They don't have the temperament or the intellect for such things." (Kingsolver 156) His response to the Underdowns mirrors how the United States believed they could rule the Congolese Nation because they thought they were powerless.

His arrogance reflects the attitudes the USA had towards the Native people as he tried to impose his beliefs on the native people, without even stopping to think about what they wanted or needed. (Kakutani) These actions also reflect the approach the Americans had on the Congolese and can be seen through the quote " American aid will be the Congo's salvation! You'll see!" This shows the selfish and single-minded ways of Nathan Price that would eventually lead to his downfall. Nathan Price shows the Marxist criticism by believing his and his religion is superior to the Natives. He continuously tried to shove his beliefs down their throats because he thinks they are better than the rich culture the Congolese have. Nathan acts without caring about what is best for those who depend on him, just like the countries in power. His religious and cultural interference in the Congo is representative of how the United States treated the Congo as well.

Rachel Price is a 15-year-old white Christian girl unable to detach herself from the American way of life. She shows her love for material possession in the quote " Rachel muttered, as her beloved toiletry items got pitched out of the suitcase one by one". Materialism is a constant struggle for the Price family, encouraged by a system that keeps the first world wealthy. Living in the United States has tainted Rachel's perception of the third world as she says " They seem to think we are Santa Claus, the way the children come around begging us for food and things every single day". In the 1950s systematic racism was engrained in American culture. As segregation and discrimination against African-American people were prevalent. Rachel makes this clear for the passage " We aren't all that accustomed to African race to begin with since back home they just keep to their own parts of

town". This shows the Marxist criticism because as a white American, Rachel views herself in a position of power. She believes that she is superior to the Congolese just because of her race. The danger of immersing racism into the very culture that it oppresses seems clear. Just as the mercy of the United States in the Congo affairs should've been clear. At the time the US was already faced with its own broken system making it inappropriate to intervene. The author uses the voice of Rachel Price to convey this message to her readers.

Ruth May Price represents the racist pollution on innocent minds. Her rapid deterioration of health is a portrayal of the rapid deterioration of the Congo after becoming independent. Even before she arrives in the Congo, 5-year-old Ruth May has a grasp on racial inequalities within her own country. She says, " They don't come in the White Castle restaurant where Mama takes us to get Cokes either, or to the Zoo. Their day for the Zoo is Thursday. That's in the Bible". This shows how a young child can be brainwashed by society and is indicative of her western superiority. Ruth May's symbolism of the African nation is represented through her rapid death. Through Ruth May, the reader is able to understand the speed at which the venomous snake took her life. " Suddenly it flew at the pole, striking twice, then, flung itself from the nest box and shot past us out the door into the morning, gone." The tone of this quote implies the shock of the observer. Just as the downfall of the Congo was shocking to its people. One of the most significant facts that relates back to the political allegory, Ruth May died on January 17, 1961, the same day that Patrice Lumumba was assassinated. Patrice Lumumba was the first legally elected Prime Minister of the Congo, who was only in power

for seven months, as he was assassinated by someone the United States hired to kill him. Ruth May was the heart of the Price family, Lumumba was the heart of the Congo, as he was the leader of the independence movement. Both Ruth May and the Congo were abandoned when in desperate need of a savior. The lack of a hero led to the death of an innocent child and the downfall of a nation.

Each character in *The Poisonwood Bible* is used as a different representation of the westernized culture and Marxism, shown through a political allegory. American Christianity, racism, and arrogance lead to the undoing of an ideal American family as well as a nation rich in culture. The American government intervened with heroic intentions, but immediately retreated when chaos erupted. This book took place over 60 years ago, why has America still not changed its attitude or arrogance towards other countries?