

Who rules the water rules la essay sample

Family, Parents



This essay compares and contrasts power as it is depicted in the short story by William Faulkner titled "Golden Land" and in Carey McWilliams essay "Water! Water! Water!" in his book titled Southern California: An island on the land. Both texts are set in Los Angeles, California where Hollywood is a presence. Hollywood is a metaphor for immorality; in Hollywood money and power are linked. For example, if people are rich they are assumed to have power. Therefore if you are powerful on the West Coast then you can make or break millionaires. You can also ruin people's lives and crush their dreams. Comparing and contrasting McWilliams essay which is a journalist's account and Faulkner's short story which is fiction may help identify whether Hollywood's rich and powerful are immoral.

Ira brought his mother to live in Beverly Hills fifteen years ago. He wanted to give her all the things he thought she would enjoy after her hard life farming in Nebraska. He is upset because one of the servants has shown his mother the newspaper headlines about his daughter's trial. He tries to explain to his mother, "Yes, I'm making money. I'm making it fast while I can. I'm going to make a lot of it. I'm going to give my children luxuries and advantages that my father never dreamed a child might have" (Faulkner 12). Ira's mother is the measure of morality in the story against Ira's immorality. He uses power in inappropriate ways starting with the way he raises his children. She has tried to talk to him about the problems of his children from the time they were young, but he would not listen. Ira's wife would not listen. Ira's wife has not even communicated with Ira's mother since the children were small. There is an irony that Ira has given his mother everything he thought she would want. He wanted to give her things she could not have in Nebraska.

But unfortunately, for his mother she does not want anything to do with his money or Los Angeles. For fifteen years his mother has been trying to save enough money to buy a train ticket back to Nebraska.

Ira's mother's view of California is the view of the outsider and perhaps the most crystal clear and moral view. She is being given everything that makes her life the opposite of what she would have if she were still living in Nebraska. Because of this she experiences California as immoral and feels a desperate need to return to Nebraska. She wants to leave but she cannot because her son pays for everything so she has no money. She is the one person in the story who can see underneath the self-deceptive shiny surface of Beverly Hills. She does not like what she sees at all. But she is a prisoner there. She is the mother, who in parent-child relationships often denotes some kind of power, but she has none. She does not want to be there, but her son is rich and he has all the power, so she has no choice but to stay until she can save enough money to buy a train ticket for home. Ira's mother's perspective on California is that of an outsider. Her income situation, that she has no money, is similar to a Californian cultural problem raised by Casey McWilliams. That is the use of power to take the resources from the indigenous people of California and the Mexicans.

The power dynamics of Southern California demonstrate a lack of cooperation in decision-making throughout its history. McWilliams (1946) explains that in the beginning, the power dynamics in California were between the people living there and the Spanish colonial powers. He explains that the Spanish were not happy that the Hispanic people living

there were still very powerful in 1859.

As late as 1870, the native Californians outnumbered the Spanish in Santa Barbara County, owned more than a third of the property, and occupied numerous positions of prominence in the community. (McWilliams 64)

In terms of the other people already there, the indigenous Indians, the power of The Catholic Church used them as slaves for the missions. The “ pre-American social structure in California” was built of the Spanish aristocrats, the Indians and the Mexicans (McWilliams 52). This the foundation upon which the American societal power structure was built as people migrated to California from east of the Rocky Mountains.

McWilliams also notes that the first migrants to reach California were from New England and New York. The geographical point of departure changed over time. People started migrating from the Middle West, then from Texas and then from the Southwest as well as from Nebraska. State associations were organized in Southern California to welcome others migrating from the same state. In 1886 the Illinois Associate of Southern California added several resolutions to the charter including the following.

Resolved: That we heartily welcome other refugees from Illinois and will do all in our power to make them realize that they are sojourning in a City of Angels, where their hearts will be irrigated by the healing waters flowing from the perennial fountains of health, happiness, and longevity. (McWilliams 167)

This attitude towards water is a mythological concept not based on reality. In fact the people and entities who own the water own the power throughout the history of California. For the Indians water was not considered property

but after the Americans settled there in great numbers the water wars started. Water wars may be inevitable because people do not want to share; so where there is war there is always someone powerful trying to win the war. McWilliams pointed out that “ As late as 1870, a limited number of windmills and surface wells barely sufficed to supply water for the livestock and the irrigated gardens of the ranches” (184).

A good example of lack of collaboration in decision-making is the battle for water. Los Angeles had a big challenge, a big water war, in order to supply the city with enough water. They did so by taking the supply of water that usually reached the farms in Owen Valley. In real life the water rights were successfully secured for the city of LA which seems like a happy ending to the story. It was not a very happy ending for farmers though because the farmers who were growing crops in Owens Valley were put out of business because they had no water to grow their crops. It was not a happy ending for Los Angeles either because as time passed more trouble with water developed. Toxic industrial chemicals had entered the ground water which cost billions to clean up. Then a new water war started with Southern California in a struggle for water with its adversaries Northern California and Arizona.

In Los Angeles it can be difficult to evaluate who is in power because there always seems to be a power struggle going on. The power struggles seem to always end up disastrous for some innocent and vulnerable group. For example in the water wars of the 1910s and the 1920s the farmers and their families ended up suffering the most when Los Angeles secured the Owen

Valley water rights. The farmers' crops died and the families had to leave the valley. A more recent water war that started in the 1970s pitted one half of California against the other. The three parties fighting for water are northern California, southern California, and Arizona. The water wars are the perfect example of the serious power struggles that go on and real estate developers like Faulkner's Ira are big players in the battles. Ira's mother represented the plight of the poor and the vulnerable in "Golden Land" where she was held as more or less a prisoner by her son. This brief examination of fictional and factual tales from Hollywood demonstrate that indeed, Hollywood's powerful are immoral because they use their power to gain more power on the backs of vulnerable people.

References

Faulkner, William. "Golden Land" New York: Signet classics, 1988 [1935].
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McWilliams, Carey. "Water, water, water" in Southern California: An island on the land, Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1973 (1946), pp. 52-64; 183 to 204.