

# Savage vs civilized essay sample



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By definition, a savage is someone who is natural or of nature. Today's definition of a savage is also any person, group or behaviour that is distinct from civilization. In the novel, Robinson Crusoe, the character Friday does not fit this description. Defoe describes Friday, not in terms of a savage but in European terms. Clearly Friday is not European, yet his features are not consistent with the description of savage. Throughout the novel, Crusoe attempts to civilize Friday. In doing so, Crusoe shows us his own negative traits and the darker side of his own personality which makes us question the idea of "civilized" being better than "savage". Friday is a product of the civilization that surrounds him where he comes from. His appearance, behaviour and beliefs are that of all the others in his tribe. Yet, he seems not to be barbaric in any way. Defoe describes Friday not being barbaric or surly but more softened like a European. "And yet he had all the sweetness and softness of an European" (Defoe 219). Except for his cannibalism, Defoe does not depict Friday as being savage-like. Crusoe preconceives an idea of a savage, but it is not apparent in Friday.

When they first meet, Friday uses sign language to communicate with Crusoe, which is an indication that Friday is civilized to some degree. He is quick to learn Crusoe's language and eager to learn more. This clearly shows that Friday is more cultured than what Crusoe thinks of as savage, especially by the 18th century standards. It is apparent that Friday has some religious beliefs, which are also a sign of civilization. When Crusoe saves him from those who want to devour him, Friday is extremely grateful and offers himself as an eternal servant to Crusoe. This shows that he has a sense of higher order. Later, when Crusoe teaches Friday English, they have a

discussion about God and Friday's God Benamukee. Friday questions Crusoe about the devil and why Crusoe's ever powerful God did not just kill the devil. (Defoe 220-230) This question shows Friday's openness and willingness to embrace a new religion as well as his intellect. Crusoe does not have an answer for Friday. Later, Crusoe remarks that Friday is learning Christianity so well that he may be better than him (Defoe 233).

Religion is also a sign of civilization. Friday is completely loyal to Crusoe, an honourable human characteristic. After a while Crusoe is aware of this but still does not trust him. He thinks Friday will leave the island and may attempt to kill and eat him. He shows Crusoe that he is a completely loyal servant. "for never Man has a more faithful, loving, sincere servant, than Friday was to me without passions, sullenness or designs, perfectly oblig'd and engag'd; his very affections were ty'd to me, like those of a child to a father;" (Defoe 222). Later, a group of natives land on the island with three canoes and prisoners. Crusoe is afraid that Friday may not be loyal to him. Friday says, "Me die, when you bid die, Master" (Defoe 241). This reveals Friday's complete loyalty to Crusoe. Friday's simplistic and honest approach to life goes against Crusoe's beliefs of humanity. Being able to learn so quickly, it is evident that Friday is not as primitive as Defoe reveals. During three years they are together, Friday teaches Crusoe many things that are useful. Friday explains the currents surrounding the island. He tells Crusoe that the current goes one way in the morning and another in the afternoon. (Defoe 227).

This explanation clearly shows that Friday is knowledgeable in navigation around this island. Friday, explains to Crusoe about the cannibalism of his

tribe. In explaining this to Crusoe, Friday discloses that cannibalism is a ritual they only perform on enemies of other tribes. This ritual by his tribe is just one small part of Friday's former tribal customs. This understanding of his surrounding environment shows us that Friday is not a true savage but knows much more of the world than Crusoe believes. Friday shows an array of emotions. During a trip to the top of Crusoe's hill overlooking the island, Friday sees a view of his homeland for the first time since arriving on Crusoe's island. He jumps and dances with joy at seeing his country. (Defoe 235)

In another instance, Friday discovers that one of the three prisoners is his father, " how Friday kiss'd him, embrac'd him, hugg'd him, cry'd, laugh'd, hollow'd, jump'd about, danc'd" (Defoe 247) He shows tremendous elation and happiness at seeing his father. These acts of love and happiness are the emotions of a caring, compassionate man which is a very desirable trait of a human being. Friday comes from a very primitive tribe. Defoe depicts Friday with characteristics of a civilized man. Friday is religious, quick to learn, emotional, and loyal. These are all very real and honorable qualities of a cultured person. This comparison of Friday's honesty and innocence not tainted by civilization are qualities that are beyond Crusoe. It seems that civilization is not what it should be and a " savage" has more good qualities than those that a civilized man should have.

#### Works Cited

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. 1719. Ed. Evan R. Davis. Peterborough: Broadview, 2010. Print