

The price of success in the united states

Sociology



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Price of Success in the United States Karen Tei Yamashita's text *The Tropic of Orange* presents two characters, Manzanar and Arcangel, who choose to live outside of society, on the margins, to protest certain values that are esteemed by mainstream culture in the United States. In this sense, they are not unlike Henry David Thoreau, who removed himself to Walden Pond for two years, two months, and two days. This essay considers the situation of Arcangel and the decisions this character makes as compared to those of Henry David Thoreau.

One of the most prominent features that both Arcangel and Henry David Thoreau share are their value systems. In these regards, both Arcangel and Henry David Thoreau embrace a value system that is outside the general confines of society. One such instance is the story's characterization of Arcangel as existing outside the bounds of regular human society. For example, Yamashita writes, "It was one of those odd moments in liberation theology in which a messenger named Arcangel stood at the top of Angel's Flight...with his arms raised to the heavens" (Yamashita, pg. 213). The text also indicates that, "By the time he had traversed fifty meters...(people) had run forward...to cup their hands to catch the blood and sweat from his torn stigmata" (Yamashita, pg. 75). In these regards, Arcangel is presented as a sort of Jesus figure, existing outside the realms of contemporary social morality in favor of a newly defined path. In large, Thoreau, through *Walden*, establishes a value system that is similarly outside the confines of his contemporaries.

Another prominent similarity between Arcangel and Henry David Thoreau is witnessed in their articulation of labor in the contemporary world. At one point Arcangel views his thoughts as a poem; in these regards the text <https://assignbuster.com/the-price-of-success-in-the-united-states/>

states, "Everybody's labor got occupied in the/ industry of draining their/ homeland of its natural wealth" (Yamashita, pg. 146). Such an articulation of labor is indicative of individuals who blindly participate in the workforce without questioning it on a deeper level. In large part, such concerns mirror similar philosophical views presented by Henry David Thoreau. For instance, Thoreau famously criticized individuals who blindly joined the military. Thoreau himself sought ways of escaping the mainstream notions of employment through his hiatus on Walden Pond. Ultimately, both individuals demonstrate similar perspectives.

One of the elements that is similar between Arcangel and Henry David Thoreau is the notion of history and wisdom. In Arcangel this takes the form of the cultural mystery surrounding his background. The text does not clearly articulate Arcangel's background, choosing instead to leave it ambiguous. While the comparison is not exact, Henry David Thoreau shares a sort of mysticism with Arcangel. While Thoreau's background is an aspect of historical fact, the pronouncements he makes in Walden come from an area of understanding that is of qualitative nature. For instance, one of Thoreau's seminal quotes is that, "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone" (Thoreau, pg. 32). While such an insight is inspirational for some, it stands on a platform that for others mirrors the mystery of Arcangel's background.

In conclusion, this essay has considered the similarities between Henry David Thoreau and the character Arcangel from Karen Tei Yamashita's text *The Tropic of Orange*. The essay has demonstrated that both individuals share a value system that is outside the confines of their social peers. Finally, it has considered the nature of both men as possessing mystical

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elements.

References

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. New York: Templeton, 1988. Print.

Yamashita, Karen. *Tropic of Orange*. New York: Coffee House Press, 1997. Print.