

"a righteous day" by mudroorroo nyroongah essay sample

[Parts of the World](#), [Australia](#)



“ A Righteous Day” by Mudrooroo Nyroongah Essay Sample

‘ A Righteous Day’ written by Mudrooroo Nyroongah on 26TH January (Australia Day), in 1988, is a poem set in the first person voice that has been composed in response to the depressing day of the Bicentenary of European Settlement. As the “ righteous” day is reflected by the persona, this contrasts with the ‘ White’ Australians celebrating a “ successful” colonisation in high-spirited ways, because to the Aborigines it is a day of mourning as they view it as Invasion day. The poem underlines the fact that despite the hardships Aborigines have experienced as a result of White Colonisation, it would be ideal if they shifted from prisoners of society to proactive citizens of Australia who will stand tall with pride and win their internal battles in the face of adversity.

The beginning of the poem is rather ambiguous as it includes the persona’s view on modern and new, yet quite useless, materialistic items. The first two lines suggests that the persona has spent a “ lifetime” until now, assimilating with the white man’s foreign and materialistic world of insignificant and ‘ useful’ materials in life. He questions whether these new “ inventions” are a necessity in life, where he views these as just an indication of the white man’s senseless ‘ progress’ and ‘ success’. The third line, which uses the strong imagery “ Protecting my wrists from the slashes of insecurities”, is the reason for the persona’s attempt in fitting into a foreign culture, as he desires to preserve his life and to survive, despite possessing nothing but insecurities. The phrase also refers to the stereotypical Aboriginal culture

where many have attempted suicide especially among young males, because they have felt useless as they have been degraded to the point where they have been deprived of their dignity and self-worth.

In lines 4-6, he emphasizes the point that “ today” is not a day for him to celebrate, but he will stand tall and proud and represent his people in a positive manner, despite the difficulties faced. Line 4 communicates a tone of optimism, defiance and pride of the persona, “ I shall hold my head higher” which indicates that the persona is morally at a higher standard than the White Australians’ low materialistic qualities. It is also accompanied with the use of a hyperbole “ higher than the kites are flying” in line 5, to further convey the persona’s new and positive manner and to add dramatic effect. The double image and meaning of the word “ kite” adds to the ambiguity of the poem, where the surface meaning refers to a symbol of the white man’s European Settlement celebration and their materialistic values. However, it is also a connotation to predatory birds which provides the responders with a sense of “ White” superiority over the Aborigines and their culture, as they have hunted, killed and weakened the original inhabitants by “ swooping down” onto them, and are now living off the death of another culture.

The use of an oxymoron “ violence passive in anger” emphasizes the fact that the composer is experiencing an inner journey as he is experiencing an internal battle. He shows that strong emotional feelings are involved in this day of mourning, and his control to suppress this anger does not actually diminish the anger he feels. It is followed by the metaphorical image of the voice described as a weapon, “ my voice shall be a steel spring coiled” which

refers to the aggression situated beneath the well-articulated and righteous statement he is making, and that underlying power and danger can occur from suppressed emotion. It also refers to the persona's strong urge to reveal and declare a unique message to the 'Whites', as he and his people have the potential to unleash it like a tightly coiled spring. However instead, he chooses to give voice to his feelings another time as he realizes that on this day, protest would be pointless and ineffective.

As the poem progresses, the poet establishes a repetitive pattern with the phrase "Today, I shall". The repeated use of the word "today" and "shall" adds ambiguity to the poem as they both indicate different times; present and future. The phrase emphasizes the poet's view of the importance of this day in positive means, and also the negative attributes of the day. It suggests a new beginning and their possible achievements such as the possibility of uniting the two distinct cultures together, but negatively it also seems to be a deliberate provoke, reminding the Aborigines of their defeat, and their loss of land, culture, and identity.

In line 9, the poet stresses again about his people's need to "walk tall", where ideally, each Aborigine should change their mindset to become strong and proud. It displays an image of him being equal in height with the authoritative leaders, which emphasises his pride and self-respect. It also shows that the Aborigines' have found new determination and hope, which is a source of their motivation to strive for justice in the face of adversity.

The poet uses a comparative image of his people's leaders performing on stilts, " with the leaders who walk on stilts and stumble", suggesting that the leaders are exposed to the risks of being disempowered politically and morally. This is because the leaders are not willing to acknowledge the fact that they have caused extreme measures of destruction to the Aboriginal race. It also suggests that the leaders are weak, as they are not really tall but are on ' stilts', which is a deception of height, and is an illusion of their superiority over the Aborigines. The line, " as they greet me with the cries of goodwill", contributes to the leaders' false superior identities in which they have publicised, which suggests that the deceitful leaders are tripping over themselves in efforts to show their greetings and goodwill in sincere ways.

His message of defiance is clarified further by the phrase, " let my fist be clenched in songs". The clenched fist is an established worldwide symbol of ' black' power, in which this gesture alludes to the protest against ' White' majority rule in Australia. This image shows control of the persona's anger while the celebratory singing goes on, because celebrating this day is an insult to himself and his people.

The visual images of colours described in line 16, " Lead me away from the red and black along the golden path..." is significant as it refers to the Aboriginal flag colours and the path that they desire to follow. The " golden path" is the centre of their spirituality, the Dreaming, in which it is the path that they desire to move along to gain happiness and success, whilst moving away from evil and anger, denoted by the " red and black" colours. The use of the personification, "...of the honeyed sunshining of my dreams", further

emphasises the message to follow the path of justice as it is a trail that will lead to strength of mind, dignity, and courage.

Lines 16 and 19 demonstrates a tone of strength and demand for a part in the future of their country, whilst being “ free of harassment” and humiliation. They also desire to progress, where his people will gather strength and determination to stand tall and to proactively take the day over for their culture, instead of remaining ignorant and accepting defeat in white colonisation.

The ending of the poem is, similarly to the beginning, ambiguous. It is unclear whom the poet is referring to when he states ‘ our day’, also following with the conversational tone established in the last line. One interpretation of this is that he is expressing the realisation that if things are going to progress then there is a definite need for greater unity and understanding among all Australian people, without racial division. This is supported by the colloquial Australian phrase, “ My bloody oath I won’t mate!”. The use of the White Australian colloquial suggests a common bond, where Aborigines are as “ Australian” as White Australians, and the possibility to unite the two cultures together so that they may progress forward together.

The poem as a whole reflects the persona’s fear about what might happen to his people if they are unable to face the day with strength of mind, dignity, and courage. Nonetheless, the poet is trying to communicate a message to all Aborigines to not fulfil the White man’s impressions of Aborigine

stereotypes. The personal, overall expresses the Aborigines' desires to be completely acknowledged as being the rightful inhabitants of Australia and to be recognised as human beings in which their dignity has been decimated as a result of their many losses due to white colonisation. He feels that the generally accepted idea of Aborigines being drunk, angry, useless, and homeless must be put to an end, and that the only way for their desires to be fulfilled is to stand tall with pride.

Source:

-wikipedia. org

-Imagined corners (Published in 2000). An anthology of multicultural poetry.

Page 41, " A Righteous Day – Mudrooroo Nyroongah"