

# A question of race in silko's ceremony novel

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **Ceremony: A War between the Native Indians and the White People**

In Silko's *Ceremony*, the white people discriminate and oppress the Pueblo Indians. They lead the Indians to believing that their way of life is deplorable. As consequence, some of the Indians move out the Indians reservations with the aim of looking for the aspects of the white world that are not available in the Indian reservations. Indian women such as Tayo's mother become prostitutes they sire children with white men. The white men take advantage of the Indian women and after impregnating them they do not take responsibility for the children. The oppression and racism against the Native Indians leads to identity crisis.

Racial misconception the *Ceremony* depict the naive Indians in the negative light and the whites in the positive light. When Tayo realizes that his lost cattle are in the ranch owned by white man, he hesitates to conclude that the white man stole the cattle because he believes in the lie that only Mexicans and Indians can steal and not the white people. He guess that the white man may have bought the cattle from the thieves because it is so hard for him to believe that the white man is a thief. Silko wonders about Tayo's misconceptions when she writes that " But something inside him made him hesitate to say it now that the cattle were on a white man's ranch. He had a crazy desire to believe that there had been some mistake that Floyd Lee had gotten them innocently, maybe buying them from the real thieves. Why did he hesitate to accuse a white man of stealing but not a Mexican or an Indian?" (191). the racial misconception here is attributed to the colonization and racism towards the native people. The natives have been colonized and

discriminated to the extent that they consider the white man to be flawless, superior and rich. The colonization has made the native people to believe in the lies that are told by the white man. The lies hinder the native people from trusting members of the community and they make them to trust the white people instead. Accordingly, the natives are fooled by the ideologies that is why it is difficult for Tayo to accept man stole the cattle. Accordingly, the native people have internalized the stereotypes concerning their community.

Markedly, victimization on the Native Americans is common in the institution of learning and this makes them to abuse substances because it hurts their feelings and esteem. Fish et al. assert that “ Native American students have low retention rates due to the structural barriers and racism inherent in colleges and universities” (414). Racism and the various structural barriers in the institutions of learning increase the Native Americans’ risk of abusing substances and victimization by the authorities. The disproportionate victimization that the native students go through interferes with their academic performance. The victimization of the native’s traces back to the colonial era and it has extended to the modern times. The victimized students are vulnerable to abusing substances and alcohol.

Moreover, the use of Native Americans as brand names perpetuates stereotypes against them. The brand images that are associated with the native Indians do not uphold the ethics of representation. The representations depict the Indians as backward people that are not enlightened and this commodifies the racism against the native Indians. In her article, Merskin argues that “ American Spirit Cigarettes are used as an <https://assignbuster.com/a-question-of-race-in-silkos-ceremony-novel/>

illustrative case study to demonstrate that these representations cannot be relegated to less enlightened times, rather endure because naturalization is part of commoditized racism” (185). Therefore, the use of the Indians as brand names contributes to the continuation of the colonial ideologies that encouraged the discrimination of the natives.

The native Americans are nostalgic of the historical injustices that they have faced throughout their existence, the injustices commenced the moment the white people arrived on the natives' land. Benotie claims that “ After the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies”(Silko 132). The advent of the white man left long lasting implications on the native people most of which are negative. Most of the effects are experienced to date. The native Indians find it difficult to accept that most of their traditional practices are no longer relevant in the contemporary world. The nostalgia makes them to dwell in the past hence they drown in nostalgia day in day out. They do not want to accept that they can no longer bring their past lives back because things have changed. They cling to traditional practices that isolate them from the rest of the world.

Understandably, the native Indians have been devastated as a result of their repression and removal from their lands . They reside in destitute areas and this amounts to cultural violence. They suffer from cultural alienation because they face the threat of alienation. Nelson claims that “ Confronted with assimilation, many American Indians are forced to choose between seclusion and cultural alienation, or to express the dominant culture rather than their own” (29). This means that the natives are torn between following <https://assignbuster.com/a-question-of-race-in-silkos-ceremony-novel/>

their native culture which is highly marginalized or to live according to the expectations of the dominant culture. Therefore, the natives have been victims of cultural violence hence they cannot uphold their lifestyles without threat of assimilation. The federal policies have contributed to the dehumanization of the Native Indians. Additionally, the federal policies have contributed to societal changes and this have allowed the development of societal attitudes that consider the native Indians to be “ wild savages”.

In Silko's Ceremony, the natives struggle to conform to the whites' standards because they are not confident in their own culture. They believe all the things that they are taught in school by the whites. Tayo ridicules the natives for their dumbness when he says that “ See these dumb Indians thought these good times would last. They didn't ever want to give up the cold beer and the blond cunt. Hell no! They were America the Beautiful too, this was the land of the free just like the teachers said in school” (Silko 58). Tayo criticizes the natives because he thinks that their struggle to conform to the whites' standards is in vain. They believe in all the standards that they learned about the whites in the school without knowing that it is detrimental to their lives and future generations. The Indian's that fought in the war were foolish to believe that the good treatment they got when they were in the war was going to continue once they returned home. After returning, it was evident that American was beautiful just for the white's and not the natives. The only thing that made them to feel like the whites were the military uniforms and when the uniforms were taken, they lost that feeling they had. It was hard for them to accept that the feeling was gone and thus things could not be the same.

Notably, The Department of Education in USA excludes the native Indian students in the conversations that relate to achievement gaps. Wong points out that “ schools run by the beleaguered Bureau of Indian Education—which serves just 5 percent of the country’s Native American children—are often dilapidated and unsafe, plagued by unstable governance and tangled bureaucracy.” Therefore, these schools do not do any good to the students hence they expose them to other risks. Further, the since the schools are not adequately furnished, it means that the native Indian children lag behind when compared to their counterparts in the public and private schools. The school simply contribute to the isolation and the discrimination of the native children.