An American Sunrise – Ongoing Fight for Native Americans' Sovereignty

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"An American Sunrise", written by an ingenious poet Joy Harjo, speaks to the hope that Native American culture has not died out. Rather, people like Harjo continue to fight their ancestors' battles in modern-day society, and the culture is still thriving. Despite the destruction and oppression of Native Americans, they still assimilated into society. Harjo, in this piece, revisits what her people lost and endured and has a lingering feeling of injustice for Native American people and the survival of the generations. She urges readers to explore a new beginning with the hope for a bright future in the United States, willing to put the past behind "spit them out" through the representation of "we" instead of "I", which sets a communal tone in the poem that many people are affected by the injustice. Throughout the poem, she recalls that she remembers the injustices done to her ancestors and "knows the rumour of demise", but she wants to move on anyway. This essay evaluates the Native Americans' ongoing fight for basic humanity and sovereignty and shares the tale of past and future generations because the author is able to reflect her narrative and morals in her work.

Return to Ancestral Lands and Indigenous Memory

In the early 1800s, the indigenous people of the United States were forcibly removed from their original lands, one of which is part of present-day Oklahoma. After two hundred years, Harjo revisits her lands and opens a dialogue about Native American lands and history. Returning to her family's lands, she finds blessings in the abundance of indigenous people who have essentially disappeared. Harjo's memories of her personal life, from the death of her mother to her beginnings of struggles for Native American lands and history, intertwine with tribal beauty and survival struggle to create a space for novel beginnings for the renewed present and the future. She illuminates a sense of spirituality in her poem; being a descendant of Native Americans helps her connect with her ancestors and other indigenous people of Native American lands. She tells the entire story with her heart throbbing and thrumming with the quiet anger due to living in the ruins of injustice.

Caesura, Allusion, and Imagery of Displacement

Harjo effectively uses a prose-like format with allusion, caesuras, and imagery throughout the poem to intensify her confrontation with the injustice and displacement that has marked hundreds of years of Native American history. Harjo, in her poem "An American Sunrise", incorporates caesuras

meticulously, which are primarily embedded in the form of periods with the use of dashes twice to recount more complex experiences and feelings. She recalls the violence, describing a group of Native Americans going back to their “ancestors’ fight” to emphasize her argument about how difficult it is for the American tribes to maintain and manage their problems while blending their past ties with present-day dealings. Harjo, in the middle of the poem, explicitly alludes to the Christian religion, “Sin was invented by the Christians,” with the eyes of indifference, which are cruellest of all the brutality that exists on this Earth (Harjo). Harjo breathes the nuance of indigenous culture and her life into a personal path of travelling her ancestors’ route during forced migration from their original lands. Furthermore, the use of imagery in the words “a fire-lit pathway” up to the “starry stars” depicts the dream-like and nostalgic feelings of the poet to show how she feels about moments like these.

Ancestral Responsibility and Hope for Justice

Harjo writes of ancestral lands, tribal history, loss of American lands and culture, and retrieval in order to bring recognition of the wrongs of the past, not just for the Native American community but for any community that is oppressed. She expresses hope for the future, reflecting the natural sense that every human being holds an obligation to their ancestors to surface an edge for “ancestors’ fight” to live out their traditions. She reiterates her point that humans hold the responsibility to be “ready to strike” to instil ancestral traditions in their children. She pushes the American audience to speak their truths not just for their personal sake but also for the present generation. She further implies that it is crucial to remain “straight” while facing many hardships just to avoid “losing days in the Indian bar” (Harjo). This suggests that due to the dire nature of the struggle, one might turn to alcohol to find comfort and warmth to find an escape from the atrocities of life, but one must not allow this “Indian bar” distraction to influence their days and remain focused. However, she is hopeful as she knows that within cruel injustices, misfortunes, joyless moments, suffering, and intense desperation, the seeds of blessings and recognition always grow.

Speaking Through Suffering and Cultural Survival

The underlying theme of the poem emphasizes that one cannot be a voice for the people unless he has immersed himself in the walk-through of desperation, suffering, misfortunes, injustices, and joyless moments of his life. Moreover, one who wants to become a voice for people cannot achieve his aim until he has touched the threads of happiness and a soft murmur of determination. Her words throughout the poem are indeed revealing and brutal, as these words have the ability to smack a person in the face raw. However, at the same time, she is tender and wants to become the voice of Native American people with the eyes of the soul and is also ready to leave deep furrows in the depths of her heart when she agrees to “wash” her “mother’s body.” In the final lines, Harjo reiterates her point that “we still want justice” to emphasize the continuity of the fight until descendants of Native Americans get the sovereignty they lost when they were ousted from their lands (Harjo). The

repetition of the poet's demand to get her indigenous lands back and continue the "ancestors' fight" suggests the theme of the poem that Native Americans have not forgotten their past and sufferings related to it.

Resistance, Renewal, and the Preservation of Heritage

In conclusion, the poem is an unwaveringly determined response to the ideas and thoughts that the elements of the indigenous culture of Native Americans could ever be lost. It is a good piece in a passionate and determined tone, alluding to the elements of Native American culture, its preservation, and indigenous people's resistance and response to the unwanted change. Although the struggle is a great deal, Harjo is hopeful that the descendants of Native Americans would dance in adversity and celebrate their history to ensure that their culture and heritage are preserved.

Works Cited

Harjo, Joy. "An American Sunrise." *Poetry*, vol. 209, no. 5, 2017, pp. 468–468.