Hannah Langford

Journal #5

In reading short stories from Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven,* along with personal essays from *First Person, First Peoples* edited by Andrew Garrod and Colleen Larimore, several themes about life as a Native American became evident. The most prominent one I found was how difficult it is to be a modern day traditional Indian. The name itself is contradicting, but so is most of their life. Whether they have been raised traditionally or not, dealing with the ‘real world’ means they either have to stick out like a sore thumb, or sacrifice their ideals to fit in. This leaves some Native Americans confused on who they are supposed to be and how they’re supposed to bridge the gap between their two lives.

A short story titled “A Drug Called Tradition”by Sherman Alexie featured a Native American named Victor, who, despite growing up on the reservation, still had trouble connecting to his heritage. For example, at a party, Victor and his friend leave and take an adventure: “‘hey,’ I said. ‘Jump in with us. We’re going out to Benjamin Lake to do this new drug I got. It’ll be very f\*\*\*\*\*\* Indian. Spiritual s\*\*\*, you know?’”(Alexie 14) After they take the drug they see simple visions of themselves doing “Indian activities.” This is a great example about how even when you grow up around Native Americans, that doesn’t mean you are any closer to your ancestors than ones who weren’t raised around Native Americans. In this case, these boys used drugs to connect their lives to their traditions.

A personal essay by Robert Bennett, called “Why Didn’t You Teach Me”shows how raising a Native American as a white doesn’t make them any less confused about who they are. If anything, it adds on to their confusion. In theory, raising a Native as white could make their life easier by helping them fit in, but it distances Native Americans from their own culture. In addition, it also distances them from “white” culture, making them feel even more out of place. In college, Bennett remarks, “I took a Native American studies course my sophomore year and learned more about Indians than I had in twenty years of living as one… I was learning about my culture and ancestors from a white professor in a white institution” (Garrod and Larimore 137). By raising Robert in a ‘white American’ setting, when he took that Native American course in college and learned all about his heritage, he was forced to go through this life crisis of *who am I really?* Then again, it seems the Native Americans that I read about all had to inevitably go through this crisis at some point of their life anyway.

After reading these different texts, the common theme of the difficulties of Native Americans is hard to ignore. From my perspective, it always seemed that Native Americans just automatically *knew* how to be like their ancestors. It hadn’t occurred to me that, similar to a religion, it takes work to be close to the ones you admire, and bridging the gap between their two lives is more difficult than we might expect.