

Name

Institution

Course grade

Date of submission

Introduction

The book titled, 'I am a man': Chief standing Bear's Journey for justice' is written by a renowned author Joe Starita. The book chronicles a very emotional justice seeking story of a small Indian community, known as the Ponca in the United States of America. This community had been living in their native land in Nebraska for centuries, practicing their culture and traditions peacefully until the government of the United States decided to take away their land. The book gives details of how the chief struggled with the legal and justices system amid discrimination based on race. The geographical setting of the story is between the region of Nebraska and Oklahoma in the years between 1877 and 1879. The plot, themes and characters are analyzed.

Plot Summary

The book starts by giving the details that led to the eviction of the Ponca Indians from their land. The tribulations of chief standing bear are narrated while reflecting on the legal and justice issues that surrounded the United States. The indigenous people of America were not recognized by the law as citizens. This factor made the eviction very easy since there was no law that protected the Ponca Indians. Actually from the narrative, the indigenous cultural groups

were treated like any other property of the United States government. When the Ponca people received the news of eviction, they resisted the move. The government intervened by sending soldiers under the command of General Crook to forcefully evict the Ponca people and take them to Oklahoma. Upon arrival at Oklahoma, the Ponca people found that the environment was very hostile. Diseases and famine was in abundances which nearly wiped the whole community. By the end of the second year in Oklahoma, a third of the population had died while the rest were emaciated to a point of not being able to work. The pain felt by the Ponca people was not only physical, but also emotional. They had formed very tight ties with other communities in Nebraska, including intermarriages. The Omaha were particularly close to the Ponca people as seen when they agreed to host them in their land and in secret meetings between their chief and chief standing Bear on his way to Nebraska.

Chief Standing Bear had promised his son, Bear Shield that he would be buried in their ancestral land, upon his death. This promise was prompted by the sickness that had gotten hold of Bear Shield. Upon the death of his son, Standing Bear was totally heart-broken and was determined to respect his dead son's wish. The six hundred mile journey to Nebraska was hard though Standing Bear, some men, women and children had the fighting spirit to conquer it. Standing Bear was arrested together with his companions and taken to court. Henry Tibbles, a journalist published several articles about the plight of the Ponca people and injustices rendered to them. The journalist approached attorneys who agreed to represent Standing Bear. The case favored of Standing Bear, and he was allowed to bury his son among his ancestors. Several themes are employed in this book to enhance suspense and narrate the background to the story of

Standing Bear. These themes include cultural identity, citizenship, nature of democracy and constitutional protection.

Themes

The theme of cultural identity is demonstrated by the resistance put up by the Ponca people against the government's attempt to evict them. To further show how the people in this book had a cultural identity, the writer relates scenarios where the chief of Omaha people, Chief Iron Eye and his daughter Bright Eye risked arrest several times just to meet and help Standing Bear during his journey to bury his son. Moreover, Bright Eye was very available to Standing Bear as an interpreter in court. Standing Bear made the journey to Nebraska from Oklahoma was to honor his cultural obligations. According to the traditions of these people, a man was supposed to be buried near his ancestors. It was believed that the life after death would be spent in solitude for those buried away from their ancestors. Determined to live up to the expectations of their traditions and beliefs, Standing Bear and other people from Ponca community fought hard to bury Standing Bear's son in their land of birth.

The theme of citizenship has also been used in this book. The writer ponders on the basis upon which one can be considered a citizen. The writer highlights the irony of the Standing Bear's case compared with white Americans. The white Americans came to America and found the Ponca people living there already. They are now the recognized citizens while they continue to marginalize the Ponca people, treating them like slaves in their own native land.

The nature of democracy when the events in this book took place was very questionable. The concept of democracy prohibits any form of discrimination and allows people a voice and a

fair hearing in matters concerning them. The Ponca people, being the native inhabitants of America had the right to live in their ancestral land and be consulted. Moreover, their pleas were supposed to be considered and have a fair trial in the court of law. From the narrative in this book, democracy was an alien concept when it came to dealing with Ponca people. In the courtroom, the attorneys representing Major Crook argued that an Indian could not be allowed to evoke the writ of habeas corpus because the constitution did not recognize him as a citizen. Such exclusions in the constitution could have denied the Ponca people justice, despite being the original inhabitants of America.

In the case of Standing Bear, The constitution was amended in what is currently known as 14th amendments to give Native Americans full right of citizenship and rights. These amendments were evoked by the simple will of a man to bury his son according to the traditions of his people.

Analysis of Major Characters

The characters that made major contributions to the flow of this book include Standing Bear, general Crook and Judge Dundy.

Standing Bear has been depicted as a wise and courageous man. His wisdom was exposed when he gave a crowd moving speech in the courtroom depicting his helpless situation, where only the judge could help him. Despite being restricted in the reserves, he courageously marched towards his place of birth, for the sake of his son. He is also portrayed as an honorable man who keeps his word. He promised to bury his son in their ancestral land and he fought to do so.

General Crook was a man of humane nature. Despite being a soldier, he saw the unjust suffering of the Ponca people and requested journalist Tibbles to assist the people. He was in charge of soldiers who arrested Standing Bear.

Judge Dundy was a man of integrity. He did not fear controversy, but confronted it. He delivered a just judgment that shaped the history of the minorities in America. Despite risking his career, he stood to set a precedent where none existed. His noble character made the plot of the story to have a relieving ending.

Conclusion

This book is intriguingly written in a manner that captures the attention of the reader and only releases it after the reading is over. The plot flows well with the characters to give an overall emotional experience while relating injustices suffered by indigenous Americans.