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Summer Reading Assignment for INTD100: Coffee and Black Holes

August 31st, 2020

1. *This essay is in a narrative style, and is broken into several parts. Summarize part I in one paragraph, using 120 words or fewer. Note: The purpose of this exercise is to complete the summary in no more than a certain number of words. What key moments stand out in your mind? What is the central realization of the author at the end of the section?*
 - a. The author outlines his relationship with his father—one that proved to be cruel and unhappy—on the occasion of his father’s death, and talks at length about the effects that living as a proud black man in a racist society had upon him—which included seemingly irrational rage and paranoia for his family. The author at first does not understand his father and resents him for it, but once he leaves his family home for New Jersey, the author begins to understand. Being confronted for the first time by the injustice of the Jim Crow laws, the author feels the same rage that his father was crushed under his entire life, and realizes that this rage is potent enough to prompt murder.
2. *Repeat exercise 1, but instead use only twenty words. What happens in part I of the essay?*
 - a. The author talks about his resentment of his father, and the experiences that helped him understand his father’s suffering.
3. *Consider part III. Construct a tract of writing that a) defines and explains the poison metaphor the author describes at the funeral of his father, b) identifies the author’s “cure” or cures for the poison, and c) provides several pieces of supporting evidence for the identification of the author’s cure.*
 - a. At the funeral of his father, the author talks at length about the “poison” that parents work hard to inoculate their children against. This poison that he refers to is the injustice of racism that black families all over the country faced (and still face) on a daily basis. As evidence of this poison, the author cites countless public places that were affected by segregation, from playgrounds, to bars, to hospitals, next to more sinister places, like the jail and the morgue. He also tells us that it is a parent’s job to work towards giving their children a better antidote to this poison than the one they themselves were given. He does not name what this antidote could be, merely citing despairing questions as to whether or not such an antidote exists, and furthermore asking whether such an antidote should even be used, specifically suggesting that “perhaps poison should be fought with poison”. This is in reference to the movements against segregation and racism that used violence and hatred as their main weapon, reflecting the rightful rage that their followers felt. In this section, the author does not give an answer as to what this antidote might be, but judging from Part 4 of the article, the author seems to indicate that the proper antidote to the poison of racism is not hatred or violence, but peacefully fighting to make the world a better place. This is shown

particularly in the last couple paragraphs of the essay, at which point the author states “Hatred, which could destroy so much, never failed to destroy the man who hated and this was an immutable law... one must never, in one’s own life, accept these injustices as commonplace but must fight them with all one’s strength... keep my own heart free of hatred and despair”. All anyone can do is continue to fight against the injustices of the world without hatred or despair, however monumental a task that might be.

4. *Consider the final part of the essay, when the author describes the fight in the Hotel Braddock. Write a tract of between 200-400 words on the author’s treatment of evidence and facts. What does the author have to say about the importance of facts about the fight to the people in that neighborhood? Notice the author’s writing takes on the tone of a reporter regarding the ensuing riot. What facts stand out regarding the outcome?*

- a. The author’s tone shift when describing the events that started the riots show the reader the switch from writing about personal events to writing about history in the making. The paragraphs about the riots seem almost like they could be from newspaper clippings, with the notable exception of the actual events of the fight. The author describes in detail the rumors that began to fly after the fight occurred, as well as describing how the perceived events then inspired the riots and the destruction of every white-owned business in Harlem, but does not tell the readers what actually happened, aside from telling us a couple instances when the rumor conflicted with reality. This reflects how the people of Harlem saw the initial fight: ignoring the facts in favor of the fabricated reality of their worst nightmare come to life. It was this fabricated reality that sparked the riots, the destruction, the bloodshed, not the truth of the matter. It is very likely that the people of Harlem had their rage simmering just under the surface for a very long time before the riots, like a faultline erupting into a devastating earthquake, and the author’s writing and handling of the facts reflects this.