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History 1301 – 16147

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Essay #1

“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark, 11:25).

The murder of a well-respected man of the Iroquois Nation would require an immense level of understanding. This is something that the colonists of the area sincerely lacked, and which resulted in multiple past calamities and would continue like that into the future. The resolution of the issue concerning the murder of Sawantaeny required three things: The following of customs regarding their grief and recompense for those lost, to form cross-cultural unity, and the acknowledgement of wrong-doing.

Contrary to what some of the colonial leaders of the area expected, the Indians wanted gifts to the afflicted from the affecting party. As well as this, they would take part in ritualistic eating instead of reprisals. It is stated, “…a murder should be countered with ritual feasting and gifts of mourning” to confirm the Indians customs regarding a death between friendly nations (NIGHT Ch7 par18). This was followed to a degree but was unfortunately committed to with the intention to mollify Indian emotions without validating their ideals.

Their wish for the direction of cross-cultural unity was also an unexpected desire, that would be obvious if the people’s ideal were understood. The Indians believed in the strengthening of bonds between people they wished to be friends within such troublesome times, as it’s when they believe it is most needed. Pursuing even isolated conflict would only create further divisions down the line and affect all the people. This is written, “…they should forever hereafter be as one head & one heart & live in true Friendship & Amity as one people” in a 1701 treaty signed at Philadelphia showing the thoughts of the Indians.

The acknowledgment of what occurred seemed either equally as important or more so than the material recompense that could be offered for the murder of Sawantaeny. The importance can best be surmised in the symbolic capture of Governor Keith to Albany. While he is merely draped in some beaded string and belts of wampum, the force of the invitation can not be overstated, as the governor knows that this crisis cannot be defused without his presence. Though it was late in its coming, it eventually resolved the issue.

In conclusion, the Indians of 1722 Pennsylvania were far different in their ideas of justice in comparison to the English colonists of the area. This combined with the problem of a lack of understanding between the colonists and the Indians ideals is what caused the calamity to occur. Only once an understanding had been established could there be a return to the sought after restitution, reconciliation, and harmony between the nations.

NIGHT. Nicole Eustace, *Covered with Night: A story of murder and indigenous justice in early America.* New York, NY : Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., [2021]