The Problem Of The Native American People In The Poem On The Amtrak From Boston To New York City By Sherman Alexie

Sherman Alexie, in full Sherman Joseph Alexie, Jr., (born October 7, 1966, Wellpinit, Spokane Indian Reservation, near Spokane, Washington, U.S.), Native American writer whose poetry, short stories, novels, and films about the lives of American Indians won him an international following. Alexie was born to Salish Indians—a Coeur d'Alene father and a Spokane mother. Alexie's first book was a volume of poetry, I Would Steal Horses (1992). Shortly after its publication he quit drinking. The same year, he produced The Business of Fancydancing, a book combining prose and poetry. A prolific writer, he published in 1993 two more books of poetry—First Indian on the Moon and Old Shirts & New Skins—and The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, a collection of interwoven stories that won the PEN/Hemingway Award for the best first book of fiction. (Kuiper, Kathleen. "Sherman Alexie." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 3 Oct. 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sherman-Alexie.)

The poem's condition is outlined in the title "On the Amtrak from Boston to New York City", which was about a white woman and a man with a Native American heritage who were together on a train. The woman was looking at the window and giving him a short "history lesson" about the city while they were passing landmarks, making the author angry, as he knew the real history of the buildings that are placed on what was once his people's land. Many Americans are unaware of the real history of the country, most of them do not know that Native American people were the first to land here.

The author's purpose for writing this poem is to inform people about the situations that many Indians can find themselves in by living in America, a country that was once their home, but now is a country where they have to pretend that their ancestors have never existed in order to succeed. On the other hand, the meaning of this poem is to inspire the readers and to determine them to learn the history of their ancestors. The poem made me feel the pain that the author was going through while the white woman was claiming to know the history of this country, assuming that he was an American as well. It is very difficult for a Native American to live in a country where his ancestors have been "wiped out" from its history.

Starting with the first line of the poem, the author refers to the woman who was on the train with him by her skin color: "The white woman across the aisle from me" (1), making it clear that even if she was born and raised in America, she wasn't a Native American.

" "Look,/ look at all the history, that house/ on the hill there is over two hundred years old,", as she points out the window past me/ into what she has been taught." (1-5). This line makes a reference to what the woman thinks is America's history, using the metaphor "over two hundred years old" to emphasize the idea. The author then continues with: "I have learned/ little more about American history during my few days/ back East than what I expected and far less/ of what we should all know of the tribal stories/ whose architecture is 15,000 years older/ than the corners of the house that sits museumed on the hill." (5-11). With these lines, the

author is pointing out his ancestor's history, much older than Americans' by using the structure: "... we should all know about the tribal stories/ whose architecture is 15,000 years older/ than the corners of the house that sits museumed on the hill." (8-11), which makes an association between the past and the present: how Native American individuals have been here for longer than the "full-blooded" Americans who have wiped out the American Indian civilization.

Starting with the last line on the third verse, the author seems to begin to be bothered by the woman's question: "Did you see Walden Pond?" (12), revealing his anger in the quote "I don't give a shit about Walden" (18-19), because the woman was unaware of the land that was taken away from him and his ancestors, Walden Pond being close to where the first settlers land. Sherman Alexie expresses his bitterness by using the metaphor "the city I pretend to call my home" (17) because he is forced to assimilate into the American culture, having to put his traditions aside and being forced to be someone he is not, things that all Native Americans can relate to. Another phrase that supports the previous argument is "I know the Indians were living stories/ around that pond before Walden's grandparents were born/ and before his grandparents' grandparents were born." (19-21), the author showing again that his ancestors were there first.

" If Don Henley's brothers and sisters/ and mothers and father hadn't come here in the first place/ then nothing would need to be saved." (23-25). From my perspective, I think that this phrase's meaning is the author's wish that the white race wouldn't have come into his country, claiming his land. Sherman Alexie uses profanity to indicate his anger as a Native American whose own family was pushed out of their "home".

"But I didn't say a word to the woman about Walden/ Pond because she smiled so much and seemed delighted/ that I thought to bring her an orange juice/ back from the food car. I respect elders/ of every color." (26-30). Sherman Alexie uses the phrase "I respect elders of every color" (30), showing that, despite the racial difference, he chooses to be respectful to the old white woman that was giving him history lessons about land that does not belong to her, the author being the bigger person, knowing that it wouldn't solve anything if he was being rude.

In the 8th verse, the author is using the phrase "All I really did was eat/ my tasteless sandwich, drink my Diet Pepsi/ and nod my head whenever the woman pointed out/ another little piece of her country's history" (30-33), its meaning being that he is no longer paying attention to what the woman is saying, using the metaphor "nod my head whenever the woman pointed out/ another little piece of her country's history" (32-33) to emphasize that the woman had no idea about the real history or how the places that she was pointing out to were once homes/ lands of the Indians.

Towards the end of the poem, on the 9th verse, Sherman Alexie says: "While I, as all Indians have done/ since this war began, made plans/ for what I would do and say the next time/ somebody from the enemy thought I was one of their own." (34-37), trying to infer that Americans assume that everyone is born and raised an American and that most of them do not know the real history and how their ancestors have stolen the land from the Native American people, using the phrase "since this war began" to accentuate the fact that the Indians and Americans have been at war ever since the Indians' land has been taken away. He also uses the metaphor "…somebody from the enemy thought I was one of their own.", "the enemy" being someone of American descent, and, "thought I was one of their own", this phrase being used to

point out the racial/culture difference.

His fame has inspired others, and he has used it to chastise what he calls 'Indian poseurs', including frauds and hoaxers. 'It comes down to their claims of authority,' he says. 'I don't care what people write about, but I get distressed when people so identify that they think they become something they're not. You hear Barbara Kingsolver saying: 'I feel Indian in my bones.' My wish is that we call it what it is: colonial literature. My career means, if you're non-Indian writing about Indians, at least there's one Indian in your rearview mirror.' (Jaggi, Maya. “Interview: Sherman Alexie.” The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 2 May 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/may/03/featuresreviews.guardianreview13.)

In conclusion, “On an Amtrak from Boston to New York City” by Sherman Alexie holds a very powerful message: how Native American descendants have to deal with American people’s ignorance towards their history, ancestral background and how American ancestors have stolen their lands, claiming them and changing the history.