

Jaguar Reaction Paper

Alan Rabinowitz's book brought about many different emotions, ranging from excitement to frustration and anger. This book was very interesting, and the intertwining of personal and scientific details made it a much easier read.

Many similarities and connections can be seen between Jaguar and Ishmael. The idea of Takers and Leavers is present throughout Jaguar. As it was said in our class discussion, the taker and leaver scale is more of a continuum than an absolute identity. The Mayas seemed to be more of a taker civilization, but not to the extent that we as Americans are. Although the Mayas have a smaller ecological footprint, they still have practices that are damaging to the environment. They would kill many animals, macaws, jaguars, ocelots, and grasshoppers, just because they were able. Their use of slash and burn agriculture was also very damaging. Every year when fields were burned, more and more of the rainforest would disappear. This was not viewed as harmful because it was helping them make a living and survive. Alan recognizes that "mankind...wishes to absorb the place of all other living things" (pg. 325). This corresponds with Ishmael's teaching that man believes he is the end of evolution and that he owns the world. When Cirillo rode thirty miles on his bike to tell Alan he would "tell dem no shoot tiger in Red Bank" (pg. 348), it reminded me of Ishmael's suggestion that Alan teach one hundred people so they in turn would teach one hundred more. Although on a smaller scale, Alan (Rabinowitz) had successfully taught Cirillo the importance of saving jaguars, and he would now teach more people the same thing.

While reading Jaguar I made comparisons between life in the U.S. and life in Belize. Two important examples of differences stood out to me. The first was when Alan talked about the Creoles. The status symbols in their culture consisted of having a zinc roof, gas stove,

bathroom, and most importantly, a TV (pg. 230). Their status symbols are almost a given in all American households, except maybe a zinc roof! Most American families have more than one bathroom, along with multiple TVs. Our status symbols are based more on large houses and luxury cars. This reminded me of the pictures comparing an American family and an Indian family shown early in the semester. The family in India had fewer belongings, but seemed equally as happy. The second example is when Alan saves Adriana's newborn son from dehydration. After he buys a limited supply of powdered milk, Alan questions if saving the child was the right thing to do. The family would now have to work extra hard to provide for another child while their economic status had not changed. In the U.S., if a baby is born sickly, more than likely, everything possible is done to try to make the child better. The concept of death is not as readily accepted by Americans as it is by the Maya.

A recurring theme in this book was Alan's frustration toward the Indians, and himself, because the environment was continuing to be harmed. Throughout much of Belize word spread about a "gringo" trying to save jaguars. Although his goals and project were well known, the native people continued to kill not just jaguars, but other smaller cat species. He talked of the Chicleros who went out of their way to hunt and kill the cats. The Indians did not seem to understand the importance of protecting the species and taking care of the environment's natural resources. Alan became angry with himself as well, especially when the jaguars were injured from his cage trapping techniques. However, our class seemed to agree that the end justified the means. Alan was deeply affected when Ah Puch died because it was by his own doing. Even though he might have caused the death of two jaguars, in the long run, he saved the lives of an unknown amount. His research and dedication resulted in the only jaguar preserve in the world.

Because of his work, not only are jaguars protected, but many other species of animals and plants are also protected.

This book reminded me of a topic we talked about in another one of my environmental classes. We discussed how developing nations follow in the footsteps of the developed nations. The ideas in Belize regarding the environment are not too far from those that Americans once believed. When Europeans first came to North America, resources were quickly depleted and an environmental ethic did not exist. Forests were clear-cut and countless species became extinct. The idea of conservation and respecting the environment is a modern outlook. Most developing nations take this same path while trying to become more industrialized. Resources are exhausted, and sometimes irreparable damage is done to the environment. Future consequences are not thought of, as illustrated by Alan who says the Indians could not even envision the destruction of the rainforest (pg. 317). It almost seems that with more “civilization” or being more developed results in a greater ability to see the intrinsic value of nature and the importance of protecting it. This however, is a very long and complex process because more civilization has the potential to lead to increased damages to the natural world.

Several topics we have discussed in class can be seen in Jaguar. The Afterword talks about how in Maya Center many of the women make and sell clay bead necklaces, turtle figurines, and stone carvings of Maya images (pg. 358). This is much like Dr. Buller’s explanation of the women’s co-ops in India. In both countries, the women are able to make a profit for themselves or their family, while raising their status in the community. These small but important economic advances help to break the traditional gender roles of women only tending to the family, working in the fields, and raising children. The significance of managing natural resources, as taught by Dr. Hill, is also apparent in this book. At the end of Alan’s

project, Cockscomb was becoming more ecocentric and less anthropocentric. The integrity of natural resources finally outweighed the benefits to society with such things as hunting and timbering. In order to ease environmental impact, all countries, developed and developing, should lower the limits of acceptable change, and decrease their present rates of resource use.

I learned many things while reading Jaguar and it made me even more excited about going to Belize and visiting the preserve! It made man's involvement with the environment and his potential ability to destroy it more obvious. Alan's drive to save the jaguars in Belize should be used as an example of how everyone can do their part to help the environment because even small efforts will add up to many long term positive consequences.