

Week 6 Reflection: Picking Sweetgrass

Complete the following reflection (500 words minimum).

1. In “Picking Sweetgrass”, Kimmerer encourages us to consider the degree of reciprocity in our transactions.
 - a. How adequately do you think our money-based economy provides for reciprocity? (Kimmerer asks herself on page 177, “How do we consume in a way that does justice to the lives we take?”)
 - b. In what ways might the convenience of all of our “taking” -- what Kimmerer sees as the rampant consumerism of modern life -- complicate our participation in this reciprocity?
 - c. What do you think about Kimmerer’s conclusion that “[n]ot everything should be convenient” (179)?
 - d. How might the rules of Honorable Harvest find adoption in our modern economy? What choices would consumers have to make in order for that to happen?
 - e. How might cultural values stand in the way of such adoption? (Recall Kimmerer’s description of early European who regarded the rules of Honorable Harvest as laziness.)
 - f. Now focus on how this applies to the question of energy. Kimmerer says, “By no stretch of the imagination is coal given to us” (p. 187). Might the rules of Honorable Harvest be applicable to energy consumption?
 - g. What are some of the choices that Kimmerer is asking us to think about in this chapter?

Robin Wall Kimmerer, in her "Picking Sweetgrass," puts into discussion reciprocity which urges one to reconsider the relationship with the material resources of the world. She states, "How do we consume in a way that does justice to the lives we take?" (p. 177), judging by her primary notion of moral and ethical responsibility kept with consumption. On the framework of crude transactions and the invention of naturalized functional groups among modern economies using money as a value currency, the system fails to take into consideration wide-ranging ecological and spiritual debts owed for consumption. With that recognition alone, it is all too apparent that the forms of consumption--food, energy, or materials--are enjoyed with little consideration of restitution to those sorts of ecosystems and communities to which they are extorted.

Kimmerer critiques the ease of consumerist ways, which distanced people from understanding where their goods originated. Because we can easily acquire things, we often forget the labor and energy that went into drying Cabernet Sauvignon grapes. "Not everything should be convenient" (p. 179), she claims, calling for a reconciliation with the peasant origins of our

sustenance and the reverence that they deserve. Although appealing, convenience is responsible for a wasteful attitude toward and an ignorance of our natural environment.

Should the Honorable Harvest principles gain wider acceptance, they would prove to be a transformational force in modern economies. This transition would mean that consumers should be concerned about sustainable decision-making regarding their energy consumption, be prepared to curtail consumption, purchase ethically produced goods, and favor durability over disposability. Yet, cultural resistance remains at the forefront of adopting these principles. Modern values emphasize efficiency, economic growth, profit-generating-anathema, and the restraint and gratitude underpinning the Honorable Harvest. Kimmerer observes that early European settlers dismissed Indigenous moderative practices as laziness, a prejudice that persists in contemporary attitudes toward sustainable lifestyles.

This unearths the meaning of the very rules of the Honorable Harvest in energy use. Perhaps Kimmerer's statement, "Coal is no gift bestowed upon us" (p. 187), emphasizes how extractive our ways of producing energy have become. Fossil-fuel energy systems follow a model of simply taking with no provided gift, breaking the reciprocity code in the process. Commitment to rising renewable energy sources, like the wind and the sun, comes far closer to compliance with such rules, as those gifts are provided by nature itself but at no cost. This transition also means that we need to change not only how we produce energy, but also how we use it—from conservation and efficiency to awareness about what we consume.

Kimmerer encourages us to make choices with gratitude and responsibility such as consuming less, using renewable energy, and developing policies to respect ecological limits. Living the values of the Honorable Harvest will tend toward those livelihoods and ecosystems on which our economies depend. Yet attaining this vision will require a different cultural shift: one that will rephrase what convenience, success, and abundance mean in concert with rather than in opposition to the natural world.