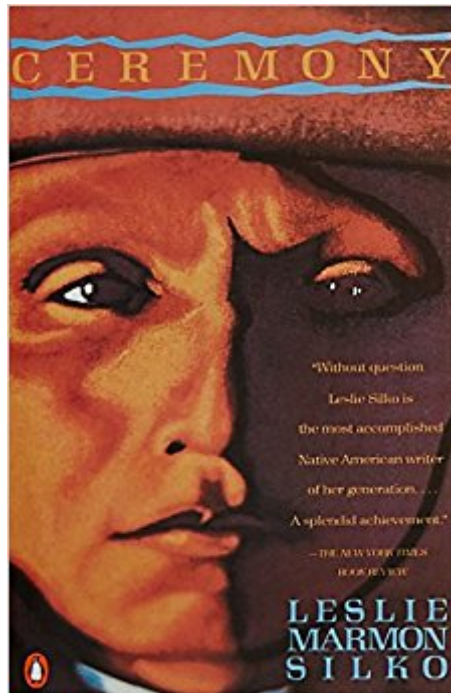


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Ceremony (Contemporary American Fiction Series)



Synopsis

Tayo, a young Native American, has been a prisoner of the Japanese during World War II, and the horrors of captivity have almost eroded his will to survive. His return to the Laguna Pueblo reservation only increases his feeling of estrangement and alienation. While other returning soldiers find easy refuge in alcohol and senseless violence, Tayo searches for another kind of comfort and resolution. Tayo's quest leads him back to the Indian past and its traditions, to beliefs about witchcraft and evil, and to the ancient stories of his people. The search itself becomes a ritual, a curative ceremony that defeats the most virulent of afflictions—despair.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An exceptional novel—a cause for celebration. (The Washington Post Book World) Her assurance, her gravity, her flexibility are all wonderful gifts. (The New York Review of Books) The novel is very deliberately a ceremony in itself—demanding but confident and beautifully written. (The Boston Globe) Ceremony is the greatest novel in Native American literature. It is one of the greatest novels of any time and place. I have read this book so many times that I probably have it memorized. I teach it and I learn from it and I am continually in awe of its power, beauty, rage, vision, and violence. (Sherman Alexie) Without question Leslie Marmon Silko is the most accomplished Native American writer of her generation. (The New York Times Book Review)

Leslie Marmon Silko was born in 1948 to a family whose ancestry includes Mexican, Laguna Indian, and European forebears. She has said that her writing has at its core “the attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed or mixed-blood person.” As she grew up on the Laguna Pueblo Reservation, she learned the stories and culture of the Laguna people from her great-grandmother and other female relatives. After receiving her B. A. in English at the University of New Mexico, she enrolled in the University of New Mexico law school but completed only three semesters before deciding that writing and storytelling, not law, were the means by which she could best promote justice. She married John Silko in 1970. Prior to the writing of *Ceremony*, she published a series of short stories, including “The Man to Send Rain Clouds.” She also authored a volume of poetry, *Laguna Woman: Poems*, for which she received the Pushcart Prize for Poetry. In 1973, Silko moved to Ketchikan, Alaska, where she wrote *Ceremony*. Initially conceived as a comic story about a mother’s attempts to keep her son, a war veteran, away from alcohol, *Ceremony* gradually transformed into an intricate meditation on mental disturbance, despair, and the power of stories and traditional culture as the keys to self-awareness and, eventually, emotional healing. Having battled depression herself while composing her novel, Silko was later to call her book “a ceremony for staying sane.” Silko has followed the critical success of *Ceremony* with a series of other novels, including *Storyteller*, *Almanac for the Dead*, and *Gardens in the Dunes*. Nevertheless, it was the singular achievement of *Ceremony* that first secured her a place among the first rank of Native American novelists. Leslie Marmon Silko now lives on a ranch near Tucson, Arizona.

I bought a used version of this book for a college course. The book was in really good condition for being used, and the price couldn’t be beat, so I am really happy about that. The book wasn’t something that I would have chosen to read on my own. So, it took me a bit to get into it. The way that Silko weaves traditional Indian customs into the fiction work is really quite great and I found myself being drawn into it. But then the narration shifts back and forth through time and unless you are paying super close attention, you could easily get lost. Since I wasn’t totally into the book, I became distracted easily while reading it, so I had to reread parts a few times. I would recommend it to anyone interested in the Native American culture as there are some beautifully written parts.

This book was a very interesting read and gave some insight into the realities of indigenous Americans, whose stories were previously absent from my knowledge of nuclear history (and it was neat to discuss as a piece of literature in a college class!).

Out of all of the novels that I've had to read for school, this is one of my favorites. I can absolutely say that I had never read another book like it, and it has a wonderful artistic way of incorporating the conscious with reality. Silko's writing speaks of knowledge and experience of a world I'll never know. She has such a beautiful way of telling a story. I love how she takes a wounded man, who acknowledges that he's wounded even if it's not physical, and takes him on a journey of healing through his relationships with people. Truly a fantastic read.

Silko captures the fugue, guilt, anger, and silent hurt of PTSD better than any novelist I've yet read. Much of the writing is lyrical and the relationships herein she imagines with beautiful nuance and the histories of the central character (Tayo) reverberate again and again. There is not always clear distinction between what things Tayo is remembering, doing, or dreaming and the shifts seem so sudden that the plot sometimes seems fractured chronologically and can be difficult to follow. The poems and snippets of song included hardly make things clearer, but they serve to give additional depth to the central tale of return, recovery, and, ultimately, renewal.

I will give Leslie Silko credit for this novel. It's incredibly in-depth and offers an very good look into PTSD and the Native American culture post WWII (Laguna tribe of New Mexico). She doesn't sugar coat this story one bit. It's raw, real, and admittedly depressing. However, I do understand why my son's high school added it to their reading list. Her character development of Tayo, the central character of this novel, is excellent. I really was able to understand his PTSD and how it affected his life. However, I sometimes think that the average reader might not appreciate how she wove in some of the Native American folklore through the use of poems interspersed throughout the book. They play a part in the story, but they're just not my thing and I know my son flipped right through them. I also disliked not having chapters. She admits to not realizing this until she was finally done (she was more of a short story writer). I know a lot of critics have rated this very highly but I didn't particularly enjoy it. It was a real drag to finish.

Beautiful, spare, graphic writing. A must read as inspiration for writers.

Great book. Would've been better if I didn't have to read it in a week for a class that I've grown to hate. Would not recommend that you read this text in a week, it's very complex and thought provoking if you have the time to think about it.

I think this was interesting look into PTSD and how it affects other people who may not be part of white culture.

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