

## The Myth of the Noble Savage

The myth of the noble savage is a concept that originated in the Enlightenment era of the 17th and 18th centuries. It refers to the romanticized notion that indigenous or primitive cultures are inherently good, virtuous, and noble, in contrast to the corrupting influence of civilization.

The idea behind the myth is that societies untouched by modern civilization, such as indigenous tribes or early human communities, possess a natural innocence and live in harmony with nature. The noble savage is portrayed as living a simple and idyllic life, free from the moral and social complexities of civilized societies.

The myth of the noble savage gained prominence as European explorers encountered indigenous peoples during their voyages to distant lands. These encounters often resulted in the exoticization and idealization of native cultures, projecting onto them qualities and virtues that were deemed lacking in European societies. The myth was used to criticize the perceived corruption and artificiality of European civilization and to advocate for a return to a more natural and primal state of being. It was believed that by studying and imitating these noble savages, society could rediscover its lost virtues and improve itself.

However, it's important to note that the concept of the noble savage is a simplification and idealization of indigenous cultures. It ignores the complexities, internal conflicts, and shortcomings that exist in any human society, regardless of its level of development. Indigenous peoples, like any other group, have their own unique cultures, histories, and variations in social organization.

The myth of the noble savage has been widely criticized as an oversimplification and a form of romanticized racism, as it tends to exoticize and patronize indigenous peoples. It disregards their own agency, diversity, and the challenges they face, while perpetuating a binary view of the world that pits the natural against the civilized.

- *With these concepts in mind, discuss aspects of the film that perpetuate the noble savage myth.*
- *What other examples of the noble savage myth have you seen in the media? In your own culture?*
- While the noble savage myth characterizes indigenous peoples as embodying positive traits that the dominant culture values, it also obscures the complexities of their real culture as well as the actual problems they face especially in relation to the dominant culture, access to resources, power, political representation, etc. The myth turns them into an idealized, fictional group of people living a peaceful and harmonious existence, when their reality is most often one of extreme marginalization and discrimination which the dominant culture ignores.
- *With this in mind, what are you curious about regarding the Khoisan's actual culture and status within the broader national cultures of Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa?*

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