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Alienation, and Its Antidote

Anna Nissley
aniss364@live.kutztown.edu

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Ancient Native American symbol for emergence

“Place names serve as a vehicle for identity.” -Juan Valdés

This research explores how literal and metaphorical distance placed between humans and their environments has resulted in social and geographical alienation. Studying modern literature reveals this alienation, as well as potential remedies for it.



Black Elk and John Neihardt in 1945

“Alienation between ourselves and our environments has defined modern America.” -*Alienation, and its Antidote* (2)

The work is situated within the American modern period, discussing alienation particularly in light of the impacts of Manifest Destiny and Imperialism. A specific focus is placed on the experiences of Native Americans displaced and oppressed by European settlers from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. One of the texts studied, titled *Black Elk Speaks*, offers the narrative of a Lakota holy man by that name and details the horrors of westward expansion. Examining also the late 1900s during which the after-effects of earlier oppression were visible, the paper analyzes William Least-Heat Moon’s travel memoir, *Blue Highways*, studying how it reveals one traveler’s resistance against alienation.

Alienation, & its Antidote

Anna Nissley, ENG 366

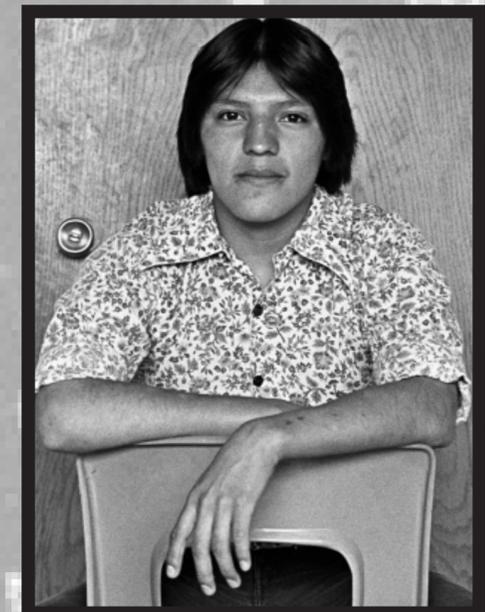
“Mobility is just as spatial—as geographical—and just as central to the human experience of the world, as place” -Tim Cresswell

This work can ultimately be applied to innumerable current contexts. Actions taken especially in political spheres should be based upon consideration of both physical and social landscapes. If alienation has resulted from a distance between human populations and their physical environments, the solution is a joining of the two, a pursuit of harmony between them. Like the decision to rename Harney Peak to Black Elk Peak (discussed in the paper), decisions must reflect not only a commitment to social justice, but also a commitment to environmental justice. In the words of Barry Lopez, “The shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes.”



Photo of a young Black Elk

“...where time and men and deeds conected.” -William Least Heat-Moon
Although Black Elk and William Least Heat-Moon both experience modern alienation, they do so in different ways. This paper dissects the nuances of their experiences as people of Native American descent in different historical contexts. Secondary sources such as Barry Lopez’s “Landscape as Narrative” further develop this discourse.



Kendrick Fritz in 1978

