

Public Abstract

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Title:Environmental Discourses and Cultural Identity on American Waterways: Regional Folklore, Folk Practice, and Natural Responsibility

This project combines multiple disciplinary perspectives from history to literary analysis to the study of folklore in order to analyze the traditions, rituals, and beliefs among whitewater river rafters. The use of multiple frames of reference allows for the construction of a method for further research among groups that engage in whitewater paddling and for developing a clear sense of how these people think about their role in a larger global and environmental context. By creating this method and applying it to the personal experiences of the author, this project helps to create a sense of, not only a lack of serious academic scholarship on whitewater river running but, the ways in which direct, physical interaction with natural environments builds a sense of environmental awareness, respect, and responsibility in the individuals who engage in these types of activity. The use of performance, ethnographic description, literary and artistic analysis, and history, all within the context of environmental engagement and awareness allows for a greater understanding of how people think about their interaction with the environment and points toward further research into this area of human engagement.