

ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES AND CULTURAL IDENTITY ON AMERICAN WATERWAYS:
REGIONAL FOLKLORE, FOLK PRACTICE, AND NATURAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis project provides auto-ethnographic material that is analyzed from the perspective of folklore studies and is centered on the practices involved with whitewater river rafting. The specific context of the author's personal experiences is used to create an ethnographic description of a river trip with the focus centered on the development of a vernacular religion based around the experience of whitewater rafting. Ethnographic description is combined with a performance script that is centered on the author's development of a vernacular spirituality through direct contact with the natural environment. Folklore studies, religious studies, and cultural geography scholars are used to provide frameworks to analyze the rituals and associated beliefs of whitewater river rafters. The embodied experience of whitewater rafting is proposed as both the central context of this particular folk group and the organizing feature of these beliefs.