

Paul Mairet  
Projects in Writing  
Canoe Trip Write-up

I'm going to start this by just copying what I wrote in my journal during and immediately before the trip. Then I'll write a little more about it, looking back several days after I've returned.

8/28/08

Starting this a little early: the night before. Just want to write the feelings before the trip. I'm excited, of course, but what else...I'm really preoccupied with what I will write about. I don't know at all really. It's anxious, confusion, restless. That's me, actually. I think I will focus more on the river than the people. And the other nature around the river. Treat the river as a living, flowing like blood, thing. It's alive and animated. Think that way as I canoe in it and sleep near it. Be a little crazy, pretend it's talking to me. Try to listen. That's it for now. It'll form itself. I hope it kind of winds. All right, good night.

8/29/08

Last night I said I was not focusing on people. That isn't possible. It's overwhelming what's happened in these places that I think of as ordinary. People were pushed out of their home, their world. Their most important places were destroyed for the benefit of visitors. This whole state, and most other states, are the result of invasions and cruelties that have never been confessed or amended. It makes everything very complicated. When we were listening to Woman of North (I don't remember what it was in the Dakota language) speak about these injustices, some people drove up to where we were sitting and told us that we were on their campsite. We said we were almost done with our discussion and that we would leave soon, but that wasn't good enough for them. It was what we'd been talking about: people thinking that they had rights to places and not wanting to share, even for a moment. One thing that really stood out to me was what Woman of the North said about the end of the oil using world and the return of a more natural life. She said this would allow the indigenous people to reclaim their land and way of life. They view everything as being alive: there are spirits in everything. That is why they respect the environment and choose to live with it rather than live outside of it. They don't view it as just resources, they view it as themselves. That's what I'm going to keep in mind as I go on this trip. Time for dinner.

8/30/08

Last night was a memorable and powerful time. LaMoine told us about the teachings of Wolakota and how it has helped him find peace in his life. The day before I left on this trip, my girlfriend said she wanted to find something that would change her view. That happened to me last night. I felt, in a much more personal way, the pain that invasion and colonization caused the natives of America. Not only were many of them killed, the ones left alive were no longer able to carry on their way of life or practice their beliefs. The settlers destroyed a culture, almost to extinction, just so they could have a new place to live. It makes me feel bad knowing that where and how I live is the same as those settlers. The effects are still felt. There were some beautiful images in LaMoine's stories however. Wolakota is about finding the center of one's life. There are the four directions: North, South, East, and West. There is Grandmother

Earth and Grandfather Sky. The seventh space is unknown. I think finding the center is like finding your calling, your purpose. That's what it seemed to mean for LaMoine. He talked about being young, seeing his friend kill himself, later finding himself not seeing tomorrow. His Grandfather stopped him, made him cut firewood, then burned the wood and sage as they prayed with the elders. LaMoine went out of his body and saw his scared self. He then came back and felt he had found his center. He gave up his violent ways and has been helping people ever since. He lost another friend to a gang member they were trying to bring onto the right path, shortly after lost his son to the same gang. It hurt to hear these parts because I'm pretty sure things would have been different if LaMoine and his people weren't living in a constant state of oppression. Sometimes they just didn't want to deal with it anymore: sometimes they were so sick of it that they did things without thinking. LaMoine has been visited by his dead father and his dead son, and they have both assured him that he is doing right and that he should continue. I really like what his father once told him: No matter where you are you will always have your grandmother and grandfather (earth and sky) they will never leave you. Touch the earth and be close to your grandmother. Reach up into the sky and know your grandfather. As long as you can do this, you are never lost. This simplicity and beauty was probably easier to believe in times past. It must be hard to feel grandmother smothered in cement and grandfather pierced by skyscrapers and contaminated with smog. It hurts to think, but I think that it's good to know. The stars were so clear and endless last night and the sun is bright, but soft this morning. It's wonderful here.

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I didn't write an actual journal entry the last day, but I did write some more poetical things. I'm planning on using them for my other writing assignments, so I won't include them in here. This trip really opened my eyes to something that is kept very quiet in our society. It's wrong that these truths aren't told in schools or history books. I'm very glad that I was able to experience everything that I did this weekend. It was much more than I expected. It was not only a beautiful trip through nature, but it was a trip of learning and understanding. I've never met people like the Dakota before. They were so open with their stories and feelings even though they'd never met us before. They are very gracious and helpful and kind. I'm surprised that this is the case considering the history of their people. I wouldn't blame them if they were bitter and maybe even hateful towards people like me. But they set a better example than our ancestors did. They treated us kindly despite all that our culture has done to hurt theirs, hoping that perhaps we will return the favor. I really admire their calm attitude. There will plenty to write about this semester.