Off the Road: Exploring Postcolonial Themes in the American Road Movie

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Abstract
This essay explores the colonial nature of the American road movie, specifically through the lens of how road movies treat the South according to Stuart Hall's concepts of identity and Edward Said's on Othering and the colonial gaze. To accomplish this, the essay analyzes the classic 1969 road movie, "Easy Rider", and the more contemporary parody from 2008, "Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay." The thrust of this paper becomes: if a progressive parody of road movies cannot escape the trappings of colonialism "Easy Rider" displays, perhaps the road movie itself is flawed.

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One of the accidental themes of this road trip was my encounters with New Americans—the Iranian at the rental agency in Los Angeles, the Chinese gamblers in Las Vegas and my Ethiopian taxi drivers; the Somalis—robed, veiled, moving in a group of nine—I encountered in a Kinko's in Arizona; the man from Eritrea in Memphis, and here in Lexington. A trip abroad, any trip, ends like a movie—the curtain drops and then you're home, shut off. But this was different from any trip I'd ever taken. In the 3,380 miles I'd driven, in all that wonder, there wasn't a moment when I felt I didn't belong; not a day when I didn't rejoice in the knowledge that I was part of this beauty; not a moment of alienation or danger, no roadblocks, no sign of officialdom, never a second of feeling I was somewhere.