

# [Analyze kerouac's treatment of race and marginality in the book on the road](https://assignbuster.com/analyze-kerouacs-treatment-of-race-and-marginality-in-the-book-on-the-road/)

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English Literature ic and Modern) Analysis Of How Kerouac Treats Race And Marginality In The Book “ On the Road.” Onthe Road is a novel written by Jack Kerouac, an American writer, published in 1957. The book has been widely received as one that gives great details on the postwar Beat Generation. The generation had reportedly been encouraged by the emergence of jazz music as well as poetry and the experiences of drugs during the time. The novel is set in from 1947 to 1950, and is mostly characterized by a lot of “ Americana” (Theado 65). My paper seeks to analyze how the issues of race and marginality are addressed in the novel.
On the Road presents an American society which is diverse, but with some groups seriously marginalized. Perhaps the most discriminated against groups within this society are racial minorities and women. Women are mostly marginalized because this society is kind of patriarchal in nature. Kerouac presents this situation just the way it is, neither openly condemning nor supporting it. The women’s place in this society is presented as peripheral, and their duties clearly restricted away from the public life. For instance, the best contribution the women can give is to be good housewives. This is clear displayed when Sal Paradise arrives in Denver and is accommodated at a friend’s place. He says, “ My first afternoon in Denver I slept in Chadoking’s room while his mother went on with her housework downstairs and Chad worked in the library” (Kerouac 40). Moreover, female voices and opinions are strongly silenced. The author has intentionally given active roles in the novel to male characters like Sal and Dean. And even when a female character is introduced, there is so little said about their feelings. The introductions will only go as far as their relationship to the male characters. For instance, when Sal is introducing a female friend of his in Denver he says, “…one of Ray’s sisters was a beautiful blonde called Babe- a tennis-playing, surf-riding doll of the West. She was Tim Gray’s girl” (Kerouac 42). Here and in other instances where even outspoken and active female characters like Frankie and Galatea as well as Marylou are introduced, female characters only exist as lovers, male character’s lovers or girlfriends.
The idea of marginality is very rife throughout the novel. Dean and Salvatore are, for instance, highly mesmerized by those people who are marginalized in America, especially the people of African-American or Mexican decent. It is interesting to realize that while African-Americans are trying so hard to gain freedom, Sal and Dean feel that this freedom can only be attained in being marginalized, since this will mean that one is left alone to do their own will without struggling to keep standards of the dominant culture. Here Kerouac is trying to show how racial discrimination affects both Whites and Blacks equally as both groups are not free to do what they choose to. However, even Sal who seems to have seen the light still thinks that anything African or Mexican is inferior. This is evident when he sleeps with a Mexican lady for the first time. He says, “…O gruesome life, how I moaned and pleaded, and then I got mad and realized I was pleading with a dumb little Mexican wench and I told her” (Kerouac 80). Sal is clearly racist.
We find the author’s hate for racial discrimination when he describes getting into visiting Mexico. He says “ It’s a great feeling of entering the Pure Land, especially because it’s so close the dry-faced Arizona and Texas…but you can find…this fellaheen feeling about life, that timeless gayety of people not involved in great cultural and civilization issues” (Kerouac 22). Acknowledging the primitive innocence of Mexico means that Kerouac is trying to show the kind of harmony and that exist in this “ primitive” society. It is better than the problems of Western civilization inherent in America. It is also Dean’s and Sal’s intention to discover their real identity since the author is tired of this race issue. The two constantly see a looming trouble in America and are therefore constantly travelling to discover a better culture (Mlakar 2007).
Kerouac treats race and marginality with a lot of caution since there is no place he condemns both openly. However, it is very clear from the novel that he strongly hates the two, and silently prays that America would be free of both. He constantly appreciates America’s racial diversity and even comments thus about Mill City, “ the only community in America where Whites and Negroes lived together voluntarily…so wild and joyous place I’ve never seen before” (Kerouac 60).
Works Cited
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