

**Kutztown University**  
**Research Commons at Kutztown University**

---

English Department: Traveling American  
Modernism Posters (ENG 366, Fall 2018)

English Department

---

Fall 12-12-2018

# The Toxicity of Otherness

Justin Malone  
jmalo793@live.kutztown.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/englishENG366posters>

 Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), [Philosophy of Mind Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Malone, Justin, "The Toxicity of Otherness" (2018). *English Department: Traveling American Modernism Posters (ENG 366, Fall 2018)*.  
1.  
<https://research.library.kutztown.edu/englishENG366posters/1>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the English Department at Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Department: Traveling American Modernism Posters (ENG 366, Fall 2018) by an authorized administrator of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact [czerny@kutztown.edu](mailto:czerny@kutztown.edu).

# The Toxicity of Otherness

Justin Malone

## What is Otherness?

Humans have a natural tendency to categorize information, so they can better process the world around them. This can become dangerous when applied to groups of people. Othering occurs once a group is categorized and socially seen as outsiders, deviations from the norm. This eventually leads to the discrimination and eventual displacement of the group, in an attempt to restore social normality.

## Who has been Othered?



A group of Japanese-American citizens, shortly after their forced evacuation. Dorothea Lange, San Francisco, California, April 25, 1942.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, an executive order from President Roosevelt was signed, giving military officials the right to forcibly evacuate any person deemed a "residential enemy". The order specifically avoided the mention of any defining traits of people to be targeted. However, it was used for the exclusive purpose of interning Japanese-American citizens all across the Western coast of America. This is just one notable example of Otherness. Many other groups have fallen victim to Othering, including the Native American population and Midwestern farmers during the Great Depression.



A family of Saalk Native Americans. Frank Rinehart, 1899

## How can we prevent Othering?

The primary way to break the cycle of Othering is to share the stories of those who have been through it. In telling these stories, one can breach the gap between different cultural upbringings. Barry Lopez, author of *Crossing Open Ground*, writes of the differences between a person's internal and external landscapes. The external landscape consists of the physical objects and entities in an environment, and the objective connections between them. The internal landscape is how a person experiences those connections.

Othering starts when someone fails to see how another culture forms their internal landscape differently from themselves. Well-written stories, like Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* or Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, can break down an experience back into base entities and reconstruct those connections. The author creates an empathetic bond with the reader, allowing one to gain a new perspective on the world around them. Forming this connection with the reader transcends any demographic differences.

### Works cited:

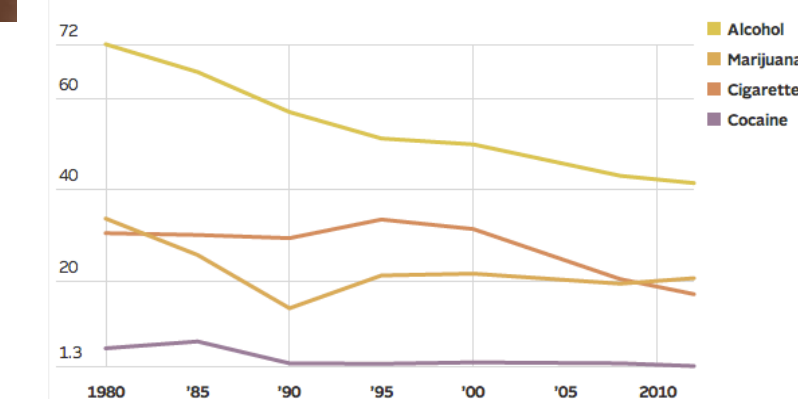
Kliff, Sarah. "Today's Teens Are the Best-Behaved on Record." Vox.com, Vox Media, 17 Dec. 2014, www.vox.com/2014/5/25/5748178/.  
Lopez, Barry. "Landscape and Narrative." *Crossing Open Ground*. Vintage Books, 1989. Print.

## The future of Otherness

It is difficult to say where the future of American culture will lead, especially considering its past. However, everything seems to be pointing towards a more positive, more inclusive America. Studies have shown that the youth of today are the best-behaved generation by several metrics.

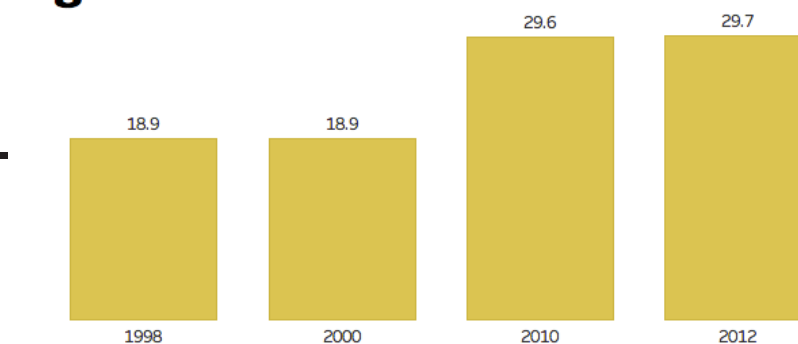
One probably reason for this is how much

### High school seniors' use of illicit substances



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

### Percent of 18 to 24-year-olds meeting federal exercise guidelines



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A sample of two studies performed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, released in May 2014

this new era of connection is leading us towards an elimination of mass Othering.

The first step in eliminating Otherness is identifying when it begins. Once a group is discussed in a way that states unifying similarities between all of its members, one should recognize the potential for Othering. It can be hard to call out those who speak in homogenizing language towards those they do not understand, but is necessary to defend those whose voices are being ignored. The hope is that one day, stories from the victims of societal Otherness will no longer need to be told.

children and young adults have free and easy access to information. With the advent of platforms like YouTube and Wikipedia, and technology such as laptops, tablets and smartphones, people can find out all they want about differing cultures in only a few seconds of searching. Humans are becoming more connected in every conceivable way, and