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“The magic land at the end of the road”: Sal Paradise’s Construction of the Other

In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise searches for alternatives to mainstream American life by exploring the lives of those who are not white. He feels that his whiteness makes his life experiences somehow less authentic than the experiences of those who are of other races. This search leads Sal to the “magic south”: Mexico. His seemingly innocent vivaciousness as he “digs” another culture masks what occurs below the surface: Sal effectively creates an occident/orient relationship which places the Mexican people on the margins of his own central viewpoint. Sal Paradise encounters issues such as racism and ethnic subordination repeatedly in the text, but he fails to see his position as a middle class white male American. By occupying this position but not acknowledging the privileges it entails, Sal places himself in the occidental center of the narrative, while those unlike him (Mexicans and poor field laborers) are pushed to the margins and Orientalized. Sal desires what he *perceives* life to be like for these others, without consideration of what life is *really* like for them. Sal’s failure to look beneath the surface solidifies his role as an Orientalist – although he appears to simply be looking for a good time, the result is the subordination of those that are of different ethnicities, cultures, and socioeconomic classes. An examination of *On the Road* through the lens of Orientalism reveals that Sal is an active participant in the creation of an occident/orient dichotomy, which ultimately leads to Sal’s failure to make any real connections across lines of class or ethnicity.