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Ventisquero del Claro

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UNTIL RECENTLY, ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE HAS BEEN LARGELY UNACKNOWLEDGED; WHERE OTHER PREJUDICES ARE QUICKLY IDENTIFIED AND CONDEMNED, THIS BIAS HAS GONE UNCHALLENGED. NOVELS BY DON DELILLO, RUTH OZEKI, AND T.C. BOYLE TARGET THIS LACK OF AWARENESS BY EXPOSING THE WAYS IN WHICH MAINSTREAM CULTURE HAS BEEN EXPLOITATIVE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES. DELILLO AND OZEKI CITE RECENT EXAMPLES OF ECOLOGICAL INJUSTICE, FOCUSING ON THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENT RACISM, AND BOYLE USES HIS NOVEL AS A STEPPING STONE TO EXPOSE THE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISTS’ ACTIONS.

FOR DECADES, the United States has carefully selected locations for hazardous testing. The country has also systematically decided upon the locations of waste management practices, like sites for toxic landfills. Not surprisingly, the people most impacted by these decisions, the people who the government chose to receive the brunt of the negative environmental and health side effects, are minorities. Due to their vulnerability, smaller numbers, and weakened political power, marginalized people become the ideal targets for this “environmental racism.” Despite mainstream culture’s ignorance and indifference of this issue, environmental racism is becoming more prevalent in the works of environmental authors. For instance, Don DeLillo, Ruth Ozeki, and T.C. Boyle each explore different ecological problems, yet they all refer to environmental racism. Delillo’s novel Underworld focuses on the toxicity of waste management practices in a consumerist society, but also draws attention to the contemporary issue of environmental injustice and its lasting effects. Ozeki portrays the impact of Genetically Modified Organisms on potato farmers’ families in All Over Creation, yet she examines how people misuse American Indian stereotypes to further their own agendas. And Boyle depicts the violence and sacrifice of activists in A Friend of the Earth, but through American Indian references, he questions the thought processes and goals of environmental radicals. Although each author emphasizes a different controversy, all three novels raise the topic of environmental racism by focusing on mainstream culture’s ignorance, indifference, and exploitation of indigenous peoples. DeLillo and Ozeki educate their readers by citing recent examples of ecological injustice and focusing on the long-term effects of environmental racism. In contrast, Boyle’s effort to reveal the misconceptions of indigenous peoples leads to romanticism and exploitation; Boyle succumbs to issues of environmental racism that DeLillo and Ozeki examine by using the pervasive stereotypes of indigenous peoples to further his own cause, to deter others from environmental radicalism. The extremism that Boyle depicts in his novel hinders ecological progress and leads to a myriad of other, more severe consequences.

DUMPING ON TONTO

In the novel Underworld, Don DeLillo raises the issue of environmental racism by examining the dangers that American Indians lived through and still face today. His character Detwiler exposes Americans’ callousness, indifference, and ignorance of American Indians. Meanwhile, the interwoven historical recollections of plutonium and uranium mining refer to overlooked horrors of the previous and ongoing injustice toward