

# Race and Social Identity in On the Road and The Reivers

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## Race and Social Identity in On the Road and The Reivers

Whether around a group of friends or among total strangers, many people feel compelled to act in certain ways to please those around them; this part of our identity is labeled conveniently as social identity. A social identity can sometimes be very close to one's personal [identity](#), but the differences between the two is caused by social pressures and obligations, and the extent to which it differs is based on many factors such as [race](#), heritage, age, etc. Specifically, the pressures on minorities in a predominantly white society may cause them to behave in certain ways. Also, examining these pressures may help us further see the reasons for this behavior. Both *The Reivers* and *On The Road* are commentaries on how this social identity develops, and both novels state their stance on what role [race](#) should play in determining social identity quite clearly.

In *On The Road*, Jack Kerouac tries to sidestep the issue of racial interaction throughout by leaving out any conflicts therein. In doing so, Kerouac implies that race has little or nothing to do with social identity. The only substantial interactions either Dean or Sal have

with members of another race are when Sal goes to the Denver ghetto to look for his friends and when Dean and Sal go to jazz bars in San Francisco. When Kerouac talks about the black people that Sal sees or interacts with, skin color is used only descriptively, and is never a social issue for Sal.

When Sal and Dean are in the jazz bars of San Francisco, the issue of race comes up very superficially; that is, race is used only as a method of description throughout the night. When they first enter the jazz bars, Sal sees "a bunch of colored...

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... an identity that cannot be defined strictly in social terms. So, instead of simply replacing negative stereotypes with positive ones, Faulkner closely examines the reasons for the existence of such stereotypes, and in his exploration, we find that such stereotypes may be seem valid on face, but are, in truth, utterly wrong. In conclusion, Faulkner's use of nuance and detail in developing the social interactions between Ned and a white society serve the ideas of racial equality much better than Kerouac's simplistic replacement of stereotypes.

#### Works Cited

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