

UNST 124g fall 2011
spirit of place

1 introduction

In the introduction to his influential book *Topophilia*, Professor Yi-fu Tuan (1974) asks a series of questions

What are our views on the physical environment, natural and man-made? How do we perceived, structure, and evaluate it? What have been, and what are, our environmental ideals? How do economy, life style, and the physical setting itself affect environmental attitudes and values? What are the links between environment and world view?

(p. 1). He asserts that finding the answers to these questions prepares us understand ourselves, an understanding without which “we cannot hope for enduring solutions to environmental problems, which are fundamentally human problems” (p. 1). In the present reading, Professor Dan Flores discusses a framework in which such questions may be asked and answered.

2 assignment

You are asked to read Flores (1998), *Spirit of place and the value of nature in the American west*, in preparation for a classroom discussion and your next writing assignment. Dr. Flores, Professor of History at the University of Montana, specializes in the cultural and environmental history of the American West. He has written many books and academic articles on those themes. The present article is a contribution to an environmental history anthology containing articles on both historiography—the methods of historical research—and applied work. In his chapter, Professor Flores challenges his colleagues—and us—to think carefully about the ways in which we relate to a place.

The article is available as a pdf in the Millar Library electronic reserve for this class. Print the article so that you are able to easily highlight or underline passages in the text and write notes to yourself in the margins. The questions below are intended to help you read the essay effectively and to prepare you for an in-class discussion. Your answers do not need to be long but they should be written using complete sentences and correct grammar. Please type your answers and print them before you come to class. You may be asked to turn these in at the end of the discussion.

1. What does Flores mean by *spirit of place*? His thesis is stated simply on page 32 and expanded in the following pages.
2. What does *regionalism* mean?
3. How does Flores use the Great Plains region to elaborate on his thesis?
4. Beginning on page 35, Flores uses his *spirit of place* framework to address the second topic in the title of his article, *the value of nature in the American West*. At the outset he identifies anthropocentrism as essential to the relationship between modern culture and landscape.

- (a) What does *anthropocentrism* mean?
 - (b) Is this a new idea or not?
 - (c) What other philosophical threads does Flores identify as leading to the present state of affairs?
 - (d) Why does it matter to spirit of place in the modern American West that Euro-Americans framed the continent as being a “wilderness” when they arrived? (p. 36)
5. Flores returns to his thesis on page 37, “Here on the cusp of the twenty-first century we are still hauling all of this human baggage...along with us like a brontosaurus tail.” Is he pessimistic or optimistic about where the culture of the American West is headed?

3 references

Flores, D. (1998). *A sense of the American west*. Spirit of place and the value of nature in the American west (pp. 31-40) J.S. Sherow (Ed.). University of New Mexico Press.

Tuan, Yi-fu. (1974). *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.