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Suggested Citation:

Wolfe, Margaret Ripley. "The Appalachian Reality: Ethnic and Class Diversity." The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications 52 & 53 (1980-81): 40-60.

## THE APPALACHIAN REALITY: ETHNIC AND CLASS DIVERSITY

By Margaret Ripley Wolfe

Accusations concerning those responsible for the disfigurement of Appalachia have not been confined to coal operators, industrialists, and lumbermen; intellectuals, too, share the blame. Evidence suggests that they have been responsible for the creation of a cultural wasteland. One popular academic lecturer on Appalachian topics quipped that if it were not for the stereotypes he would be out of business. Such rare candor affords some insight into the rather basic question of why some scholars have chosen to ignore or diminish the importance of pluralistic elements that are also a part of the region's social composition, but it hardly explains the pervasiveness of the homogeneity interpretation.

From myriad sources emerges a distorted composite that depicts the Appalachian native as a noble savage, ruined by the forces of modernization; perpetuates an Arcadian myth; presents a one-sided view of capitalism; offers an overly simplistic explanation of class values and the class system; and ignores ethnic diversity. These flawed themes seem to be derived, at least in part, from the ambivalence of intellectuals toward capitalism and their discomfort with instability in American society. The dominant interpretive scheme places the region and its people outside the context of modern American life.

*Appalachia*, as used herein, is as much a state of mind as a specific place. The Appalachian region encompasses thirteen states or portions thereof, stretching from the Deep South to New England; but prevailing imagery derives its impetus principally from the segment designated as Central Appalachia by the Appalachian Region Commission or as Southern Appalachia and the Southern Highlands by earlier observers. Mountainous portions of Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, and Maryland have largely escaped unfavorable association with *Appalachia*. As a point of record, however, it should be noted that Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle, who possessed an "in-

superable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor," lived in the "Kaat-skill [*sic*] Mountains . . . a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family."<sup>1</sup> This popular character made his literary debut in a collection entitled *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* published around 1819-20 and represents one of the earliest caricatures of an Appalachian to be found in American literature.

Because imagery of Appalachia is so intimately associated with descriptions of life styles in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, arguments offered herein rely on data drawn principally from these states. Nonetheless, diversity occasioned by topography and rural and urban configurations exists even here. A study that emphasizes ethnic and class diversity seems, to this author, a statement of the obvious. Yet, the continuing flow of commentaries which seem to ignore this salient fact demands that some attempt be made "to mainstream Appalachia."

From standard maudlin accounts of Appalachian life, one could easily gain the impression that dulcimer-plucking Appalachians experienced a near idyllic existence on their hillside farms before they were robbed of their land by outsiders. Such a quaint notion conceals the degradation of illiteracy, the despair that accompanies sickness when medical care is absent or inadequate, and the revolution in human hopes and aspirations that sometimes appears with the development of a cash economy. This is not to suggest that all Appalachians had a squalid lifestyle or that capitalism immediately improved the quality of life of those who did, for the benefits of capitalism "trickle down" slowly at best. Even in the Northeast, the seedbed of the modern American economy, capitalism rarely generated a pattern of "rags to riches."<sup>2</sup>

The capitalists who masterminded developments in Southern Appalachia from the 1880's to the advent of the Great Depression introduced inhabitants to both the best and worst aspects of an industrial urban society. On the positive side, regular cash income, indoor plumbing, health care, electricity, recreational opportunities, commitment to public education, and housing that was as good or better than the norms of the area helped to elevate the standard of living for some. The better aspects of a few of the new planned communities

<sup>1</sup>Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle and the Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (New York, 1957), 1, 3.

<sup>2</sup>See Edward Pessen, "The Egalitarian Myth and the American Social Reality: Wealth, Mobility, and Equality in the 'Era of the Common Man,'" *American Historical Review*, LXVII (1971), 989-1034; and Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, 1964).

like Stonega, Virginia, or Kingsport, Tennessee, provided a kind of yardstick for human aspirations. On the negative side, capitalists exploited nonunion, unsophisticated laborers with comparatively low wages and often dangerous working conditions, allowed company housing to fall into disrepair, and polluted the air and water while abusing the land.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary observers looked for "real mountaineers" and sometimes tended to ignore or diminish the importance of changes being wrought in the local culture during this transitional period. Traveling in eastern Kentucky, Tennessee, and northern Georgia around 1907, Horace Kephart, who had forsaken civilization in the North for a wilderness existence in the southern mountains, concluded:

I verified beyond question my conclusion that the typical southern highlanders were not the relatively few townsmen and prosperous valley farmers of the Appalachian region, but the great multitude of little farmers living up the branches and on the steep hillsides, back from the main highways, and generally far from the railroads. These, the real mountaineers, were what interested me; and so I wrote them up.<sup>4</sup>

The educator John C. Campbell acknowledged the influence of capitalistic development but observed that some mountaineers could not "meet the demands of the new life arising from increase of population and the passing of pioneer conditions to which they had learned to adapt themselves well."<sup>5</sup> In *The Southern Highlander & His Homeland* published originally in the 1920's, Campbell, a self-described "American, born in the West, educated in the East, and by preference a resident of the South," identified three groups among the then current highland population: "urban and near-urban folk," "more or less prosperous rural folk," and less prosperous landowners, renters, or common laborers scattered among the other two groups.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup>See Margaret Ripley Wolfe, "Changing the Face of Southern Appalachia: Urban Planning in Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee, 1890-1929," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, XLVII (1981), 252-65. Conditions in the mining communities varied considerably. For a detailed study of settlements in West Virginia, see Mack H. Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Field of Southern West Virginia, 1880 to 1930," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1972).

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders: A Narrative of Adventure in the Southern Appalachians and A Study of Life Among the Mountaineers* (Knoxville, 1976), xxxvii.

<sup>5</sup>John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander & His Homeland* (Lexington, 1969), 89.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, xx, 81-82.

"The opening up of the country by railroads and industrial development," he wrote,

is making changes in many parts of the mountains. The wealth that has come accentuates social distinctions little noted in the days when the mountaineers subsisted chiefly by distinctively rural pursuits and lived as rural folk. The gap between the first and third groups has been widened, and while many of the second have shared in the increase of wealth that economic development brings, by opening to them near at hand a ready market for their surplus products, all of the group by no means share in the prosperity.<sup>7</sup>

The most obvious peculiarity of modern capitalism in Appalachia is that it came somewhat later to this region than some parts of the United States and that its incursion was a cultural shock to a predominantly rural setting. Rural to urban mobility patterns were common not only to native-born Americans but also European immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, their exposure to urban, industrial America involved a deliberate choice to forsake one pattern of life for another. Rural Appalachians, however, for the most part had industrialization imposed upon them and their land, although local entrepreneurs in league with outside investors actively promoted this transformation.

Appalachia had not experienced that flowering of preindustrial capitalism that had manifested itself in the Northeast during the first half of the nineteenth century and eased the transition of a rural economy to industrial capitalism.<sup>8</sup> Appalachia, nevertheless, was not totally devoid of commercial contact with the outside world. Anthropologist Eugene A. Conti, Jr., has documented the development of "fledgling commercial bonds" between eastern Kentucky and the Bluegrass as well as the Atlantic Coast during the antebellum period, but he cautions that this does not "imply that the region was well integrated with those sections," although such bonds brought the "highlands within the purview of the American economy and polity . . . in a decidedly preindustrial fashion."<sup>9</sup> Economic development that came to Appalachia in the late nineteenth century did not represent an aberration of capitalistic practice; it did represent the superimposition of mature capitalism on a society that had not been sufficiently cushioned by the preceding economic stage, and it affords an example of unrestrained capitalism allowed to run its course.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>8</sup>George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York, 1951); Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago and London, 1978), 19.

<sup>9</sup>Eugene A. Conti, Jr., "The Cultural Role of Local Elites in the Kentucky Mountains: A Retrospective Analysis," *Appalachian Journal*, VII (1979-1980), 56.

It is the nature of capitalists to seek control of raw materials, manipulate the political system, and dominate the labor force in the international arena, on the national front, and indeed on such regional levels as that of Appalachia and the American South.<sup>10</sup>

Terrain is a key to interpreting Appalachia and understanding its alleged distinctiveness. Just as these mountains were a barrier to westward-moving English colonists prior to 1763, they likewise impeded economic development during most of the nineteenth century. Although they harbored tremendous mineral and timber wealth and some people who favored a diversified economy, it was not until the late nineteenth century that technology was sufficiently advanced and American economic conditions ripe for the penetration of modern capitalism into the Appalachian region. Mark Potter, president of the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railroad, explained in the company's annual report of 1911 this impediment to trade and commerce and the concomitant isolation of the Appalachian region. "Because of this mountain barrier," he wrote, "commerce between the Central West and the Southeast has swung around through the Virginia gateway at the north or the Atlanta gateway at the south, moving over circuitous routes, affording inadequate service and involving expensive operation."<sup>11</sup> Although the idea for a railroad traversing the southern highlands to connect the Midwest and East Coast had originated in the Old South, its realization awaited the New South's exploitation of untapped resources in eastern Tennessee, southwestern Virginia, and eastern Kentucky. The Clinchfield as well as other lines that penetrated the mountains opened the region to modern industrialization.

As capitalism relieved physical isolation, swarms of literary figures, geologists, engineers, and a plethora of other experts embarked on the first "rediscovery" of Appalachia.<sup>12</sup> Their conclusions about the natives and their life styles were more subjectively descrip-

<sup>10</sup>John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana, Chicago, and London, 1980); E. Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1980).

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Frank E. Shaffer, "Here Comes Clinchfield," *Trains*, August, 1961, 37.

<sup>12</sup>How many times Appalachia has been discovered depends to a large extent on who is counting. Robert Munn identifies four distinct stages: a literary discovery beginning in the 1850's, a missionary discovery of the 1890's, a renewed interest during the 1930's, and that of the 1960's. Such careful delineations assume chronological boundaries that are virtually impossible to ascertain. See Robert H. Munn, "The Latest Rediscovery of Appalachia," *Mountain Life and Work*, XL (1965), 25-30.

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tive than objectively analytical and reflected as much about the discoverers as those being discovered. Historian Roderick Nash found turn-of-the-century America "ripe for the appeal of the uncivilized on a broad popular basis." The impetus behind what he dubs the "American cult of the primitive" rested on "a growing tendency to associate wilderness with America's vanishing frontier and pioneer past that was thought responsible for many desirable national characteristics." That mood sparked the organization of the Appalachian Mountain Club in 1876 and the Sierra Club sixteen years later. On the European continent a century earlier, according to Nash, Rousseau had lauded "the sublimity of Alpine scenery so enthusiastically as to stimulate a generation of artists and writers," while some American literati substituted the Appalachians for the Alps. Furthermore, the cult of the primitive "provided a vehicle for criticizing the commercial orientation of American life" marked by industrialization, urbanization, and business values.<sup>13</sup>

While some mourned the passing of rural America, the northeastern and midwestern cities were reeling under the weight of millions of "new" immigrants, Catholics and Jews from southern and eastern Europe, who threatened the "purity" of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture; the country was gearing up for one of its waves of nativism.<sup>14</sup> Another racial dimension of the "rediscovery" has been explored by historian James C. Klotter who argues that "increased racism and northern disappointment over Reconstruction allowed some reformers to turn with clear conscience away from blacks" to the needy and pure whites of Appalachia.<sup>15</sup>

Prejudiced by their discontent with *fin de siecle* America, the discoverers quarantined their subject and defined Appalachia as "a strange land inhabited by a peculiar people, a discrete region, in but not of America," a pattern akin to investigations of "new" immigrants in the tenement districts of major American cities. According to historian Henry D. Shapiro, "It should . . . come as no surprise that they insisted vigorously on the accuracy of their vision of Appalachian otherness, or that their assertions were made more

<sup>13</sup>Roderick Nash, "The American Cult of the Primitive," *American Quarterly*, XVIII (1966), 521, 528, 532, and 533.

<sup>14</sup>For a general discussion of American nativism during this period, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N. J. 1955).

<sup>15</sup>James C. Klotter, "The Black South and White Appalachia," *Journal of American History*, LXVI (1980), 849.

often in New York and Boston and Philadelphia than in Asheville or Knoxville." Removed from Appalachia, they were unaffected by the "real conditions of mountain life or the normal complexity of social and economic conditions which prevailed in the mountains as in every other section of the country."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it is no coincidence that the "discovered Appalachian"—a rural, semi-educated independent-spirited, lily-white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant—was well adapted to his wilderness habitat. Impelled by a nostalgia too strong to resist, this generation of intellectuals found a race of noble savages set apart from modern America in a mythical mountain Arcadia unmarred by ethnic and class diversity.

Apparently the tensions of contemporary America have guaranteed the survival and embellishment upon earlier stereotypical images, for they continue to enjoy prominence. The most recent "rediscovery" of Appalachia that occurred during the 1960's and 1970's was spawned by an American society fractured by civil-rights crusades, rising ethnic consciousness, the Vietnamese war, and women's demands for equality. Historian Robert H. Wiebe writes of that period: "The major casualty of the 1960's was a dream of moderation, accommodation, and cohesion, and its passing brought acute feelings of loss and betrayal." He further observed:

Challengers and their opponents alike met the issues of the late 1960's by drawing lines. Many used blanket categories: white or black, men or women, establishment or counterculture. A hard hat? A bigot. A long hair? A fag. Many more . . . devoted a metaphysical attention to details, to the minutiae of dress and language, patriotic ritual and racial myth. . . . When Americans encountered problems, they looked not for the common ground but for the boundary dividing it.<sup>17</sup>

Out of this era came the writings of Harry E. Caudill as a voice crying in the wilderness, railing against the sins of the capitalistic establishment in America's garden; and the polemic of Jack E. Weller, likening Appalachian "folk" to working-class urban ethnics. A few political candidates, troops of VISTA volunteers, and waves of photographers and journalists made their forays into Appalachia, focusing national attention on downtrodden mountaineers. Photo-

<sup>16</sup>Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill, 1978), xiv.

<sup>17</sup>Robert H. Wiebe, *The Segmented Society: An Introduction to the Meaning of America* (New York, 1979), 8-9.

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journalists still wend their way to the most desolate, ramshackle houses inhabited by the most degenerate forlorn people to capture present-day "real Appalachians" on film. Writers turn out a steady stream of horrible testimonials on the evils of capitalism. So well engrained is the idea of Appalachian distinctiveness that one well-meaning professor has developed an Appalachian Ethnic Awareness Test, while one of his colleagues, obviously victim of a confused set of images, has denied the idea of homogeneity and offered his own peculiar class delineation of "town and city dwellers, valley farmers, and branchwater mountaineers."<sup>18</sup> Let us concede that modern capitalism has brought mixed blessings to the region, but some intellectuals of the past and present are largely to blame for the blighted national perception of Appalachia. Their failure to come to grips with the contradictions of modern America has generated the perpetuation of a mythical Appalachia — one so out of step with the remainder of American society that in the popular mind the region and its people are anachronisms to be ridiculed.

Of particular importance to arguments presented herein is the misunderstanding of the class system and class values in Appalachia. This phenomenon can be at least partially explained by the fact that two of the widely recognized sages of contemporary Appalachian culture, Harry M. Caudill and Jack E. Weller, have emphasized the poor and downtrodden. Both have issued disclaimers from time to time denying that their work represents *all* Appalachians, but the general public remains unimpressed, believing the "real Appalachians" to be those depicted. Caudill, a one-time attorney at Whitesburg, Kentucky, now professor of history at the University of Kentucky, and Weller, a Presbyterian minister who published *Yesterday's People* after thirteen years of work beginning in West Virginia, write of the coal camps and miners of West Virginia and Kentucky.

The scenario that emerges from Caudill's books is exploitation of isolated pure Anglo-Saxons by coal operators, mostly outsiders; the rape of the land by strip miners; the collaboration of politicians and big corporations; and the implications of the Appalachian welfare system and the ravaged environment for the broader national spec-

<sup>18</sup>David N. Mielke, "Appalachian Ethnic Awareness Test," in *Teaching Mountain Children: Towards a Foundation of Understanding*, ed. David N. Mielke (Boone, N. C., 1978), 1-4; Cratis D. Williams, "Who are the Southern Mountaineers?", *ibid.*, 11-12.

trum. Caudill has of late also seemingly embraced the idea of genetic inferiority of the natives by his attention to the limited gene pool. Although he does not deal with class and class values *per se*, one might surmise, without reading between the lines, that only two classes exist: the acquisitive businessmen and politicians and the despairing miners and small landowners. He acknowledges social and geographic mobility, however, and concedes that there have been natives who found opportunities and exploited them.<sup>19</sup>

Jack E. Weller claims that he "like most middle class Americans" assumes "that in our modern, mobile society we have a fairly homogeneous culture and that, generally, what makes us different is our income"; he admits that "'style' of life" may be a factor in class; and he bases his entire book on the thesis that the Appalachian "folk culture" does not possess middle-class values. He accepts a chart formulated by Professor Marion Pearsall that compares the values of Southern Appalachians and the upper-middle (professional) class. The values of Appalachians include a belief in man's subjugation to nature and God and a fatalistic outlook, whereas the middle class think that man can control nature and are optimistic. The Appalachian deals with concrete places and particular things; the middle class, with everywhere and everything. The Appalachian believes that human nature is basically evil; the middle class, basically good or mixed good and evil. The Appalachian is concerned with being (existence); the middle class, with doing. In human relationships, the Appalachian subscribes to personalism and is suspicious of strangers; the middle class, impersonal. Paradoxically, Weller admits the existence of a middle class as well as a professional class in Southern Appalachia, but he separates these mountaineers from the "folk." "Even so," he writes, "it is true that most people living within Appalachia . . . have come out of this folk culture and so share it as a background, if nothing else."<sup>20</sup>

Weller, a contemporary outsider, perceives Southern Appalachians through virtually the same mindset as the earlier generation of outsiders. His book reflects intellectual attentiveness to the resurgence

<sup>19</sup>This view emerges from the following books by Harry M. Caudill: *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (Boston, 1963); *My Land is Dying* (New York, 1971); *A Darkness at Dawn: Appalachian Kentucky and the Future* (Lexington, 1976); and *The Watches of the Night* (Boston, 1976).

<sup>20</sup>Jack E. Weller, *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington, 1965), 1-8.

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1. Caudill: *Night Comes to the Land is Dying* (New York, 1971); tington, 1976); and *The Watches* palacia (Lexington, 1965), 1-8.

of ethnicity and the immediacy of cultural pluralism. His characterization of Appalachian "folk" is closely related to Herbert Gans's study of low-income Italian-Americans in Boston's West End during 1957-58, and Weller acknowledges that influence. Gans's work in turn is attuned to Edward Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, a study of 1950's peasant village in southern Italy. Although *Yesterday's People* antedates Banfield's *The Unheavenly City*, the characteristics of Weller's Appalachian "folk" closely resemble values that Banfield ascribes to the urban lower class. According to Banfield, the lower-class individual is present-oriented; possesses an attitude of helplessness about the future if conscious of it at all; lacks self-discipline; is suspicious yet dependent on others; and lacks civic consciousness.<sup>21</sup> Cultural comparisons provide interesting intellectual exercises, but studies by Weller, Gans, and Banfield are highly subjective and limited at best, a reality usually understood by the researchers themselves but not necessarily by their readers. Furthermore, such studies tend to promote homogeneous perspective.

Images of Appalachia as transmitted by intellectuals and received by the popular mind fail to depict the usual American class system; to record social, economic, and geographic mobility; and to acknowledge the positive impact of education and technology on the Appalachian population. A study by sociologists Richard P. Coleman and Lee Rainwater identifies seven strata in the American class structure: the old rich of aristocratic family name; the new rich or success elite; the college-educated professional and managerial class; middle Americans of comfortable living standard; middle Americans just getting along; a lower class who are poor but working; and a nonworking welfare class.<sup>22</sup> Examples of all of these can be found in contemporary Appalachia. The residential patterns of the oft-maligned coal town are microcosmic historic testimonials to class structure. Indeed, Appalachia can boast the proverbial "rags-to-riches" stories, like that of Loretta Lynn, "the coal miner's daughter," Dolly Parton from the Great Smokies, and the Carters, "the royal family" of country music. Because class extremes are

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4; Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York, 1962); Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York, 1958); and *idem*, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston, 1970), 53.

<sup>22</sup>Richard P. Coleman and Lee Rainwater, *Social Standing in America: New Dimensions of Class* (New York, 1978).

already so obvious, attention should be focused on Appalachian middle strata and their particular values, for it is generally conceded that the middle class is the backbone of American society; and if there is any denominator in American society, it probably revolves around middle-class aspirations.

While it would be foolhardy to deny the existence of social heterogeneity in Appalachia prior to the advent of modern capitalism, it has become more pronounced with that development. There are some Appalachians who have been victimized, but there are, and have always been, others who consider themselves beneficiaries of, even accessories to, modernization. Conti has documented the existence and influence of "indigenous mountain entrepreneurs and political leaders in the social, economic, and political evolution" of an area along the Highland Rim in eastern Kentucky during the late nineteenth century, among them lumberman Floyd Day who was active during the 1880's.<sup>23</sup> In a historical study of 140 coal operators of West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, and southwestern Virginia between 1880 and 1930, Ronald D. Eller discovered that about 22% were native-born, including the southwest Virginians George L. Carter and Rufus A. Ayers.<sup>24</sup> Other natives like J. Fred Johnson of Hillsville, Virginia, and John Caldwell Calhoun Mayo of Pike County, Kentucky, helped to transform the Appalachian region.

Mayo born in 1864, the son of a school teacher, and Johnson, ten years younger and the scion of a general store owner, came to manhood as "New South" philosophy began to influence the economy of the South. One source claims that John Mayo was "the individual most responsible for developing eastern Kentucky's coalfields," adding that he

never owned a coal-mining company and he bought very little surface land. His forte was collecting many acres of mineral rights under the umbrella of a landholding company and then selling those rights to a firm that would do the actual coal mining, or to speculators outside the region.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Conti, "Local Elites," 61.

<sup>24</sup>Ronald D. Eller, "The Coal Barons of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930," *Appalachian Journal*, 4 (1977), 196, 198; see also Eller, *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930*. (Knoxville, 1982).

<sup>25</sup>Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg, eds., *Our Appalachia: An Oral History* (New York, 1977), 137.

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Property acquired by Mayo became the sites for the towns of Jenkins, Fleming, Wheelwright, McRoberts, Weeksbury, and Wayland as well as others. He "paved roads, built power plants, courted railroad magnates, played politics, and recharted the course of the nation's coal industry."<sup>26</sup>

Another local legend, J. Fred Johnson, became the principal promoter for the new town of Kingsport in 1916. His experience as a child and young adult had already forged a character that was heavily imbued with the Protestant work ethic and corresponding middle-class values. Johnson's marriage to Ruth Carter led directly to his business association with her brother, George L. Carter, the man behind the Clinchfield Railroad project and the development of thousands of acres of coal land in southwest Virginia and eastern Kentucky, and indirectly to contacts with northern investors. One of these, John B. Dennis of Blair and Company, New York City, who salvaged the Clinchfield when Carter encountered financial difficulties, cast Johnson as the founder of Kingsport, a role that he played until his death in 1944.<sup>27</sup>

Both Mayo and Johnson were native entrepreneurs, middle class in origin who took advantage of their fellow mountaineers. As Mayo's son observed, the key to his father's success was that "he bought low and sold high." Mayo appreciated the mountaineers' preference for hard cash and on his land-buying rounds was frequently accompanied by his wife, her skirts filled with coins.<sup>28</sup> An acquaintance remembered Johnson as "something of a shyster as well as a businessman" and "if there was anything to put over such as a land deal," Johnson took care of it around Kingsport.<sup>29</sup> He respected the inhabitants of the Southern Appalachians, believed that they should have opportunities to better themselves, and had no patience with those who failed to use opportunities to their advantage.

Elite, a fashionable term for middle-class entrepreneurs, appears in the works of Eugene A. Conti, Jr., and John Gaventa. Conti defines the elite as "a mountain based minority with political and

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>Margaret Ripley Wolfe, "J. Fred Johnson, His Town and His People: A Case Study of Class Values, the Work Ethic, and Technology in Southern Appalachia, 1916-1944," *Appalachian Journal*, VII (1979-1980), 70-83.

<sup>28</sup>Shackelford and Weinberg, *Our Appalachia*, 139, 148.

<sup>29</sup>Personal interview with Earle S. Draper, Landscape Architect, Vero Beach, Florida, June 26-27, 1978.

commercial ties to metropolitan bases" who "formed the nucleus of a flourishing town-based culture in the region."<sup>30</sup> Gaventa in his study of the area around Middlesboro, Kentucky, a town which was initially financed and developed largely by British investors, notes that "the dominant institutions and social values that affect the Valley from beyond it have often been found to be mediated by a local or regional elite."<sup>31</sup>

The aspirations and values of the elite, however, are not and have not been completely foreign to the Appalachian "folk." Sociologist Thomas R. Ford concluded from a survey that he made among Southern Appalachians during the 1950's that

most of the people of the Region . . . have adopted the major goals and standards typical of American society. They, like other people throughout the nation, wish to have larger incomes, greater material comforts, and more prestigious status. And if it seems unlikely that they will realize these aspirations for themselves, they would at least like to see them realized by their children.<sup>32</sup>

Appalachians have not been dragged kicking and screaming off mountain farms; the cities and suburbs have held the same attractions for them as other Americans. New Yorker Sylvester Petro, who came to Tennessee to study the Kingsport Press strike of the early 1960's, noted that getting a job at the company (or any other Kingsport industry) was "the difference between hard scratching on a stony ten acres in Scott County, Virginia or Harlan County, Kentucky, and one of those trim ranch houses, the good schools, the fine churches, a college education for the kids, and a new Chevy under the carport in Kingsport."<sup>33</sup>

There is evidence that prior to World War II, the native, first-generation industrial labor force possessed the characteristics that Ford and others have identified more recently. Surveys conducted among senior citizens of Sullivan and Hawkins counties in Tennessee and Scott County, Virginia, who were initially employed in Kingsport industries prior to 1950, demonstrated their overwhelming preference for industrial work as compared to farming. Their length of employ-

<sup>30</sup>Conti, "Local Elites," 67.

<sup>31</sup>Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 258-59.

<sup>32</sup>Thomas R. Ford, "The Passing of Provincialism", in *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey*, ed. Thomas R. Ford (Lexington, 1962), 32-33.

<sup>33</sup>Sylvester Petro, *The Kingsport Strike* (New Rochelle, N. Y., 1967), 20-21.

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ment ranged from a few months to more than forty years. Some of those interviewed had begun working in industry for as little as fifteen cents an hour, but they shared a common sentiment that the stability of industrial employment and the regularity of checks was a godsend. Their opinions were not those of fatalistic, present-oriented, non-participatory human beings. They were, on the contrary, reflections of middle-class individuals.<sup>34</sup>

Such attitudes seem to be in stark contrast to the despair and fatalism frequently associated with the denizens of coal mining areas. The boom-bust economic syndrome, dangerous working conditions, and company ownership of most of the land and housing have undoubtedly contributed to an "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die" attitude. In the Kingsport area, many industrial workers have lived on small farms or a few acres in communities ringing the town; within city limits, the old Kingsport Improvement Company established a pattern of encouraging home ownership. The contradiction between the two environments lends support to that tenet of republican ideology, the virtue of land ownership.

Although scholarly research has already amassed considerable evidence challenging assumptions about the class structure in Appalachia, the stereotypes are amazingly resilient; so, too, are generalizations that categorize Appalachians as white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. No comprehensive inquiry has been made into the ethnic origins of Appalachians, but even if one had been attempted, the results would be highly subjective. Older census tract data leave much to be desired, and attempting to determine ethnicity by family names is fraught with pitfalls. Historians Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, who are conducting a massive investigation of the ethnic origins of white southerners, have made some observations based on preliminary data which suggest "that upwards of 70 percent of those whose ethnic background can be ascertained were of Celtic extraction—mainly Welsh, Scots, Irish, and Scotch-Irish—or had originated in the 'Celtic frontier,' the extreme southwestern, western, and northern parts of England."<sup>35</sup> McDonald and McWhiney en-

<sup>34</sup>The questionnaire was developed by the author, and personal interviews were conducted by Lou Ann Lawson, Michael Cox, and Mickey Hamm, student in Tennessee history courses, summer, 1978 and winter, 1979.

<sup>35</sup>Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980), 1107-8.

dorse the view that Celtic people are "no more English than Britain is European."<sup>36</sup> Some of what they have to say at this point may be of relevance to Appalachia:

When the culturally preadapted Celtic peoples migrated to the Southern uplands of British North America—which they did on a grand scale during the hundred years after 1715—they found geographical and political conditions ideal for the flourishing of their style of life. In sum, the opulently easy society of the Southern plain folk on the eve of the Civil War represented the culmination of many centuries of Celtic traditions.<sup>37</sup>

Conclusions depend a great deal on methodology. This accounts for some of the disparity that occurs between scholarly investigations of ethnicity. In a recently published study of the ethnic descent of Kentucky's early population, historian Thomas L. Purvis argues, for example, that 56.6% of the state's 1820 population was of English origin; 18.2%, Scottish; 8.2%, Irish; 8.7%, Welsh; 5.6%, German; 1.5%, French; 1.0%, Dutch; and .2%, Swedish.<sup>38</sup> These figures seem to be incongruous with the preliminary findings of McDonald and McWhiney.

National diversity has been operational even within Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic constraints. Before the Civil War, for instance, Gruetli, a Swiss settlement, had been established in Grundy County, Tennessee.<sup>39</sup> During the 1880's Rugby, an English utopian experiment, flourished northwest of Knoxville in the Cumberland Plateau.<sup>40</sup> During the late nineteenth century, German farmers settled at Cullman, Alabama; and German priests who came to minister to them founded St. Bernard's Abbey.<sup>41</sup>

Determining ethnicity for residents of Southern Appalachia from the 1880's to the onset of the Great Depression—a pivotal era in

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 1109.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 1111.

<sup>38</sup>Thomas L. Purvis, "The Ethnic Descent of Kentucky's Early Population: A Statistical Investigation of European and American Sources of Immigration, 1790-1820," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, LXXX (1982), 263.

<sup>39</sup>Stanley J. Folmsbee, Robert E. Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell, *Tennessee: A Short History* (Knoxville, 1969), 426.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 427; see also W. H. G. Armytage, "New Light on the English Background of Thomas Hughes' Rugby Colony in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 21 (1949), 69-84; Francelia Butler, "The Ruskin Commonwealth: A Unique Experiment," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XXIII (1964), 33-42; John Egerton, *Visions of Utopia: Nashoba, Rugby, Ruskin, and the New Communities in Tennessee's Past* (Knoxville, 1977).

<sup>41</sup>From materials on file at St. Bernard's Abbey, Cullman, Alabama.

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the economic development of the region—poses enormous problems. The Dillingham Commission, in a multivolume report published in 1911, for example, examined immigration. Considerable attention was given to "new" immigrants in coal mining districts. Assuming the commission made a completely accurate count, which it did not, numbers that applied one year hardly reflected conditions of the next. In West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky, immigrants were highly transient; and for that reason, census data, collected at ten-year intervals, do not give a true picture of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of southern and eastern Europeans who at some point might legitimately have been called Appalachians. If significant proportions of Appalachians are white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, which they surely are, this hardly differentiates Appalachians historically from other Americans. Nonetheless, American society and the Appalachian region have hosted other ethnic and religious groups; and in both, this has been more decidedly so since the late nineteenth century.

The southern mountains have been home, albeit sometimes temporarily, to a wide range of ethnic groups outside the Anglo-Saxon pale. They were once the refuge of American Indians and still harbor the Eastern Band of the Cherokee at their western North Carolina reservation as well as scores of individuals who boast Indian blood. They witnessed the bondage of African Negro slaves, and blacks today comprise an average of about 8% of the mountain populations, although this was higher in previous decades, as much as 35% in some counties. Blacks account for around 12 and 18% respectively of Knoxville's and Chattanooga's total populations.<sup>42</sup> Within the First Tennessee-Virginia Development District, one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country, can be found a black mayor of Bluff City and a black vice-mayor of Kingsport; but the black population is only 2.1% of the total as of 1980, having experienced an overall decline of about 12% in ten years. An exodus is evidenced by the fact that during the 1970's, more than 1,300 blacks left eastern Tennessee.<sup>43</sup> Mountainous Hancock County, Tennessee, has been the sanctuary of the Melungeons, those dark-skinned folk

<sup>42</sup>Ronald D. Eller, "Toward a New History of the Appalachian South," *Appalachian Journal*, V (1977), 77; James B. Murphy, "Slavery and Freedom in Appalachia: Kentucky as a Demographic Case Study," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, LXXX (1982), 151-69.

<sup>43</sup>Kingsport Times-News, January 17, February 28, 1982; see also Edward J. Cabbell, "Black Invisibility and Racism in Appalachia: An Informal Survey," *Appalachian Journal*, VIII (1980), 48-54.

whose origin remains a mystery.

Obviously Appalachia has never been pure Anglo-Saxon Protestant, but cultural pluralism has been more apparent since modern capitalistic development began, coincidentally with the high tide of the "new" immigration. Some developers advertised the presence of a "pure" native white labor supply to attract northern investors. It was, for example, a vital part of the propaganda used by Johnson and Dennis at Kingsport. A promotion tract of the Kingsport Improvement Company boasted in 1920 that the main body of the town's population was native born, with less than 6% black and not 50 foreigners.<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere, when confronted with a labor shortage, some developers, not so enamored with the virtues of mountain whites, actively recruited southern and eastern European immigrants newly arrived in the United States. The Dillingham Commission found that native whites and blacks were the principal source of labor for developing the bituminous coal resources of the South, but before 1890, immigrants from Great Britain and Germany had been especially noticeable in Alabama and West Virginia. Ten years later, the operators of West Virginia had increased their employees from these countries and hired a considerable number of Austro-Hungarians, Poles, Russians, and Italians. "New" immigrants also made their appearance in the Virginia coalfields. Kentucky and Tennessee, however, relied mostly on native whites and blacks. In Virginia, West Virginia, and Alabama, according to the commission report, the pattern already evident became "fully operative" between 1900 and 1907.<sup>45</sup>

The local labor supply was boosted not only by southern and eastern Europeans. When World War I reduced the supply of immigrants and other laborers were being drafted, coal operators in southwest Virginia recruited blacks from the Deep South, but expressed general dissatisfaction with them.<sup>46</sup> At Alcoa, Tennessee, in 1920, the Aluminum Company of America employed 130 Mexicans along with 1,482 blacks and 1,708 whites. By 1930, the Mex-

<sup>44</sup>*Kingsport: Its Growth, Housing and Industries* (Kingsport, 1920), 24, 26.

<sup>45</sup>U.S. Cong., Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, S. Doc. 633, 61st Cong. 2nd sess., 1909-10; *Immigrants in Industry: The Bituminous Coal Mining Industry in the South*, V, 136-37. See also C. G. Belissary, "Tennessee and Immigration, 1865-1880," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, VII (1948), 229-48.

<sup>46</sup>See, for example, Stonega Coal and Coke Company, *Annual Report*, 1916, Westmoreland Coal Company, Big Stone Gap, Virginia, 13.

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icans had departed, the black population had declined, and the white population was on the rise.<sup>47</sup> The labor demands generated by modern capitalism in Appalachia produced the "Hunk Hollows," "Tally Towns," and "Black Bottoms" of mining and industrial enclaves. Among the "new immigrants," South Italians and Hungarians (Magyars) seem to have been dominant from the 1890's to the 1920's; but Appalachia also attracted immigrants with a wide range of national origins including the countries of the Middle East like the Isaac family from Lebanon whose widowed mother managed to get several children and herself from Beirut to southwest Virginia.<sup>48</sup> Not all of the immigrants of this period in Appalachia worked the mines; some like the Isaacs were peddlers and then merchants; a few established restaurants; and others sampled a wide variety of occupations. Even Chinese occasionally settled in the coal camps and established the proverbial laundries.

Although many of the immigrants in Appalachia proved to be sojourners, others attempted to secure a permanent place for themselves. Between 1907 and 1949, for example, as many as 359 newcomers underwent naturalization proceedings in the United States District Court at Knoxville. Their origins were as varied as their occupations. Among them were Canadians, English, Italians, and Jews, as well as Arabs. They were peddlers, shoemakers, merchants, barbers, bakers, and engineers. Some of the unmarried women worked as stenographers and teachers. A few were ignorant of the naturalization process and confessed to voting and serving on juries, believing that they indeed were citizens because they had declared their intents. This confusion was not confined to the lower socio-economic group. The president of the University of Tennessee, John Harcourt Alexander Morgan, married and the father of five, was finally sworn in on September 24, 1919. After having held various state and federal positions, including that of federal food administrator of Tennessee during World War I, he learned that his declaration of intent made in 1891 at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was insufficient. The native of Ontario, Canada, then acted quickly to remedy his situation.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Russell D. Parker, "Alcoa, Tennessee: The Early Years, 1919-1939," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 48 (1976), 89.

<sup>48</sup>Personal interview with Mary Isaac Bailey, Norton, Virginia, September 6, 1974.

<sup>49</sup>U.S. Dist. Court, Knoxville, Tennessee, Naturalization Index and Record Books, 1907-1941, Regional Archives Branch, Federal Archives and Records Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

The pockets of "new" immigrants tucked away in the recesses of Appalachian mining towns and construction camps, away from the small valley cities, were predominantly Catholic; and priests soon came to minister to them. There had been a few Catholics among the early settlers, and priests had entered the mountains as early as the 1840's to hold occasional services; but concentrated as they were in the mining districts, Catholics from southern and eastern Europe attracted more notice. During the 1920's a priest from St. Bernard's Abbey at Cullman, Alabama, wrote of the Catholic presence in Wise County, Virginia: "they cling faithfully to the faith of their fathers and at occasions like First Communion, Confirmation or dedication of a new church, the outpouring of Catholics is quite a revelation and one would imagine to live for the time in a village of the former Austrian-Hungarian Empire."<sup>50</sup>

Ominous developments of the 1920's in the coal industry followed by the stark realities of the 1930's served as the backdrop for the declining Catholic influence in Southern Appalachia as most of the immigrants moved north to major cities. In an attempt to reverse the decline of Catholicism, the Church during the 1940's and 1950's established missions at county seats, conducted "outdoor preaching" and "radio preaching," dispensed clothing to the needy and visited door-to-door. Also Catholic nuns became more extensively involved in educational work.<sup>51</sup> Small congregations continue to exist in towns and cities throughout the Appalachians. If Americans remain the highly mobile people that they traditionally have been, then Southern Appalachia will undoubtedly harbor a more heterogeneous population in the future. Consequently, it is likely that there will be a continued Catholic presence in the region.

Religious and ethnic diversity in Appalachia is further evidenced by the presence of Jewish communities. The stateline town of Bristol, Tennessee-Virginia, for example, possessed a sizeable enough congregation in September, 1908, to attract the attention of the local press when Jewish merchants closed their shops to celebrate their new year.<sup>52</sup> The largest Jewish-owned enterprise there for years was Hecht's Bakery.<sup>53</sup> The contemporary Jewish community of the upper East Tennessee area maintains a synagogue at Blountville.

<sup>50</sup>Sacred Heart of Stonega and Missions [unpublished manuscript], p. 4, St. Bernard's Abbey.

<sup>51</sup>From materials on file at St. Anthony's Catholic Church, Norton, Virginia.

<sup>52</sup>Bristol *Herald Courier*, September 26, 1908.

<sup>53</sup>Charles J. Harkrader, *Witness to an Epoch* (Kingsport, 1965), 226.

way in the recesses of camps, away from the public; and priests soon found a few Catholics among the mountains as early as the nineteenth century as they were concentrated as they were in western and eastern Europe. The presence of St. Bernard's Catholic presence in Wise County is the faith of their fathers. Confirmation or dedication of Catholics is quite a revelation in a village of the

coal industry followed as the backdrop for Appalachia as most of the century. An attempt to reverse the trend in the 1940's and 1950's with "outdoor preaching" for the needy and visited the area extensively involved. It continues to exist in the region. If Americans remain in the area, they will have been, then the area more heterogeneous and likely that there will be a change.

is further evidenced by the decline of Bristol, a sizeable enough community to attract the attention of the local media to celebrate their anniversary there for years. The community of the region at Blountville.

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Such Jews as those associated with the B'Nai Sholom Congregation are more visible because of their cohesiveness, but the Appalachian region shelters others whose Jewish heritage is obscured.

While the Jews sometimes display an amazing sense of community, other minority groups in Appalachia have also exhibited manifestations of group consciousness as well. A disturbance arose among Hungarians (Magyars) in St. Elisabeth's Church at Pocohontas, Virginia, in 1923, for example, when the priest withdrew the privilege of allowing them to sing in the vernacular during High Mass. Permission to use their native tongue had been granted eighteen years earlier to encourage them to attend services; and although the number of Hungarians in the congregation had declined and most now spoke English, they resented the priest's decision to require the use of Latin.<sup>54</sup>

Among blacks, such fraternal organizations as the Knights of Pythias and the Grand Court of Calanthe established disability allowances and survivors' benefits and policed the morals of their members. A bitter dispute arose within Iron Clad Lodge Number 73 at Morristown, Tennessee, in 1927 when the membership adamantly refused to honor a disability claim of one of their own, blinded by syphilis. Obviously the brother had strayed during the course of his membership or had presented a bogus health certificate when applying for admission to the order.<sup>55</sup>

The cultural pluralism of Appalachia's past and present is likely to intensify in the future. The wanderings of industrial and commercial nomads of diverse ancestry will undoubtedly lead some of them to Appalachian urban areas, and the more relaxed immigration policy of recent years, along with the influx of political refugees from Asia and the Caribbean, may have minor consequences in the southern highlands. If a Canadian-born lady of Japanese ancestry can become a United States citizen, convert from Buddhism to Christianity, and minister to Vietnamese and other foreigners in a small city in upper East Tennessee, then anything may be possible.<sup>56</sup>

Appalachia by virtue of its diversity is distinctively American. The prevalence of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant influence in Appalachia and America has been tempered by the presence of other

<sup>54</sup>File on Reverend Anthony Hoch, St. Bernard's Abbey.

<sup>55</sup>Correspondence contained in the Knights of Pythias Collection, Appalachian Archives, Sherrod Library, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee.

<sup>56</sup>The story of Heddy Deskins of Kingsport, Tennessee, as reported by Kingsport *Times-News*, March 5, 1982.

racial, ethnic, and religious groups. The static nature of stereotypes like those common to Appalachia renders them erroneous in a fluid society. Cultural pluralism, not homogeneity, is the pattern; but this cultural pluralism is subject to common denominators like capitalism, urbanization, and middle-class aspirations. Some intellectuals in pursuit of Appalachia may wish it not so, but all their incantations to the contrary do not alter reality. As evidence presented herein suggests, the social composition of Appalachia is less like a finely woven blanket and, appropriately enough, more like one of those much-vaunted mountain handicrafts, the patch-work quilt.

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