Miners, Moonshiners, and Men of the Mountains: The Effect of Violence in Central Appalachia Through the Reconstruction Era

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MINERS, MOONSHINERS, AND MEN OF THE MOUNTAINS:
THE EFFECT OF VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA THROUGH THE
RECONSTRUCTION ERA

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“While Appalachian scholars still debate the provenance of particular stereotypes, they do agree that the region has been, and continues to be, portrayed as primitive, isolated frontier homogeneously populated with white Anglo-Saxons who are lazy and prone to violent feuding and making moonshine…."

In the spring of 1865, in the somber wake of the American Civil War, the surging, testosterone-ridden men who had bolted at the call to arms only four years prior, returned home without yips and hollers, parades or cheers. Men who had teemed with excitement at the prospect of shooting a “Yankee” or “Reb,” dragged themselves home in the shadows of their previous selves, fearful yet eager about the life they were to return to. For these men, the war had changed far more than they had ever anticipated: despite having been separated from families for months or years at a time, and having seen brothers, fathers, and sons die beside them on the bloody battlefields, men returned home to a completely overturned society. Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation declared that “…all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free…."

Although the war had devastated the Northern economy, the South suffered significantly more economic loss — the slaves who had played a central part in the sustenance and flourishing of the southern economy had been freed, and the once-seceded Confederacy had been reabsorbed into the power from which they had separated themselves. Men returned to their homes as what they perceived as being powerless: the authority of white males in southern society was crumbling, families had been broken apart by the war, and, amidst the rubble of a broken nation, industrial and societal innovation was taking


place, particularly in the North. While most of the nation turned its attention to reconstructing cities, farms, and the economic framework of the United States, a fraction of men returned home to a corner of the country masked by seclusion. Defenders of the Union and Confederacy alike ventured home to the northern and southern-central rural Appalachian mountains, including the Blue Ridge Region, the Alleghenies, the Smoky Mountains, the Appalachian Plateau, and the Shenandoah Valley (Appendix A and B). What these men did not know, however, was the part that they would play in forming the future of the region — in rural Appalachia, sources of income were scarce, and men needed ways to support their families. However, the income-generating practices of the past were changing in ways that challenged native Appalachians. Outside of the mountains and valleys of the region, the nation surged forward into an era of industrialization and innovation. Factories were manufacturing an unfathomable quantity of products, workers were immigrating from eastern Europe to provide the stamina to run the factories, and new inventions were cropping up throughout the nation allowing the United States to become stronger, faster, and more powerful.

Despite the growing success of the rest of the nation, the residents of Appalachia seemed content keeping to themselves and their traditional ways of living: “The Kentuckian, like the Englishman, is fond of fencing himself off….“3 What the rest of the nation viewed as a “frontier-like” society that was stuck in the ways and customs developed in earlier American history, people of Appalachia viewed as sacred and intentionally concealed from the rest of the world.4

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3 James Lane Allen, *The Blue-grass Region of Kentucky, and Other Kentucky Articles* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 25.

Kentucky is a land of rural homes… they have a strong feeling for a habitation even no better than a one-story log-house, with furniture of the rudest kind, and cooking in the open air… They are gregarious at respectful distances, dear to them being that sense of personal worth and importance which comes from territorial aloofness, from domestic privacy, from a certain lordship over all they survey. The land they hold has a singular charm and power of infusing fierce, tender desire of ownership.5

The residents of the Appalachian mountains held their families closest and defended them at all costs, regardless of bad blood, kin was kin. Hence, when it came to supporting and providing for their families, the natives of Appalachia prided themselves in their respective crafts, with mountaineers showing particular pride in the manufacture and sale of moonshine. However, as the nation expanded, the United States government sought to exercise control over Appalachian manufacture of alcohol. In the 1870s, in the early days of tensions between the Hatfields and McCoys, the government began sending “revenuers” into rural Appalachia to control and tax the production of moonshine. What resulted, however, was defense of livelihood on the part of the mountaineers but death for many revenuers who ventured into the mountains.6

As the government sought to exercise more control and entrepreneurs sought to expand their borders and move into territory untouched by industry, the people of Appalachia became more threatened by outside influence. Young men, ex-soldiers, and freed slaves who were hungry for work started to move into the mountains to work in the growing coal mines and towns. Railroads were expanding across the country and moving into Appalachian territory to transport coal and other natural resources. As more people moved in on what was once undisturbed by outside influence, violence continued to spread like wildfire, drawing the attention of writers

5 Allen, 181.
6 Stewart, 187.
across the nation and the condemnation of the Victorian-era social class across the nation.\textsuperscript{7}

Although most of the newly-reunited states had resolved the disputes that had once divided them, a surge of guerrilla warfare erupted in the southern Appalachian region in the wake of the Civil War. Brutal dissension concerning the preservation of the region’s industry and lifestyle would ultimately imprison the region’s inhabitants and further a stereotype fabricated by the rest of the nation.

Historian Andrew Slap argues that the “…history of Appalachia during Reconstruction [is] one of the most transformative periods in United States history… While Appalachianists have been overlooking Reconstruction, historians of Reconstruction have disregarded Appalachia.”\textsuperscript{8} Arguably, Appalachia has been significantly overlooked throughout most of American history, except in reference to moonshine and the idea of “hillbillies” and “white trash.” The South often gets attention for the enforcement of white supremacy after the war, and the North often gets recognized for its factories and booming industries. However, the forgotten strip of mountains and valleys that stretches down from Pennsylvania to the northern tip of Georgia has gone largely unrecognized apart from its involvement with violence, poverty, and primitive lifestyles. The commonly-accepted belief is that the hillbilly stereotypes surrounding the Appalachian region were developed in the wake of the Civil War. However, although the mountains had been inhabited since long before the American Revolution, the stereotypes of Appalachia did largely develop during the Reconstruction era.\textsuperscript{9} Writers, who soon came to be known as “local color” writers, flooded into the area, and successfully established a convincing

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 181.
\textsuperscript{8} Slap, 24.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 24.
image of the region and its inhabitants. Writers stressed the beauty of the landscape, the lush flora and mist-covered mountains, hillsides and crags untouched by human civilization.\(^{10}\) “…It is a beautiful country; the Kentucky skies are not the cold, brilliant, hideous things that so many writers on nature style American skies… Only by visiting this region during some lovely season, or by dwelling here from year to year, and seeing it in all the humors of storm and sunshine, can one love it….”\(^{11}\)

Juxtaposed within the picturesque scenery of the landscape lived a barbaric mountaineer, characterized by a bony framework, few teeth, pallid, droopy facial features, while being illiterate, promiscuous, in-bred, and prone to violence.\(^ {12}\) The image of the hillbilly or mountaineer has become the basis on which other cultures base their perception of Americans, and is often recognized as the beginning of “racial identity and hierarchy” in the United States.\(^ {13}\) Terms to define the “hillbillies” of Appalachia, as well as other Americans throughout the United States who shared similar traits, began to crop up with the publishing of the local color pieces. Often times, terms were coined based upon exaggerations of physical appearance (such as “red neck” and “brush ape”) or were attributed to the meager diet of rural dwellers (“corn-cracker” and “rabbit-twister”).\(^ {14}\)

Despite being given names based on physical appearance or lifestyle, the primary focus of local color pieces was to stress the “wrongness” of backwoods mountaineers of the


\(^{11}\) Allen, 15-16.

\(^{12}\) Harkins, 18, 19, 32.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 6.
Appalachian mountains, while stressing the sophistication, piousness, and “correctness” of upper-middle class Victorian society. In the 1880s, as people continued to move into the region and as violence escalated largely as a result, the rest of the United States started to worry that the Appalachian culture was becoming a threat to the preservation of the rest of the nation. The interest concerning the primitivity of lifestyle and beautiful landscape dissolved and from it sprung a fear and rush to illustrate and elaborate upon the violent events occurring in the mountains. The solution proposed by the rest of the nation to free mountaineers from their lives of backwardness and isolation was further attempts at industrialization and innovation in the area. One of the primary resources upon which entrepreneurs sought to expand in the Appalachian mountains was the coal industry; while this called ex-soldiers, freed slaves, and young men from across the country to work, the rush of unwanted outsiders and confinement of energetic, hormonal young men in an isolated region promised only further brutality, devastation, and conflict.

Although the Civil War left the entire nation in a state of catastrophic disarray, the Southern economy received a cataclysmic blow as a result of geographic ruin. The cotton industry, which the South had strongly depended on throughout the Antebellum period, had collapsed, leaving southerners to face the reconstruction of their crumbled cities as well as their infrastructure. As Reconstruction progressed and the nation continued to rebuild in terms of industry and societal structure, entrepreneurs started to look for newer, more lucrative economic industrial investments. Many larger cities, including New York, Chicago, and Lowell, Massachusetts, continued to churn out profits through their factories and major industries such as meat packing and textile production. The industrializing nation was propelling forward at an
unprecedented speed, and people started to look for bigger, better, newer ways to outdo one another. The construction of railroads across the nation revolutionized transportation of people and goods from one side of the country to another, exponentially augmenting national and international trade as well as urban development across the United States. As cities continued to build up, entrepreneurs started to move into unchartered economic territory: the coal-rich, undeveloped mountains of central rural Appalachia.

The coal camps and towns of Appalachia were not characteristically friendly places to reside. In a quickly-developing country, testosterone-ridden young men were on the move, looking to make money and find success. However eager as young men were to find their place within the growing nation, increasing populations within the mountains and valleys of Appalachia led to a drastic increase in violence. Historians Paul H. Rakes and Kenneth R. Bailey cite the *Biennial Report of the Board of Directors and the Warden of the West Virginia Penitentiary for the Years 1903-1904*, which indicated that the majority of inmates in West Virginia’s state prisons were comprised primarily of miners. By 1904, the combined populations of the mining counties of McDowell, Mingo, Kanawha, Mercer, and Fayette had 419 of 748 state inmates while a comparative list of sixteen agricultural counties, with a population of 205,175, had supplied only 28 criminals. In addition to the total percentage of state prison convicts that came from mining communities, Rake’s citation of the *West Virginia Penitentiary Report, 1905-1906* indicated that more violent crimes, such as murder and assault, comprised 4/5 of the total crimes committed in Southern Appalachian mining areas in 1906.15

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However, looking back at the region before the mining rush at the end of the 1870s, areas in central Appalachia such as West Virginia were primarily made up of family clans, similar to the Hatfields and McCoys. The rise of the coal industry changed the nature of the region forever, bringing in outsiders as well as industrialization, economics, and politics. Men who came to the region searching for employment were primarily native white and blacks, however, the population also included southern and eastern Europeans.\textsuperscript{16} The wealth of the coal pockets in West Virginia and Virginia had been discussed since the colonial era, documented by Thomas Jefferson in his \textit{Notes on Virginia}.\textsuperscript{17} The coal mined in central Appalachia, especially from West Virginia, eventually became known across the nation and the Atlantic Ocean, having a reputation of being some of the most efficient coal for steam due to its high heat capacity.\textsuperscript{18} Men who came to the region were frequently exploited and abused by coal producers, who placed more value on their total output than on the welfare of their workers and their families. Producers took advantage of the problems of competing companies and placed extraneous amounts of pressure on their workers to produce more coal at a faster rate. The concept of “simplicity and efficiency” was stressed by mine owners. Mining coal in the mountains of West Virginia was notoriously cheap due to the “large, soft seams and exposure on the hillside [which] allowed for easy entry and for use of efficient and economic drift or slope mines.”\textsuperscript{19}

Despite the success of the mines, transporting the spoils of the coal mines posed a massive problem. When railroads were introduced to the mountains of central Appalachia, this


\textsuperscript{17} Corbin, 2.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 5-6.
provided a solution to the problem. However, constructing railroads in the deep Appalachian
mountains and hollers was both expensive and difficult. In the early 1880s, entrepreneurs such as
John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan became interested in contributing to the industrialization of
the area, and the money for the projects became available. As the railroads were constructed, the
hunting practices of local inhabitants were largely affected. Because the noise of the railway and
the workers, many native species were driven further into the mountains, making it more difficult
for locals to hunt while adding another obstacle in the race to survive. Railroad construction also
brought wealthy speculators coming to stake their claim to property, which led to hotly disputed
court cases with natives who already owned the land. However, capitalists took what they
wanted from Appalachian natives, and eventually pushed them to sell their land shares or
eventually off of their land due to relentless pursuit in court. As a result, many native inhabitants
of the mountains developed a strong distrust and disrespect for the legal system and those
involved, because of the fact that the wealthy, crooked entrepreneur had won over the
impoverished, honest, hardworking man: namely, those who had either worked to purchase and
develop the land or those to whose families owned the land for the generations prior. The amount
of farmland in the hills decreased, and, as industry and people moved into the once-secluded
area, education increased while the historic lifestyle of mountain family clans began to
disintegrate.20

As the coal industry grew (Appendix C), this gave “local coal operators a dominance in
the state government over southern West Virginia until the New Deal. It also broke down the
traditional mountain culture and introduced new values, and brought in tens of thousands of

20 Ibid., 2-6.
southern blacks and Europeans to mix with the native population in the confines of the company town.” Rather than settling in the mining villages themselves, most single young men constructed lean-tos and worked in the mines or timber industry. Miners with families often lived in company houses, for which they were forced to sign contracts and, as a result, were bonded to the company until it was decided that their work was either no longer needed or they were branded as “undesirables” and literally thrown out onto the road with their belongings by hired thugs. Despite all of this, because of the economic benefits that the coal mines provided for the region, the majority of industrial hubs and residential areas largely improved. Between 1867 and 1910, the total coal production of West Virginia increased exponentially (Appendix A). As economic benefits increased, however, so did tensions between natives and unwanted outsiders.

Men who came to the mountains looking for work often brought with them a variety of behaviors when, mixed with tempers and drunkenness of like-minded comrades, became a deadly combination. Incidents such as those at Rush Run, Paint Creek, and the March on Blair Mountain became frequent occurrences in the mining areas of central Appalachia. In addition to guerrilla-style shootouts and night raids and stabbings, saloon-style violence, which is typically associated and stereotyped to the “Wild West,” became frequent in the small towns of central Appalachia. Rakes suggests suspected drug use among miners, primarily cocaine and laudanum, in addition to the already deadly mixture of alcohol and weaponry. Shootouts in taverns became a regularity throughout the region, particularly as access to guns became easier for men and women of all classes.

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21 Ibid., 1.
22 Ibid., 10
23 Rakes, 318-319.
The railway system was argued to be the primary source of blame for leading many miners to their violent demises, due to the fact that trains delivered liquor and, as a result, the testosterone-ridden young men who migrated to the mountains engaged in gambling and other tests of manliness, leading to so many gun-related deaths that they stopped being mentioned in the media. In attempts to stop the violence, the law made relentless attempts in regulating the sale of drugs and alcohol, which yielded some success. However, in attempting to regulate the sale and use of firearms did law enforcement find extreme difficulty, largely due to the fact that inexpensive guns could be purchased at both large and small scale shops throughout the region. Rakes asserts that young men with “a ‘short fuse’ frequented the early coal camps and contributed to a remarkable expansion of crimes-against-the-person… [however] all who became miners worked in a violent world where natural environmental forces claimed life and limb on a daily basis.”

Although mining town shootouts and murders happened between men of various racial backgrounds, there was a particular concentration on liberated slaves and free blacks, particularly in urbanizing areas such as Roanoke, Virginia. Like the mining industry had done with many other Appalachian towns, Roanoke had become a major railroad hub for trading and manufacturing. Natives and the large population of northerners had respectfully cohabited the area throughout the 1800s, however, when entrepreneurs turned the town into a trading capital, the massive influx of people looking for work created a powerful friction from which serious problems would soon develop. The growing city soon found itself unable to keep up with the

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24 Ibid., 319.

25 Ibid., 318.
growing population and, although the city became primarily divided by class, Roanoke also saw itself become clearly divided by race.\textsuperscript{26}

A large population of young, African-American men in Roanoke continued to grow with industrialization, mainly because many of them were searching for a life outside of sharecropping and farming. The classist divides that separated many of the white residents of the area dissolved and turned into a brotherhood with redirected interests: to improve the economic structure of the city while making it clear to black residents that they were not welcome in the community. Many white men in particular viewed the large presence of black men as threatening to their families as well as their jobs. So, members of the Roanoke community protested to law enforcement, demanding that it be allowed for them to personally manage crimes committed by individuals of African-American descent who had been accused of a crime against a white citizen. Whites particularly pushed for what was referred to as the “lynch law,” which would legally permit them to lynch African Americans suspected of criminal actions. Law enforcement prevented whites from enacting harm on black citizens, which many whites, lower-class whites in particular, viewed as an infringement on their personal rights. As a result, many lower-class whites of the mountains responded by rioting and continually attempting to take the law into their own hands.\textsuperscript{27}

In 1893, tensions between African-Americans and lower-class whites exploded when the town lynched a black man who had been suspected of assault. While local law enforcement attempted to stop the mob violence, the city’s militia killed eight white residents and threatened


\textsuperscript{27} Dotson, 239-241.
to hand the mayor over to the mob. Fires and weapons were strewn throughout the community and, although the bulk of the Roanoke community was comprised of people from the urban North, the violence was largely blamed on the natives from the mountains and backwoods. The newspaper coverage of the event changed the nation’s view of Roanoke in the wake of Reconstruction, shifting from a new and booming economic empire to a city at risk for ruin.\textsuperscript{28} Additionally, publications and accusations concerning the riot and others throughout Appalachia enforced the rest of the nation’s view of the region and its peoples when, ironically enough, the behavior exhibited by the natives of Roanoke and throughout the Appalachian region was not atypical of the era, particularly in the South: in 1893, a total of 12 black citizens were lynched in Virginia alone while a total of 153 were lynched in the region of the southern United States as a whole.\textsuperscript{29} Natives of Appalachia were easy to blame because they were so far removed from the rest of the nation in terms of geography and lifestyle, that it was effortless to place blame on what the nation viewed as uncivilized heathens who were stuck in the past.

While racist behavior and violence was a common behavior of southern states during the period, the Appalachian region was under the hypothetical microscope of the upper-middle class Victorian society of the rest of the United States. While much of the South was progressing with the rest of the nation in terms of industry and social reform, Appalachia remained stuck in its ways of living, despite the fact that industrialization in the region was leading to the crumbling of age-old traditions and social structure within the mountain communities. There was a charm about the mountain people that led to a cruel fascination by the upper-class Victorians, who,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Ibid., 237-238.
\item[29] Ibid., 262.
\end{footnotes}
while finding it uplifting to their own status to poke fun and criticize the people of Appalachia, utilized the publication of events in the mountains to their advantage and entertainment.

Historian Anthony Harkins examines the shift from the portrayal of Appalachian society as “stuck in the past,” to a new understanding of the region in the 1880s of the region as a threat to the rest of the progressing nation. Local color writers (writers who wrote about Appalachia as a region, focusing on characteristics of the landscape and the people) were successful in creating the image of the beautiful mountains and valleys of the region, but were also successful in augmenting the characteristics of its inhabitants in stark contrast to the landscape, presenting the native Appalachians to the rest of the region as primitive and idiosyncratic peoples. The cultivated curiosity as a result of these publications nationwide sparked an emphasis and reassurance that the rest of the nation was doing everything “right” compared to the lawless back-country woodsmen of the Appalachian mountains. Although mining violence and news concerning the challenges of industrialization in the region made it to newspapers across the nation, one of the more prominent sources of stereotyping the region came from the long-established Appalachian tradition of producing moonshine.

Throughout American history, the federal government has attempted to collect excise taxes on the production and sale of alcohol, one of the earliest examples being the Whiskey Rebellion (1793). During the Reconstruction era, many farmers of the Appalachian mountains returned home from combat and needed to generate revenue to support their families and retain ownership of their property. So, many farmers utilized a portion of their crops to manufacture what came to be known as “mountain dew,” otherwise known as moonshine, in addition to other

30 Harkins, 34.
liquors such as brandy and whiskey.\textsuperscript{31} During the Civil War, excise taxes were placed on goods as a temporary measure, however, the taxes that were placed on alcohol and tobacco still exist today.\textsuperscript{32} The success of the federal government in regulating the moonshining industry fluctuated throughout the later half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, however, moonshiners still found a way to maneuver around the ways of the law.

In the 1700s, emigrants Western Europe (predominantly Scots-Irish) came and settled in the Appalachian mountains because the farmland of the valleys and coasts had already been claimed. Despite the fact that the mountains posed risks for inhabitants and there was significant isolation, settlers claimed the area with determination. The people were “proud, independent, and fiercely protective of their individual rights.”\textsuperscript{33} The Scots and Irish were notoriously famous for making good liquor out of fruits and vegetables. Although men were predominantly involved and displayed in the manufacture and consumption of moonshine and other alcohol, women were also very active in the distilling process, often gathering the provisions needed for the creation of moonshine and other liquors.\textsuperscript{34}

Moonshiners, also referred to as “blockaders” moved into the eye of the public sphere as Reconstruction wrapped up in the late 1870s. The practice of moonshining was concentrated primarily in the Blue Ridge and Cumberland area of the Appalachian region, stretching through

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 34.


\textsuperscript{34} Edwards, 136.
eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, and western Virginia. Farmers typically set up moonshining stills in caves and hills on family property, attempting to conceal their manufacture from wandering eyes and legal investigators. Distilling laws in the wake of the Civil War caused Appalachian families to hide their moonshine and move its manufacture “underground.” Instead of allowing themselves to become subject to governmental control over their livelihood, moonshiners took their production facilities and hid them throughout the mountains in hollers and caves. Moonshiners found extreme difficulty in transporting their crops (such as rye, corn, apples, and other fruits) to larger towns and cities. To supplement the financial downfall and arguably generate a more handsome profit, men took their crops and distilled them into liquor.

The control over alcohol taxation and regulation had been relatively lax immediately following the Civil War. Historian Wilbur R. Miller discusses the common belief that, because the Union won the war, that the amount of power that they had or believed that they had was augmented because of that victory and, therefore, they felt the need to exercise it. That being said, the power that they assumed to have was not prioritized well. During Reconstruction, the federal government focused their energy on certain tasks while neglecting others. The role of the government, albeit limited, became a burden to moonshiners as the focus of the Bureau of Internal Revenue focused their efforts on the control and collection of taxes on liquor. Revenuers were men from the Bureau who ventured into the Deep South and Appalachia to retrieve tax money for the production and manufacture of moonshine. Before Commissioner

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35 Miller 15-16.
36 Edwards, 136-137.
37 Miller, 1-5.
38 Ibid., 3-4.
Green B. Raum moved into office in 1876, revenuers had a reputation of being corrupt and inefficient. During his time in office, Raum stressed the importance of “honesty and efficiency,” and polished the Bureau into an effective force that policed moonshiners and served warrants to those caught in the act of illegal manufacture.39

The small farmers who produced moonshine feared governmental control over their “local affairs,” and deeply resented the limitation being placed on a freedom that they had long enjoyed and used to support their families.40 Largely organized resistance against taxation developed while Raum was in office, mainly due to the fact that he had formed the Bureau into an effective legal agency. Aside from tax evasion, moonshiners regularly shot at and often killed revenuers who ventured into their territory to confront them on illegal distilling.41 Although corruption on behalf of both revenuers and moonshiners still continued, the success of Raum’s Bureau escalated, as did incrimination of illegal distillers. Miller cites historians Henry D. Shapiro and E.J. Hobsbawn in illustrating that “by 1876, most of the work of district attorneys and marshals in Appalachia was revenue cases, in Georgia amounting to four-fifths of federal prosecutions.”42 Miller also points out that “in 1891 the Appalachian region accounted for 68 percent of the nation’s cases of selling liquor without a license and 77 percent of the cases of illicit distilling.”43

39 Ibid., 7.
40 Harkins, 34.
41 Miller, 15.
42 Ibid., 15.
43 Ibid., 16.
As a result of Raum and his successors’ reforms, moonshiners were forced to get creative in their distribution of their liquor. Neighbors of moonshiners typically hid empty mugs and money under piles of brush or in the hollows of trees. When they returned later, their mugs would be full of liquor. Another technique for moonshiners to draw in business was to strategically place laurel branches along the side of the road, leading only skilled minds in the direction of distilling locations. In terms of marketing outside of the community, moonshiners would take sizable jugs of their illicit liquid on trips into town, and people throughout the region (particularly in industrialized areas) would leave empty jugs and money on the side of the road to be filled, cleverly concealed under hay, carts, and other inconspicuous objects. Although moonshiners had their ways of getting around revenuers, revenuers did not give up the fight.

In the 1870s, the federal tax on liquor was $0.90 per gallon. By 1894, the tax on liquor rose to $1.10 per gallon. The rise in taxes caused moonshiners to lose money that they did not already possess, who were hardly generating a profit and not wanting to price themselves out of business to try and compensate for their cut in income because of the tax. For a short time, many distillers pled ignorance to the established federal laws concerning the production of alcohol, however, this was short-lived. Political sympathy was not attainable, simply because the region was divided in terms of who defended which side during the Civil War and who supported which political party as a result. Bitter resentment came from former Confederates, in particular, who adamantly opposed reabsorption into the Union following the war.  

44 Ibid., 34-45. 
Despite the fact that there were frequent standoffs between distillers and revenuers, most moonshiners preferred to save themselves and their families from the law before shooting at someone, although such cases were never published in the media; most moonshiners were men looking to support their families. Some mountaineers fought to the point of death to protect families and loved ones. However, some moonshiners had tendencies to be disloyal to their own communities, placing their stills on unsuspecting properties of neighbors or enemies, causing them to be charged with illegal distillation in their stead. People with personal grudges against families and friends began threatening the force of the law if moonshiners themselves continued to evade it or fail to appease their enemies. Citizens who opposed drinking, especially when it was the source of livelihood or abuse in families, often turned to becoming informers to revenuers.\textsuperscript{46} Because many men felt the need to be protective of themselves and their families, distillers often posted warnings alongside the road for revenuers as they approached the distilleries.\textsuperscript{47} While some distillers continued guerrilla warfare and violence towards revenuers, more distillers took heed to the law as conviction rates climbed, and allowed the taxation of their liquor.\textsuperscript{48} A few notorious outlaws, such as Lewis Redmond, gave all moonshiners the image of being lawless and violent and, as a result, branded the entirety of Appalachia with the same behavior in the eyes of the outsiders.

As success of revenuers to identify and charge moonshiners continued to fluctuate, the industry that was the livelihood of many mountaineers and their families declined. Tensions escalated in the 1890s, largely because of the spread of local and national prohibition legislation.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 55-59.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 45-46.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 146.
Although moonshining resistance mostly subsided by the late 1890s, the image of lawless mountaineers out to defend their liquor and primitive way of living became an essential piece of the evolving hillbilly image.49

Agricultural depression, a higher liquor tax, and local prohibition made the lives of drinking mountaineers more difficult. The combination of these factors provided a wider market for moonshiners… many turned once more to organized resistance… Moonshiner violence and vigilantism were part of a larger intensification of conflict in the late-nineteenth-century South. Ordinary assaults, murders, and robberies, began to crowd the dockets of county courts…. in the mountains feuds seemed to be even more vicious than earlier.50

Although national attention was focused on moonshining and mining violence in Appalachia, family conflicts (particularly in western Kentucky and West Virginia) drew in attention as well, beginning in the 1870s. Between 1874 and 1893 alone, there were forty one reported familial conflicts, each expressing violent confrontations and racking up numerous casualties. As familial violence continued to expand throughout the Appalachian region through the 1880s, the focus expanded from Kentucky and West Virginia to the entire region. Newspapers argued that the backwoods people of Appalachia threatened to wholesome goodness and successful continuation of industrialization and assertion of superiority in the United States.51 While bitter feuds throughout the region engaged the attention of the rest of the nation, its most infamous rivalry would grip the Appalachian region and follow the families’ descendants far into the future.

The names Hatfield and McCoy have long been branded in the hills of West Virginia and western Kentucky. The conflict occurred primarily in the area along the Tug Fork of the Big

49 Ibid., 34-35.
50 Ibid., 174-175.
51 Harkins, 35-36.
Sandy River: the Hatfield family of Logan County (then called Mingo County), West Virginia was the more affluent of the two feuding families, having found success after deserting the Confederacy in the lumber industry. (Appendix D) The McCoys of Kentucky were of the lower-middle class sphere, struggling to support their large family. The patriarchs, William Anderson “Devil Anse” Hatfield and Randall “Ole Ran’l” McCoy, were the primary figures involved in the feud and are argued by many historians to be the source of the conflict, despite the fact that its actual origin is clouded by a series of bloody encounters and suspicions. Both families had primarily fought for the Confederacy during the war, and the fact that the Hatfields and McCoys had intermarried in the past further complicated the situation between the two parties, causing extreme tension within each household in addition to the weighted societal friction as a result of the feud.

Despite the fact that the marked beginning of the conflict is debated, a series of events are agreed upon to have contributed to the explosion of violence that occurred beginning in the late 1870s. The death of Asa Harmon McCoy, who had fought for the Union during the Civil War, in January of 1865 was suspected to have been a crime committed by the Logan Wildcats, a Confederate home guard group tightly tied to the Hatfield family. The death of Moses Christian Cline, a friend of Devil Anse’s, preceded the death of Asa McCoy in 1862, at which point Hatfield promised that he would get revenge on those who were responsible for his death. However, the first outwardly public dispute between the two families occurred when Floyd Hatfield was accused of possessing a hog that Randall McCoy claimed was his, an identification he argued could be proved by the specific notch markings on the hog’s ears. The argument was taken to the local justice of the peace, the elder brother of Devil Anse, Anderson “Preacher Anse”
Hatfield. Preacher Anse ruled in favor of the Hatfields because of the testimony of Bill Staton, a relative of both families. Staton was killed in June 1880 by Sam and Paris McCoy who escaped charges on the grounds of claiming self-defense.

Following the hog dispute and death of Staton, Roseanna McCoy, daughter of Randall and his wife Sally (in some sources referred to as Sarah), and Johnse Hatfield, son of Devil Anse and his wife Levicy, developed a romantic relationship that led to a pregnancy, the arrest and rescue of Johnse, and the abandonment of Roseanna by Johnse for her cousin, Nancy. The murder of Anse’s younger brother, Ellison, by Randall McCoy’s sons cut deeper into the veins of the feud, and resulted in the murder of the McCoy boys by the Hatfields as recompense for Ellison’s death.

Myriad murderous events continued to fuel the animosity between the two families, including the famous New Year’s Night Massacre, and eventually slowed to a trickle with the hanging of Cottontop Mounts in 1888. The events of the feud caused local color writers and newspapers to report on and play up the events of the conflict to attract attention of people outside the region and, ultimately, sell literature. An article in the Boston Daily Journal from November 1, 1889, opens by informing readers that “another bloody chapter was added to the story of the Hatfield McCoy vendetta Wednesday night.”52 (Appendix E) The article continues on to highlight the story of ambush, murder, and attempt to communicate the frustration of outsiders at the effect and length of the conflict. Another article entitled “A War of Extermination: The M’Coy-Hatfield Feud in West Virginia,” appeared in The New York Times in January 1888, and emphasized imagery of feud violence along the Tug River, including terms

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such as “cries for mercy,” “dangerously wounded,” and not forgetting to mention the Hatfields’ New Year’s Eve activities of “murder[ing] people, burn[ing] property, and kill[ing] stock.”

(Appendix F) In March of 1891, when the physical feud drew to a close, the speech written by Devil Anse was not as widely circulated as bloodied accounts of the feud — the publication of the speech was concentrated primarily to local newspapers such as *The Big Stone Gap* of Virginia while larger newspapers of metropolitan society neglected to feature the close of the story for which they had so highly publicized. (Appendix G)

Although the Hatfield-McCoy feud still stands as one of the most famous family feuds in American history, other feuds throughout Appalachia, although primarily from Eastern Kentucky, significantly contributed to the stereotype of its people developed by the rest of the nation. However, accounts of the feuds did not influence the stereotype as much as reports, stories, and local color pieces did; rather, the family feuds of eastern Kentucky flourished and spread through stories. Few sources of hard documentation and evidence of the crimes do not exist today or are notably unreliable. Famous areas of feuding in Kentucky included Pike, Perry, Rowan, Clay, Breathitt, and Harlan counties. Historian John Ed Pearce notes that

In writing about the feuds, there is always a tendency to fall into stereotypes. The image of the breaded, one-gallus, barefoot mountaineer, sucking his corncob pipe, his jug of moonshine on his shoulder and his trusty rifle to deal death to his neighbors, has for more than a century made the mountain people objects of ridicule and contempt. The feuds undoubtedly fed this stereotype.54

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Pearce also notes that, while newspapers of the past and other historians have ignored this fact, men of the mountains in rural Appalachia often did not have time to reach the county sheriff if their home was being ambushed. It was essential for Appalachian families to live near their relatives and develop close relationships with their neighbors, creating systemic protection in the rural wilderness of the mountains. For some, it is easier to link the conflicts of Reconstruction Appalachia to differences of opinion during the Civil War, especially because central Appalachia is concentrated mostly within border states, dipping into the bottom of the Union and top of the Confederacy. Additionally, it is just as easy to blame feuding on geographical and cultural isolation. However, because each feud is unique in terms of circumstances and causes, there are no common threads between them: likely causes point to external influence and intrusion, poverty and its relationship with formal education, industrial colonialism, and the struggle between local and national power in the wake of the war.55

Aside from mining violence and conflicts between moonshiners and revenuers, feuding was another powerful topic that writers could focus and elaborate on to paint the picture of Appalachia and its inhabitants, meanwhile selling papers and advertising the region like a circus spectacle. Local color writing was a genre that emerged in the wake of the Civil War, focusing on regions and their dialects, customs, landscape, and overall culture. The southern half of the United States received the most attention from local color writers, and its popularity soared as curiosity from northerners grew. Appalachia soon fell under the radar of local color writers, being described as “…a backward frontier that was culturally and economically behind the rest

55 Pearce, 3-8.
of the nation.” By the turn of the twentieth century, novelists began using Appalachia as settings in their novels to add dramatic effect and tension to their stories. These pieces were less historic works and more of a pop-culture development that strengthened the developed stereotypes of the region. Andrew Slap branches off of Pearce’s point of likely causes of feuds in explaining that most of the developed stereotypes, although they might not have directly related to the conflicts themselves, directly correlated with the poverty and isolation of the region. The stereotypes that local color writers formulated largely abandoned the factual nature of the events and pointed directly to what the rest of the nation viewed as “shortcomings” of the region; that is, the attributes that were not in line with the rest of the industrializing, changing country.

Local color writers such as Mary Noailles Murfree (pen name Charles Egbert Craddock) and James Lane Allen wrote detailed accounts of the Appalachian region, starkly contrasting the beautiful landscape with its unruly, savage inhabitants. In her writing, Murfree emphasized the people of the region as being illiterate, however, she recognized their strong sense of morality, family ties, and and proud of their culture, despite their shyness. Even though Murfree provided a defense to Appalachian natives, albeit small, the emphasis upon Appalachian isolation largely established the literary genre of “southern mountain fiction,” which much of the country regarded as truth. Murfree’s writings created a clear-cut line that defined the region as being “stuck in the past” and without motivation or tools to modernize.

Between 1870 and 1890, over 90 travel accounts and 125 short stories about the Appalachian region were published in the United States. Industrial era America was the period in

56 Slap, 26.
57 Ibid., 24.
58 Harkins, 30.
which the region emerged into public view because it emphasized where Americans came from. The existence of Appalachian society within industrializing America pushed for condemnation of the region for lack of innovation while praising the rest of the country for “moving forward” in the world and asserting western superiority. The purpose of local color pieces were to elaborate upon the differences and strangeness of life in the rural Appalachian mountains to sell more literature and make more money. The emergence of local color pieces was not considered as an established literary movement because of the diversity of the writing and writers. By stressing and clearly outline the outdated and barbaric ways of the people of the Appalachian mountains, the budding industrial era was inversely celebrated. What makes the illustration of Appalachian mountain people different from figures such as Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone is the absence of heroic symbolism; images of Appalachian whites were instead portrayed as sickly figures with animalistic behaviors, long legs, angular facial features, and filthy appearance. Although the stereotypes of Appalachian natives and southerners have existed since before the founding of the United States, and were largely augmented and popularized during the Reconstruction era, the concept of the Appalachian/southern “hillbilly” is still alive and has become an active component of the American identity. The Appalachian stereotype was created by journalists from stereotypes stemming from New England and the Southeast. Harkins notes that:

The twentieth century hillbilly image had its origins in three related but separate literary and illustrative traditions that reach back at least as far as the colonial era…the meaning of the people this image supposedly represented shifted dramatically from slightly isolated but generally unremarkably rural folk, to picturesque survivors of an earlier era,

59 Ibid., 29-30.
60 Ibid., 18-19.
to dangerous moonshining and feuding savages who needed to be reformed or eradicated.\textsuperscript{61}

Americans outside of the Appalachia saw the “hillbilly” culture as exotic or to be equated with outside-ness such as Native American or African American culture while also being understood as a lower, less advanced and sophisticated version of the rest of the white American society.\textsuperscript{62} Today, the image itself has not deviated much from its original design, but its implications and overall meaning has shifted in response to the ever-changing society. The term “hillbilly” has been used throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The term is often used by upper class Americans to criticize lower class, often southern, society: as a result, the lifestyle of poorer society is shadowed with disapproval while positive light is shed upon the advancement of society and the nation’s constant mission for betterment and progress.\textsuperscript{63}

The portrayal of Appalachian society and the “hillbilly” stereotype in media began with local color pieces, but truly emerged into society in the early twentieth century and was incorporated into film beginning in the 1920s. One of the earliest pieces, \textit{To 'lable David}, featured a play on the Hatfield-McCoy feud. Other famous portrayals of Appalachian society includes films such as \textit{Deliverance} and \textit{The Beverly Hillbillies}, although the hillbilly American culture is often proudly referred to in country music and is even the root of comedian Jeff Foxworthy’s “you might be a redneck” jokes. The image of the American hillbilly is often pointed out today as being the root of racial identity and hierarchy in the United States.\textsuperscript{64} Positive

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 13-14.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 4.
connotations associated with the hillbilly or redneck image include close familial ties, nationalism, rugged individualism, and a powerful sense of self. However, negative connotations include clear-cut gender roles, social and economic backwardness, sexual promiscuity, incest, ignorance, and intentional disregard for nutrition, medical care, childbearing, and external religious practices.⁶⁵

Despite the positive and negative connotations associated with Appalachia and the redneck/hillbilly stereotype, the current state of the region is clouded by stereotypes while its inhabitants are suffering because of industrial abuse and national neglect. While most of the nation’s coal continues to be mined in the mountains of Appalachia, healthcare provisions for workers are poor or nonexistent. Many native Appalachians never leave the region and are forced to work in the mines to support their families. Poverty is an epidemic throughout the region, so penetrating that parents give their infants and children Mountain Dew and Pepsi because they cannot afford milk. As a result, adults and children alike suffer from conditions such as “Mountain Dew Mouth,” where most of their teeth rot out by the time they reach their early twenties.

Other sweeping epidemics in the poverty-stricken Appalachian region are alcoholism and drug addiction. Often times, one the only solutions for desperate families to feed their families is to acquire and sell addictive prescription drugs, particularly narcotics such as oxycontin. Clinics often have to guard their prescription drugs with guns and other weapons due to extreme desperation. ABC news anchor Diane Sawyer debuted her documentary entitled A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains in 2009, where she ventured into her home state of western

⁶⁵ Ibid., 7.
Kentucky and documented the poverty in Appalachia and its effect on children: “we all know the stereotypes about mountain people…,” Sawyer opened, “…2.2 million people live there and of them, half of a million live in a kind of poverty a lot of us cannot imagine.”

Despite the fact that the stereotypes of Appalachia and the American hillbilly are often seen today as a source of humor and pride in American society, its roots are dug into some of American history’s most raw material. In a nation that markets itself on being accepting of other cultures and offering a new beginning to those who need are in need of one, there is help that is desperately needed within our borders. The Appalachian region has been under the microscope of societal scrutiny since the Reconstruction era, and has further been scrutinized since before the American Revolution. However, although the rest of the United States developed the stereotype that has branded Appalachian society for over a century, the poking and prodding and utilization of the region’s natural resources has yielded little aid or recognition of the region’s struggles outside of smaller organized charity groups. Although the violent events in Appalachia during the Reconstruction era were largely publicized, it was the rest of the nation that constructed and imprisoned the region within a stereotype that still exists and is exploited today.

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Images: (Appendix)


Appendix A:

Appalachian mountains, the central region concentrated within eastern Kentucky, northeastern Tennessee, western Virginia, and southwestern West Virginia.

Appendix B:

A map dividing the Appalachian mountains into its respective provinces and plateaus, bordered by the Coastal Plain along the East Coast.

Appendix C: Statistics from page five of David Alan Corbin’s Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922. Total coal production statistics from the state of West Virginia, 1867-1917.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Coal Production in tons</th>
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<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>489,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>4,882,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>89,384,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix D:

The Hatfield family, 1897.


“Milton, W. Va., Nov. 1. Another bloody chapter was added to the story of the Hatfield McCoy vendetta Wednesday night by a skirmish in which Mrs. James Brown was killed and John Blumfield wounded by a detachment of the McCoy party [in] ambush. The feud has now assumed the aspect of a war of extermination, and the battle, which has been delayed for forty-eight hours, may begin at any minute. The only thing which has kept the Hatfields from attacking the McCoys was the strong force and intrenched position of the latter, and the situation is now entirely changed. The Blumfield family, goaded to frenzy by the wanton butchery of Al Blumfield and his wife, have decided to join the Hatfields in an attempt to exterminate the McCoys. The will give the Hatfield leaders at least 230 armed men. Yesterday John Blumfield, Charles Blumfield and George Hatfield, all of them cousins of the murdered pair, went to Huntington and recruited about a dozen of their relatives, who work there in the Cincinnati and Ohio shops. They then purchased all the rifles and revolvers they could find, securing in all about 100 [repeaters] of recent model and nearly 130 revolvers. They also bought several thousand cartridges. This supply of war material was loaded upon ten wagons, and they were driven south, toward the scene of the Lincoln County feud, surrounded by a guard of 13 desperate men armed to the teeth. No attempt was made to stop them as the county authorities are powerless.

The cavalcade was attacked at Fudge’s Creek, near the Guyandotte River, Wednesday night, by a party of McCoys in ambush near the farmhouse of Mrs. James Brown, who was a Hatfield before she was married. The Hatfields had stopped for supper and were eating when a volley was poured through the windows. The Hatfields were taken by surprise, but seized their rifles and returned the fire. It was pitch dark and it is not known if any of the McCoys were hurt, as the Hatfields were afraid to search in the underbrush. When Blumfield’s men returned to the house Mrs. Brown lay dead upon the floor with a bullet through her neck, and John Blumfield, the leader of the party, was found to be wounded, but it is impossible to learn how seriously.

This last affair has stirred up feeling here to the highest pitch, and it has been determined to call on the Governor for troops. Every one recognizes, however, that the regular militia can do little, for they will be ignorant of the country and its thousands of hiding places and would be shot down from ambush. There is some talk of organizing a company of State Rangers, modeled on the Texas plan, but no one can be found to assume the leadership.”


“Catlettsburg, KY., Jan. 24. — The war of extermination between the Hatfields and McCoys is still going on in the wilds of West Virginia. The steamer Frank Preston arrived from Pikeville yesterday afternoon and brought intelligence of an encounter between the pursuing party and the Hatfields on last Saturday. On Thursday last the capturing party, numbering 20, left Pikeville for Tug River. After crossing the river, when nearing the residence of Capt. Hatfield, they came across a woman in the road who was standing picket, and who immediately gave the alarm. The party when turning a point in the road were fired upon by a squad of eight from the Hatfield gang. Bud McCoy was shot through the shoulder and dangerously wounded. Two of the posse
were detailed to care for him and take him home. The capturing party immediately returned the fire, and Will Dempsey of the Hatfield gang fell to the ground, shot through the bowels.

At this juncture, the Hatfields beat a hasty retreat, throwing away their blankets, overcoats, &c. The posse went up to where the Dempsey was, and, although he was in a dying condition and begged piteously to be saved, as he would not live long, despite his cries for mercy, the man that killed Jim Vance on the first raid put his gun against Dempsey’s head and almost blew it off. At this inhuman act one of the pursuing party became angry, left the posse, and returned home.

The Hatfields were organizing for a raid over on Peter Creek, in Kentucky, the scene of their New Year’s night deeds, to murder people, burn property, and kill stock. The Peter Creek Guards, 20 strong, have joined the capturing party, who now numbers forty-odd, and are in hot pursuit of the Hatfields. The excitement throughout Pike County, though intense, is increasing daily, as the Hatfields have warned the people that they propose to kill them and burn their property. They have sent word that they propose to burn Pikeville and extricate their six comrades now in jail there. The jail is strongly guarded day and night, and pickets are sent out in all directions from the town every night.

Judge Waggoner, County Judge of Pike County, and J. Lee Ferguson, County Attorney, came down on the Frank Preston from Pikeville en route to Frankfort, where they go to lay the case before the Governor and ask him for arms to protect themselves and their property.”


“Wheeling, W. Va., March 26 — The Hatfield-McCoy feud on the West Virginia and Kentucky border is a thing of the past. All the troubles which have caused the shedding of so much blood have been settled. The hatchet buried, and henceforth, so far as the Hatfields and McCoys are concerned, Logan County, West Virginia, and Pike County, Kentucky, will be peaceful communities. Captain Hatfields, the leader of the West Virginia faction, who has figured in so many bloody engagements during the twenty years’ between the two families and their branches, has been the leader in bringing about the conferences which have resulted in a declaration of peace, and he himself announces the conclusion of the negotiations in the following card, which he has sent to the newspapers of the southern section of the State:

‘To the Editor: I ask space in your valuable paper for these few lines. A general amnesty has been declared in the famous Hatfield-McCoy feud, and I wish to say something of the old and new. I do not wish to keep the old feud alive, and I suppose every body, like myself, is tired of the names ‘Hatfield and McCoy,’ and the word ‘border warfare in time of peace.’ The war spirit in me has abated and I sincerely rejoice at the prospects of peace. I have devoted my life to arms. We have undergone a fearful loss of noble lives and valuable property in the struggle. We being like Adam, not the first transgressors, now I propose to rest in a spirit of peace. Yours respectfully, Captain Hatfield. Logan County, W. Va.’
This letter, which was originally addressed to the Wayne County News, is extensively published and has caused a feeling of relief in the Southern section of the State.”