The Responsibility of Forms: Social and Visual Rhetorics of Appalachian Identity

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This dissertation titled

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ABSTRACT

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Appalachians are typically represented in visual culture as homogenized: white and poor. For the rest of the country tuned into to American visual culture, Appalachia is nothing more than America’s backwoods country, crawling with hillbillies, peopled by incestuous families, and stocked with slovenly welfare abusers. In the spirit of recent Appalachian scholarship’s reclamation of Appalachian heterogeneity via challenges to what scholars have referred to as the “Appalachian Myth,” this study examines the rhetoric of Appalachian stereotypes in visual culture, observes scenarios in which they construct external and internal “others,” and theorizes the ways in which images promote prejudice, classism, and gender disparities and deny the existence of richly diverse cultural traditions within the region.

The visual ephemera covered in this project are not studied or organized as artifacts in an historical taxonomy. Instead, they are understood as subjects within a visual grammatical system. This system establishes boundaries between Appalachia and America. Thus, the subjects and materials studied—Jesco White: The Dancing Outlaw, media coverage of the 2006 Sago mine disaster, Jessica Lynch and Lynddie England, Hillbilly Days, Redneck Games, and The Descent—are treated as iconic phrases within a larger visual etymology or taxonomy of identity. By treating images as grammatical
rhetorics and situating them within the context of contemporary feminist and visual studies theories, this dissertation offers a new theoretical framework to study the construction of identity through the deployment and rhetoric of imagery.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

William F. Condee

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memories of Madge Adeline Smith and Sophie P. Kitty.
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INTRODUCTION

Appalachia, the geographic and cultural region that stretches from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi, is an area typically represented by illustrators, photographers, filmmakers, and television producers as home to a certain kind of people—white, degenerate, and lower class. Beginning as magazine cartoons and portrait photographs in the late nineteenth century and expanding to include films and television shows in the twentieth century and electronic media in the twenty-first, iconic and prejudicial images of Appalachians circulate in American visual culture, resulting in a series of negative stereotypes that highlight Appalachian peoples’ difference from mainstream America and subordinate cultural and social similarities between them and the rest of the country. These images, including the nostalgic mountaineer, the lazy or ridge-running hillbilly, the overly fecund mountain girl, the villainous mountain man, and the aged-before-her-time cantankerous grandmother, propagate specific categories of Appalachian identity that are unquestioningly absorbed by a larger American audience. Such caricatures do not represent the full range of characters and characteristics in representations of Appalachians. Positive stereotypes of traditional craftsman, heroic coalminers, and soulful musicians coexist with these aforementioned negative distillations of identity. The harmful types stand out because they fit stereotypes about Appalachia and act as signs of social deviance precipitated by faults in the character of the subjects of these images, and, most importantly for this study, they are produced and circulated at higher rates than positive ones.
This study examines these stereotypes as they manifest in American visual culture. It explores their creation and circulation in relation to rhetorical and political needs of their creators and not the “real” needs of the subjects. Though the stereotypes tend not to discriminate geographically—the diversity of Appalachia is condensed into singular tropes—this project focuses on their manifestations in and generalizations about Central Appalachia and Central Appalachians, especially those in or from West Virginia.\(^1\)

This research observes the ways in which essentialist structures of identity circulate in visual culture and socialize negative stereotypes into material truth. Contributing to postmodern practices, this dissertation is concerned with the visual, historical, and theoretical structures of stereotypes of Appalachians in American visual culture.

Through this project, the visual rhetoric and potency of stereotypes will be framed in the language of art history, visual culture, and contemporary identity theories—thus bridging the disciplinary gaps between Appalachian and visual culture studies. Important as well are the psycho-social construction and performance of whiteness, gender, sexuality, and class. These identity categorizations are critical in the process of othering, acting as signifiers of identity difference within a national visual culture that in turn exerts pressures on Appalachians from within their region and themselves. This work is a mere beginning in the study of this “visual identificatory system,” enough to dispute recent pronouncements of a “decline” in the occurrence and circulation of these

\(^1\) Central Appalachia, a term defined by Appalachian studies, includes the coalfields and mountains of southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, western Virginia, and northeastern Tennessee. The materials this project examines are primarily limited to eastern Kentucky and West Virginia.
stereotypes and to problematize the relationship between history, visual culture, and identity within Appalachia and in a larger national context.²

This work attempts contextualization by positing a new rubric for analysis of Appalachian stereotypes: visual culture. Visual culture, which is the object of study by visual studies, consists of human-produced visual materials that comprise our visual experience, shape our perception, and inform our identities. According to James D. Herbert, visual studies examines the hierarchies that separated “high” versus “low” arts and studies the objective relationships of visual things—how we categorize them, where we find them, how they work on us, and what kinds of identities and symbols are at work in them (Herbert 452). Most importantly this dissertation contributes to the three goals of visual studies delineated by Herbert: to democratize the materials, to globalize by shifting definitions of the objects of study to “visual artifacts,” and to dematerialize materials by using technologies and approaches that strategically advance and/or examine cultural change (452-3; 457).

This study about Appalachians in American visual culture seeks to de-vilify the Appalachian and contribute to critical studies of American sub-regions by employing this breakdown of high/low and importing such theoretical views as visual rhetoric, feminist theory, and whiteness studies. Ultimately, such scholarship will contribute to a dematerialization of essentializing views of Appalachians, de-stabilize internal-colonialist

² In his recent book, Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon, Anthony Harkins hints that we have witnessed a decline in the number of Appalachian stereotypes circulating. However, as recent examples from the entertainment industry and the media’s discussions of notorious Appalachians in the military demonstrate, stereotyping is actually expanding and the imagery is just one layer of this social phenomenon.
discourses of which such stereotyping practices are indicative, and examine the sexual, gendered, environmental, and performative rhetoric of Appalachian stereotypes.

Finally, through the employment of visual studies strategies, this project will examine film, television, and media examples of Appalachian othering not included in the recent seminal work by Anthony Harkins in an effort to broaden understanding of how ubiquitous, pervasive, and resilient the Appalachian stereotype is in hopes of understanding how and why he/she survives in these postmodern, and supposedly multicultural, global culture. While this is neither a comprehensive study nor a survey of Appalachian stereotypes in American visual culture, it offers a glimpse at visual moments and posits an inherent connected-ness among them.

Deviance and Images

The persistent presence of images of Appalachian stereotypes in American visual culture, including those found in films and reproduced media discourses, illustrate the continuing necessity of pursuing critical examination of the nation’s view of Appalachia. This view homogenizes what is in reality a geographically localized and richly polyvalent group of identities. Visual stereotypes send overwhelmingly negative and damaging messages about Appalachians and hide the numerous identities and traditions that comprise Appalachian cultures.

This study of image and identity will not, however, explain the “real” Appalachia. New art historical and visual cultural methodologies challenge the notion that anything can be known comprehensively about a given subject from the perspective of a single author or through individual analysis of historical epochs. Knowledge is shaped by a
point of view; therefore, a work by a single author cannot by its nature offer a study that defines Appalachia.

Signs of deviance purport to point out a “truth” about Appalachian-ness while acting as negative signs to absent positive referents: the “typical” American. For example, the lazy, ridge-running hillbilly is the criminal and anti-authority counterpart to the typical white male law-abiding citizen. These characters and characteristics mark deviations from an unspoken standard or norm. Such types also act as representations of truth(s) attached to people who are perceived to be “different.” For most image beholders, this difference is merely “uncovered,” unfalteringly rendered in visual representation. In reality, such imagery is crafted in the entangled process of creativity, subjectiveness, misperception, and social signification that comprise image production, dissemination, and reception.

A recent search in Pennsylvania for Appalachian actors for a Hollywood horror film is a poignant example. In February of 2008, Nala Films’ company Donna Belajac Casting issued a call for actors in the city of Pittsburgh. The company searched for actors who appeared “abnormal” in order to obtain a particular Appalachian sensibility in the film’s characters. David M. Brown of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review reported that the call directed that “‘regular-looking’ children need not apply”. The call, according to Brown, is explicit in its search for actors with particular physical attributes, needing people who looked abnormal in order to cultivate an “authentic” rendering of the peoples of the hills and hollows of West Virginia (Brown). Brown reports that the Donna Belajac Casting call further described that actors should be:
‘Extraordinarily tall or short. Unusual body shapes, even physical abnormalities as long as there is normal mobility. Unusual facial features, especially eyes.’ The announcement requests ‘a 9-12-year-old Caucasian girl with an other-worldly look to her. Could be an albino or something along those lines—she's someone who is visually different and therefore has a closer contact to the gods and to magic. (Brown)

The call for actors for the horror film *Shelter* represents ongoing perceptions about Appalachians, and in this particular instance, West Virginians. The company charged with hiring actors was searching for real life people who fit a fictive set of characteristics conceived as “Appalachian” by the creators of the film. The idea *precedes* the visual representation. An audience’s interpretation is not driven by what they see; rather, it is constructed by and limited to the ideas that inaugurate the images. The idea of what Appalachia “is” or who Appalachians “are” is extraneous to both the visual materials that purport to represent Appalachia and Appalachian peoples themselves.

The majority of images in American visual culture claiming to represent the “essence” of Appalachian-ness include little that hints at the region’s cultural diversity. For the rest of the country tuned in to American visual culture—nearly anyone watching television, using the Internet, attending the movies, or reading a newspaper—Appalachia is nothing more than America’s backwoods country, crawling with “rednecks,” peopled by “incestuous” “hillbilly” families, and stocked with “slovenly Welfare abusers.” And if image is to be taken as truth, these people are evidence of an isolated white population of Scottish immigrant descendants, the secluded inbred offspring of degenerate hill-folk.
These pervasive stereotypes about white degenerates both hide the diversity of the region’s population and occlude the social, cultural, and economic causes of class difference that aid in the construction and continuation of stereotypes. And because of the saturation rate and apparent truthful quality of such images compounded by audiences’ willingness to believe them, Appalachians can be discounted by America at large as lacking; they lack the civil or social refinement embodied by other Americans, lack the technological knowledge of our information age, and lack the ability to contribute meaningfully to society. Thus Appalachians are often depicted in situations in which, invariably, their “hillbilly-ness” causes them to “muck it up.”

In spite of visual evidence to the contrary, the people who live in this region called Appalachia are culturally, socially, ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse. From the Lebanese American communities who helped build the cities in central West Virginia, to the African Americans who work(ed) alongside the Scots-Irish in the region’s coal, salt, steel, and textile industries, Appalachia is home to immigrant peoples from every corner of the world, not to mention the Native American presence before and after white settlement. While Appalachia and the South have reputations as persistent and unabated cultures of racism, racism and racial tensions occur throughout the United States and are thus not limited to former slave-holding states. Willburn Hayden Jr. reports that contemporary Appalachians are witnessing population growths among non-whites in the region. He writes that while “The 2000 Census indicates whites remain the largest racial group in Appalachia—with blacks being a distinct second [. . .]” there is “higher growth in the non-white population of the region and a slowing growth rate
among whites [. . .]” (Hayden 304-5). Currently, 11.2 % of Appalachians are non-white (Hayden 293). While Appalachia is not diversifying as quickly as the rest of the country, it is not outside of this demographic trend.³

In an effort to establish the framework of the visual system that makes such assumptions about Appalachia possible, Chapter One “Iconic Appalachia: Social and Visual Elision” examines images of upper middle class America and lower middle class and poor Kentucky and Ozarkan families. Moving from images of railroad tycoon Collis P. Huntington to images that purport to “distill” the reality of life in the mountains, the rhetorical iconography of images as truth-makers is explored. Building on the idea of diversity in Appalachia as opposed to the suggested reality created by stereotypes and images, Chapter Two, “Appalachia: History, Myth, and Postmodern Studies,” offers a history of both the Appalachian region itself as well as the origins of the Myth of Appalachia. Chapter Three “The Codified Myth” highlights scholarship produced by Appalachian studies that examines the myth and also situates this thinking within a postmodern framework.

³ Phillip Obermiller and Thomas Wagner argue in their book African American Miners and Migrants: The Eastern Kentucky Social Club that it is not the rampant presence of a particularly heinous kind of Appalachian racism that has kept non-white population numbers low; rather, it is the economic struggles of the entire region over the past century that has encouraged the migration of non-white workers through and out of the region. According to Obermiller and Wagner, there were important differences between African American and white Appalachian miners: “Although many African Americans moving from the Deep South may have had dreams of buying land, most, as former sharecroppers, did not actually own any property. In contrast, most native whites and some foreign immigrants who came to the coal towns could lay claim to a landholding “back home.”” (Obermiller and Wagner 9-10). This difference in ownership tied native whites to the land, thus preventing them from leaving during times of economic struggle. African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century, as would later migrant worker populations moving throughout Appalachia, were unattached and thus able to move on when work dried up in mining towns (10). This suggests that the slow pace of racial diversification might be due to economic conditions and not solely to social conventions. Further, it is also probable that racist conditions continued unabated because of economic instability and not because of the existence of a particularly Appalachian culture of racism.
Chapter Four “Stereotypes, Postmodernism, and Visual Culture Studies” continues the postmodern evaluation begun in Chapter Three, expanding it to include sociological theories on stereotyping and art history and visual studies theories on imagery. This chapter ends with an exploration of the relationship between identity and the visual through the application of recent feminist and queer theory. Chapter Five “Land and Kin as Rhetorics of Appalachian Difference” maps the visual rhetorical history of the landscape in American visual culture and images of Appalachians.

Chapter Six “The Sexual Rhetoric of Appalachian Stereotypes” offers an addendum to recent Appalachian studies scholarship on the “hillbilly” through the analysis of gender rhetorics and sexuality. Chapter Seven “Film, the Documented Image, and the Appalachian Other” introduces new material and analysis about a West Virginia filmmaker and his subject, hillbilly and redneck festivals, and Appalachians in horror films. This chapter offers new observations about internal othering, intercultural performativity, disidentification, and the Appalachian stereotype as a new category of otherness, the hillbilly “monster.”
CHAPTER ONE: ICONIC APPALACHIA: SOCIAL AND VISUAL ELISION

The power of images is acute; they condition our understanding of not only the world around us but also notions of “self” within the context of our world. Psychoanalysts, such as Jacque Lacan, link images and their perception to the construction of internal identities (Lacan 126-28). That is, images actually shape our internal notions of “self” rather than mirror what we are like in reality. Scholars of art history and visual culture—the study of the social links between art, visual materials, and traditions of looking—have studied the process of typification as a sign of supposedly inherent social difference, asserting that stereotyping actually is and has been a critical agent in the fashioning of social difference in the Western world over the past few centuries.

According to Stuart Hall, a scholar of cultural and visual studies, stereotypes are signifying images and tools of identity signification through which people make judgments about other people (Hall 257). Signification, in this sense, is a process of transmitting or enacting an identity through behaviors, speech, and materials. Linked to the ways in which we process information, stereotypes are a condensed or concentrated kind of signification Hall calls “typification”:

We understand the world by referring to individual objects, people or events in our heads to the general classificatory schemes into which—according to our culture—they fit. [. . .] Our picture of who the person “is” is built up out of the information we accumulate from positioning him/her within these different orders of typification. (257)
A stereotype is a composite of the most vivid, memorable, and reductive traits of a given identity, often resulting in an unchanging character whose traits mark them as different from a cultural—and in America, a particularly “modern” and educated—norm (257-58).

Repetitious and persistent visual stereotypes situate Appalachians. The Appalachian in stereotyped form is actually a product of a national imagination that has culled from the rich tapestry of Appalachian identities a set of oversimplified and anachronistic characteristics that stand in, synecdochally, for the entire region’s people. For the Appalachian, representational identities socially imbricate them within the system of American culture as lower class. In this network, stereotypes and caricatures testify to their social and educational lack, displacing and overshadowing Appalachians’ own claims to identity, self realization, and cultural performativity. Just as minstrelsy—whites performing stereotypes of blacks in black face—purported to speak for African Americans and present “blackness” for a white audience (while degrading them through stereotypes that justified their oppression), stereotypes of Appalachians also enact a bait-and-switch maneuver that creates “real” images of Appalachians that occlude real identities. They result in notions that Appalachians are helpless, do-less, toothless, poor whites who appear to deserve their lot in life.

Further, this system transmits this identity and encourages the categorization of the region as a lesser American identity, highlighting poor whites while using them to deflect attention from the white privilege that makes invisible both the ruling class and the social ills produced by class disparity—the social and economic gap that effectively
sets poor whites apart as “poor” and “white” (Harkins 9). Images imply that Appalachians cultivate and revel in poverty while indicting them for their cultural and racial inferiority. Finally, this visual tradition encourages the notion that Appalachia is comprised of only poor whites and thus marginalizes Appalachia’s large Hispanic and African-American communities, ignoring the economic status and rich working-class history that should unite these cultural groups as Appalachian. Interestingly, the Appalachian Regional Commission does not provide data on the racial and ethnic diversity of the Appalachian populations in the thirteen states that make up Appalachia—Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia. Economics (and therefore class) are the organizing principles of its data. So, the federal government and the ARC assess Appalachia based on class and fail to provide a blueprint of the populations that might reveal internal disparities where race and class produce identificatory social sub-structures. As long as there is no regional view of Appalachian racial and ethnic identities, poor whites remain the icons of the region and the operation of whiteness as a race of privilege in a national context remains unproblematised.

Stereotypes, the currency of social and class difference, frame their subjects as different from and lower in status than viewers who consume such images. In relation to

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4 According to the 2000 Census numbers on poverty as reported by the Appalachian Regional Commission on their website, the two poorest states in the nation—Mississippi and West Virginia—are Appalachian. Of the 273,882,232 Americans for whom poverty status is determined 22,212,416 are Appalachian. Of the 33,899,812 people who fall below the poverty line in the US, 3,030,896 are Appalachian. That means that 13.6% of Appalachians are below the poverty level whereas 12.4% of Americans are below the poverty level. 15 September 2007. <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=5>. The economic difference between Appalachian and American whites revealed by these numbers also points to potential reasons that this visual othering persists.
Appalachians, stereotyping has identified and explained the causes of Appalachian difference by directing image consumers’ attention towards social and physical difference. But their difference is not simply a product of class; it is also linked to race. Theorists such as Annalee Newitz and Matt Ray see such visual images and the power relations they are symptomatic of as masking agents of white privilege (Newitz and Ray 3). One important example is the term “white trash.” In *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, they ascertain: “It has been the invisibility (for whites) of whiteness that has enabled white Americans to stand as unmarked, normative bodies and social selves, the standard against which all others are judged (and found wanting)” (3). A pejorative such as “white trash” is used to separate those whites from the space of the invisible white majority who fail to adhere to the social imperative that whites not appear culturally distinct—the mechanism that cloaks white privilege in the guise of “normativity” (4). The absence of such a distinction enables the white majority to enjoy a majority’s material privileges, advantages that survive behind the illusion that whites *earned* their status instead of *inherited* their privilege from a current capitalist system’s racist and discriminatory superstructure.

Following this logic, white Appalachians, mountaineers, “hillbillies,” “rednecks,” and “white trash” all fail the cultural test by not having access to the cultural materials that signify middle or upper class. Further, they are perceived to represent an abundance of whiteness as opposed to an invisibility of whiteness. Because of their lack of material and cultural privilege, American visual culture highlights these stereotypes and they become the remaining primary signs of American whiteness. Indeed, white middle-class
consumption is itself an act that props up its class status and hides its white identities. Stereotypes complete the ideological cycle: Appalachians are reduced to caricatures (always white, poor, and degenerate) that are in turn marketed by/to an American public who consumes them as comedic proof that Appalachians genetically and culturally deserve to be low class. Understanding how Appalachia is othered by an American audience goes far in explaining the causality of stereotype production and circulation, farther than a strict history of these visual materials. These materials were not merely produced because Appalachians appeared strange; they were produced because they functioned within larger discourses of race and class, designations that are circulated and created by the consumption of commodities.

Ann McClintock offers an interesting example of how racial identity circulates through commodities-based articulations of class through her work on race and visual culture in Victorian England. An English and women’s studies scholar, McClintock suggests in “Soft-Soaping the Empire: Commodity, Racism, and Imperial Advertising” that the imagery attached to the advertising of soap in nineteenth-century Britain was actually a form of social control, setting boundaries according to race and class (McClintock 507). She writes,

The soap saga captured the hidden affinity between domesticity and empire and embodied a triangulated crisis in value: the undervaluation of women’s work in the domestic realm, the overvaluation of the commodity in the industrial market and the disavowal of colonized economies in the arena of empire. (506)
Relying on four main fetishistic themes—the soap, white clothing, mirrors, and monkeys—this racial and classed visual culture exalts white bourgeois culture, deemphasizes women’s work (unpaid labor), and demonstrates how imperial attitudes imposed ideologies on middle class time and consumption (510). Therefore, soap was an important conduit for the circulation of ideologies of race, gender, and class in Victorian England, one commodity among many to give visual form to invisible ideologies.

While anthropomorphic imagery suggests racist and classist designations in soap advertisements from Victorian England, images suggestive of racial degeneration fixes race to Appalachians in American visual culture. Commodities, not bodies, transmit identity. Here, then, we get to the heart of the matter of identity, which is often dichotomized as nature or nurture or by contemporary feminist and queer theorists as essentialist or constructivist (Davis 330). To “imagine” the other is to call forth an image, to visualize in our minds a physiognomy of a people used to explain cultural difference. This process, scholars argue, is the foundation of the process of psycho-socialization—the process through which we determine who we are by developing an understanding of who people are around us. A psychoanalytic concept, psychosocialization happens internally, but only according to the external promptings of the world (331). These promptings are predominately visual yet they take on the “real life” forms of raced, classed, gendered, and ethnicized identities.

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5 This research does not purport to offer a sociological study of identity; rather it addresses identity as a visual discursive formation indelibly linked to identity. This project’s focus is not whether identity is either a product of human nature, an essential aspect of a group of people or socialized into being through social, imagistic, and rhetorical discursive formations.
In this particular visual-cultural scenario, however, race operates on principles of difference and sameness, or the interaction of rejection and recognition. Race is dependent on the already present visual difference, that is, the fetishization of skin as an indicator of cultural, ethnic, national, and sometimes biological differences. One cannot simply stop “performance” of skin color because its valuation occurs not in the body of the raced subject but in the perception and reception of raced subjects by another race (Winant 51).

Two traditional views of race have been developed to explain its origin and power. The first is essentialist: the body is the site of race. Race, therefore, is an “objective condition.” The second is discursive. This widely recognized theory holds that race is socially constructed, especially in oppressive, violent, and exclusionary moments of conflict and difference (race riots, lynchings, discrimination). Race is not the result of the body but is the meaning we attach to the body and is, therefore, an ideological construct.

These two views of how race operates are incomplete in that they do not account for the connection between real world experiences and the psycho-social structures that make race meaningful. The first denies the possibility that the meaning of race exists as a discourse and the second is theoretical and thus does not account for real-world consequence of perceived racial differences. Howard Winant proposes a re-conceptualization of race theory that bridges the gap between theory and real-world consequences, combining the two academic views of race:
For it may be possible to glimpse yet another view of race, in which the concept operates neither as a signifier of comprehensive identity nor of fundamental difference, both of which are patently absurd, but rather as a marker of the infinity of variations we humans hold as common heritage and hope for the future. (Winant 6)

We must merge the tangibility or real-world status—insofar as the real world gives it an ontological form—with the theory that race is an unstable category that is constantly performed and reformed as behavior and language (especially the reception/perception of these modes). However, identity theories of race remain incomplete if race remains a signifier of “color,” “visibility,” and “difference”—signifiers that do not include whiteness, which suggests the absence of color.

Interestingly, while the aforementioned kinds of stereotypes present a range of characters and characteristics, they all share a specific set of qualities that condense Appalachian identity into a “type.” According to such images, Appalachians embody three important characteristics: whiteness, genetic and social degeneracy, and low class status. In the recent example cited, Nala Films and Donna Belajac Casting sought an “albino child” or one who was an abnormally white actor to play the part of a child who lived with a “holler witch” who was blind, acting as her eyes (Brown).6 The child’s “whiteness” and physical difference would equate with her supernatural abilities as well as act as a physiognomic geography of her difference; we automatically know where she is from by virtue of what she looks like. This visual recognition of Appalachian

6 “Holler” is slang for a hollow, a deep or narrow valley that usually follows a water source out of hills or mountains.
appearance has been cultivated by more than a century of visual traditions about
Appalachians that used whiteness, degeneracy, and low-class status to mark and explain
Appalachian difference.

In this formulation images attach fiction to presumptive truths which are then
simultaneously attached to the bodies and cultural identities of Appalachians. These
three characteristics—whiteness, degeneracy, and low class status—essentialize cultural
difference and behaviors in Appalachian bodies, placing responsibility for their
difference on biological identity rather than social conditions. By essentialize, I refer to
the feminist meaning of the term that characterizes the process by which social or
behavioral difference is situated in the body as coming from the body, biologically
(Hovey). Essentialism, as opposed to social constructivism, views social, gendered,
sexual, racial, or classed difference as inherent to the biology of the subject. Jaime
Hovey indicates that social constructivism holds “that all the qualities of a person are
socially constructed and are made to seem natural only to establish an ideological
advantage for one group over another” (Hovey). The essentialization of difference
encourages the belief held by “outsiders” that Appalachians cannot “integrate” with
normal culture because they were perceived to be racially, and therefore biologically,
different from non-Appalachians.

This essentialization of difference is not contained to perceptions about
Appalachians who remain in the region. It emerged in cultural conflicts between
Appalachians and other Americans throughout the twentieth century as Appalachians left
the region to find work in urban centers. Indeed, those Appalachians who left in early
and mid twentieth-century labor migrations out of Appalachia faced cultural boundaries raised by essentialist stereotypes as they dealt with housing, employment, judicial, economic, and social discrimination in cities like Detroit, Chicago, and Columbus. First, Appalachians did not descend en masse on urban centers without provocation.

Demographers Phillip Obermiller, Thomas Wagner, and Bruce Tucker write that:

> After World War I, immigration restriction laws put a premium on domestic labor supplies, and southern mountain workers were recruited heavily for jobs in northern factories. Even in that early period, employers established their hiring practices with a particular view of mountain folk. They associated Appalachian workers with mechanical aptitude, a strong work ethic, and resistance to unionization and blandishments of communism. Special bus lines ran directly from county seats in eastern Kentucky to factory gates in Detroit, and more “southern whites” flooded cities such as Cincinnati, Hamilton, Dayton, Akron, and Chicago.

(Obermiller, Wagner, and Tucker xii)

Second, Appalachians posed more of an economic than ethnic threat in cities. They were explicitly sought out by manufacturers for their work ethics and thus posed a threat to other urban workers as new labor competitors. Images of Appalachians depicted something else altogether; according to political cartoons produced throughout the migration period, Appalachians were the source of social and cultural corruption instead

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7 For a comprehensive study of Appalachian migrants and their experiences in the mid-twentieth century see Phillip J. Obermiller, Thomas E. Wagner, and E. Bruce Tucker’s *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration*. This anthology includes analysis of individual and group encounters, activism, community network-building, and discrimination experienced by Appalachian migrants from the first great migration in the 1920s to the end of the 1970s.
of discriminatory attitudes held by urban residents. As more Appalachians entered cities, they were increasingly identified as trouble; social and civic institutions responded with projects to educate, acclimate, and reform urban Appalachians (Tucker 80).

Bruce Tucker indicates that it was migration occurring after the Great Depression that especially attracted the attention of social and civic institutions. The Appalachian presence was so pronounced that officials coined names for these migrant workers:

As thousands of Appalachian migrants entered the cities, public officials, business leaders, police, educators, and social workers sought ways to deal with what was then called “the SAM problem.” Journalists and professionals alike referred to these migrants as SAMs (southern Appalachian migrants), WASPs (white Appalachian southern Protestants) or SANs (southern Appalachian newcomers). Street-level labels were more pernicious: briar, cracker, hillbilly, redneck, ridge runner, snake eater, and swamp turkey, to list a few. (Obermiller, Wagner, and Tucker xiii)

Obermiller, Wagner, and Tucker follow the history of these responses as they evolved more formally into organizations with explicit reformatory agendas for urban Appalachians. In Cincinnati, Ohio, for example, city-sponsored groups such as the Mayor’s Friendly Relations Committee and the Social Service Association of Greater Cincinnati hosted a series of city forums and workshops on this urban problem. Tucker writes:
organizers of the 1954 workshop assumed that poverty and high birthrate in mountain communities would continue to result in migration to the cities and that a “successful adjustment” was important to Cincinnati. They also believed that many families made “a poor adjustment to their own hurt and that of social agencies, city services, schools, churches, industry, and community relations generally. (Tucker 80)

Roscoe Giffin, a sociologist from Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, led the workshop and was the central proponent of the view that urban Appalachian difference originated in the rural conditions and traditions of non-urban Appalachians (Tucker 70). In reporting his interactions with non-Appalachian Cincinnatians, Giffin recounts anecdotal conversations with citizens about migrants:

When he found I was from Kentucky and after assuring me he wasn’t talking about me, he sailed off on the most vitriolic stream of anti-Kentucky remarks I’ve ever heard. He had been born and reared in the area [Cincinnati], but he had stood all he could of the uncivilized ways of these ex-Kentucky barbarians, and he was moving out to the suburbs the next day. (Quoted in Tucker 71)

Giffin and others acted as scholarly interpreters of rural and urban Appalachian worlds, codifying the stereotypes for the urban public (Tucker 70). In such cities as Detroit, Michigan, Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio, and Chicago, Illinois, Appalachians became the new “urban blight,” hillbillies who threatened the racial and economic balance of Midwestern cities. The perceived difference in the behaviors and bodies of Appalachian
migrants aided the growth of this visual tradition as urban dwellers reacted to signs of Appalachian otherness such as odd speech patterns, foodways, strong family bonds, and competitive labor practices.  

Cartoonist Homer Davenport’s “hill-billies” from 1900, one of the first images to have the “hillbilly” moniker attached to it, is one example of this visual tradition (Harkins 50, see fig. 1). Depicting Collis P. Huntington, a railroad tycoon who controlled Southern Pacific Company railway’s finances and its construction firm, Davenport’s political cartoon presents the viewer with a larger-than-life Huntington towering over small southern “hill-billie” men. Huntington carries a money bag marked by a dollar sign and all of the shorter characters expectantly look up at him. “Illustrating the Troubles of a Good Man in the Far South,” the subtitle of the composition, suggests that Huntington faced resistance from southerners in his efforts to connect railroads across the United States. The image characterizes the relationship between corporate officials and southerners as corrupt and imbalanced, one where the empowered meets the powerless. In the upper left-hand corner of the image is a long necked bird feeding her expectant young.

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8 These signs of difference might also be present in twenty-first century American immigration debates. Appalachian migrant workers were once the labor group responsible for many of the onion and tomato harvests in the Midwest (Obermiller xii). Today, Hispanic migrant workers fill that role and are subjected to similar ridicule and discrimination, like that of Italian and Irish immigrants in the late nineteenth century. Obermiller writes “Both migrant and immigrant groups struggled to obtain housing, employment, and education for their children and encountered various forms of prejudice and discrimination” (xiii). Social signs of otherness are more a function of labor competition between a rooted labor class and a migrant one and less a product of conflict, dissent, or ethnic inferiority.
An allegory for the larger pictorial relationship, this vignette suggests that Huntington is the mother, the money is the food, and little men below are the infant birds waiting to be fed. The relationship between the railroad tycoon and the poor southerners is naturalized as a mother bird feeding her expectant young. Bribery, then, is a natural, if not paternalistic, aspect of “progress” and the “hillbillies” are the naïve chicks who do not question this power dynamic. An alternative reading of this motif may support free-market capitalism; like Huntington, corporate powers left alone will “naturally” act in the best interests of the public. Regardless of the exact meaning—its in-exactness being the point of a political cartoon—the image clearly defines the power of the company and the powerlessness of the southerner.

In order to demonstrate that it is in the nature of virtually any image from visual culture to be both an exaggeration of real life and a reflection of exaggerations in life one need only to look at another essentialized image: the print of Collis Huntington’s portrait that accompanies his biography (see fig. 2). A traditional Western portrait, including its three-quarters pose and idealized features, this print seeks to classify Huntington as an aristocrat through his formal dress and the portrait’s academic art codes. It also lacks

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9 It is important to note that the image above Huntington and the small men, the pelican feeding her young, is a Christian art motif. Symbolic of both the Eucharist blood and sacrifice of life, this motif typologically represents selfless sacrifice and the act of charity (Hall 238).

10 The sitter is in a three-quarters pose where his body is turned at an angle to the picture plane so that he does not fully face the viewer. We are given both his profile and part of the other side of the face. Traditionally, such portrait techniques as this pose and the averted gaze are associated with art for Western aristocracy. These techniques are descendants of new compositional forms that first appeared in art during the Italian Renaissance when portraits emerged as an important art form for wealthy patrons. Further, this print is the product of a process called printmaking where an original drawing is reproduced by passing paper through a printing press over a master plate, which has the original drawing carved or bitten into the plate through manual or chemical processes. The print form was meant to be widely reproduced and as such was an appropriate medium for a portrait of a famous business man who was an important face of the railroad industry in the United States during the nineteenth century.
the political commentary of a caricature or cartoon. Those same portrait characteristics can be detected in a photograph of Huntington during his tenure as President of Southern Pacific Company taken by the American photographer Carleton Watkins (see fig. 3).\(^\text{11}\)

The photograph, like the print, uses a three-quarters pose to create formal distance between the viewer and the subject. The photograph and print are meant to convey particularity, authority, and the idealized visage of a capitalist leader. Such functions, while not social commentary, are certainly class based since they frame the social and economic standing of Huntington. Both print and photograph present us with a formal likeness of the railroad tycoon through his socially indicative attire, formal pose, and turned gaze of the sitter. These shared qualities—revealed as consistencies between a drawn and mechanical process thereby situating both images in a larger system of visual signification—disrupt assumptions viewers have about accuracy as these are social and artistic codes embedded within each image. The photograph is just as “drawn” and authored as the art print. Therefore, even the “real” image of Huntington is the product of artistic interpretation and cultural function. If the “real” image is fake than all images are “fake.” They are only separated by the degree of balance between naturalistic detail

\(^{11}\) Carleton Watkins and Huntington shared the same home town: Oneonta, New York. Interestingly, scholar Martin Berger argues that Watkins was a key photographer in the realization of American westward expansion. Through photographs of soon-to-be Yosemite National Park for the American Geological Survey, Watkins framed the national debate about land and resources through his visual framing of Yosemite. Berger writes: “In the late summer of 1858, the landscape photographer Carleton Watkins (’829-1916) took the stand in a California courtroom to defend the accuracy of his work. Watkins answered questions on his panoramic image of the Guadalupe quicksilver mine, commissioned to help resolve a boundary dispute that the court was adjudicating. Asked to explain his selection of the vantage from which the image was taken, the photographer recounted that he had chosen a location ‘which would give the best view.’ He assured the court that the resulting panorama was accurate” (Berger 42). How interesting is it that a landscape photographer whose work helped federal courts decide land-boundary and mineral rights disputes also produced an official photograph of the railroad tycoon who participated in the connection of the continental United States by building railroads. Both Watkins and Huntington were part of an ideology that promoted the displacement, bullying, and elision of poor and Native Americans.
and ideological function. Read in this way, all images bear traces of social, political, and cultural ideologies.

Figure 2. “Collis P. Huntington.” Print, date and artist unknown. From Encyclopedia of World Biography.
The extent to which each of these examples is ideological varies. Photographic and printed portraits convey both likeness and class. The cartoon’s job, however, is to convey the most essential qualities of its subject and to narratively comment on those qualities. Huntington’s upper-class status is reduced to his power as a railroad man; the
opposite is true for the prints and photograph which amplify his social standing. Further, Huntington’s role is editorially responded to in the cartoon as we look from him to the image of the mother bird over his shoulder. In this case Collis P. Huntington’s authority is justified as natural: rich men give, poor men receive.

Roger Penn Cuff defines political cartoons as: “Published drawings [. . .] designed to produce a humorous effect and to teach a lesson [. . .]. When a cartoonist creates a sketch that is both pictorial and editorial, he communicates an opinion or a conviction. He reveals a preference for, or a judgment against, some person or class or issue or foible” (Cuff 87). This definition suggests that print imagery holds an important function as a means of making sense and meaning out of culture, politics, and public debate (Harkins 71). Davenport seeks to reveal a truth not only about Huntington’s character but also about the Appalachians or southerners he calls “Hill-billie.” The hill-billies are small in scale and sport beards, long hair, wide-brimmed hats, and long coats. Their attire seems slightly larger than scale would dictate, lending these characters to a comparison with “Uncle Collis.” This contrast is important as it demonstrates that the cartoonist held expectations for his audience’s literacy pertaining to Appalachian and southerner visual identities.

Through the visual rhetoric that such images employ—such as the passivity and lack of agency suggested by Davenport’s early “hill-billie” political cartoon—Appalachians are indicted for their low-class status and powerlessness. Over time physical and economic difference between Appalachians and other classes is visualized more derisively. Sharper visual condemnations can be seen in such images as those
produced for Marion Hughes’ 1904 pamphlet *Three Years in Arkansaw* (Dorson 92). A record of the author’s visit to Arkansas, the pamphlet, according to Richard Mercer Dorson, sought to stereotype Ozarkans—inhabitants of parts of Missouri and Arkansas whose distinct dialect and perceived rural identity bear striking resemblance to and were often conflated with Appalachians (Dorson 92; Gale).

Figure 4 “In an Arkansas Kitchen.” 1905. By C. Kesslor. In Marion Hughes’ *Three Years in Arkansaw*. From Anthony Harkins’ *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*. 
Hughes spent “his three years in tiny Ozark settlements,” communicating these experiences through the pamphlet descriptions and illustrations (Dorson 92). Describing one particular image, the folklorist writes that:

Hughes [work] pictured an Ozark family with whom he stopped. The old woman’s hair was covered with goose feathers, and her dress was made of flour sacks. The children went barefoot. The old man wore a coonskin cap, striped shirt, and high-water pants patched with a tobacco sign. The old woman kept a frog in the churn to kick the cream into butter, and then picked hairs from the butter, as easier than straining the milk. (See fig. 4; Dorson 92)

In the illustration published in the pamphlet, we see the flour-sack dress on an unkempt woman. At her feet are a chicken and pig, both of which appear undernourished as they inappropriately hang about the kitchen. Hughes used the presence and absence of details and certain behaviors to create a view of Ozarkers as impoverished, ill-mannered, and unhygienic (fig. 4).

Another image included in Hughes’ pamphlet, drawn by C. Kesslor and titled “Interior of a Typical Arkansaw Home,” depicts a husband and wife sharing their home with their many children and animals (Hughes 35; see fig. 5). The children are playing and eating with animals inside of their home, with one preparing to abuse a nursing dog while another shares a food dish with a dog. Pets and animals for slaughter are mixed, suggesting that they are perhaps interchangeable. Interchangeability and blurring of accepted social boundaries is typical of such images. Indeed, the children mix with the
animals to such a degree that their behavior is no longer discernable as “human” and therefore suggests that these children are behaviorally closer to animals than to humans—an assumption common in images that lampoon cultural characters. Further, the number of children—seven—and the apparently advanced age of the parents all suggest that they have overtaxed their bodies through unchecked reproduction.

Figure 5. “Interior of a Typical Arkansaw Home.” 1905. By C. Kesslor. In Marion Hughes’ *Three Years in Arkansaw*. From Anthony Harkins’ *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*.

The commingling of animals and children metaphorically suggests these children *are* animals. The mother breastfeeds two infants while the father plays the violin in a chair rocked back against a wall. This action/inaction contrast also suggests something about these people: the women are over worked while the men care not for work. Humor is to be found in these images through this difference: no “normal” member of society
would reproduce beyond their biological means, allow children to mingle with animals, and ignore their parental duties.

Such images imply that their poverty is brought on by themselves through their inability to control their reproduction, resistance to modernity, and mistrust of the outside world. Their physiognomic difference is the biological sign of their social deviance. Thus, while American audiences were and are exposed to a variety of images of and about Ozarkans and Appalachians, one coherent identity was forged, circulating in both real and made-up images. These three characteristics—whiteness, degeneracy, and low-class status—were distilled in the American consciousness as one social type: the Appalachian. Indeed, these qualities continue to be important to the way in which social and cultural differences linked to Appalachians are perceived and distilled, even coming to affect mid-century presidential policy.

Figure 6. “Girl Fingerpainting.” 1959. Andre Stern. On display at the University of Kentucky, October 12, 2007.
Andre Stern’s “Girl Fingerpainting” exemplifies this distillation, created six decades after the publication of the above examples. One work in a body of images that served as the face of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, Stern’s photograph shows us a lone little girl in the yard of her Appalachian home (“Photos that Began the War on Poverty”; see fig. 6). “Girl Finger Painting” suggests a kind of poverty recognizable in C. Kesslor’s image “Interior of a Typical Arkansaw Home” with two important exceptions. First, instead of finding humor in the comedic commentary on family life offered by the previous images, Stern’s photograph invites the viewer to feel sympathy for this child’s impoverished state, an emotion cultivated by her aloneness, the absence of toys and presence of junk in the yard, and her youthful innocence demarcated by her tender age, tousled hair, and Sunday-best dress. Second, the photographic medium leaves little doubt as to the “truthfulness” of her life and circumstance. A documentary photographer, Stern’s Appalachian series from 1959-1964 predates the notoriety visited on the region after President Johnson’s 1964 declaration of “War on Poverty” (“The Photos that Began the War on Poverty”). Stern’s simple, stark, and compositionally compelling images fit perfectly with Johnson’s agenda to eradicate poverty in the eastern United States, an economically stifled region that had never fully recovered from the Great Depression. During a short visit to the Tri-State Airport in Wayne County, West Virginia, Johnson highlighted Appalachia’s mythic, old world past: 

This is one of the oldest and proudest regions in our land. [. . .] President [Franklin] Roosevelt talked of the one-third that were ill-clad and ill-fed and ill-housed. In 30 years of effort, we have brought that group down to
one-fifth that are now in the poverty group. Won’t it be a great blessing, won’t it be a great achievement, won’t it be a great satisfaction for you governors and the rest of you here tonight, to pass on to your children, to know that young Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. has been with us all day, trying to do something to move this one-fifth down to where it is one-tenth. (Quoted in Leonard “War on Poverty”)

The Johnson administration sought to, as contemporary political consultant Adam Yarmolinsky suggested, “Color [the War on Poverty] Appalachian if you are going to color it anything at all” (Quoted in “The Photos that Began the War on Poverty”). The icons of the War on Poverty, like “Girl Fingerpainting,” were pivotal in shaping the public’s perception of the president’s policy. These works were rhetorical place-holders for specific notions of race and class. The decades-old image of the poor Appalachian child was used to establish empathy for poor rural whites and thus calm racist concerns that Johnson’s program would benefit Black Americans. The War on Poverty with its “white face” was, according to Yarmolinsky, a war that “was in no sense a help-the-blacks program” (“The Photos that Began the War on Poverty”). Thus, images of poor Appalachians created an “acceptable” demographic for the War on Poverty.

The rhetorical function of Appalachians in such images has changed over time, evolving from lampooned caricatures to “authentic” natives and serving the agendas of various political and social discourses. Just as Arkansan children were depicted in non-normative relationships and settings in Hughes’ pamphlet, Appalachian children were later captured in impoverished settings without familial or material support. Thus the
history of Appalachian images is not a chronologically unfolding one; rather it is a persistent presence in visual culture, a visual public’s propensity for iconic images of rural, poor whites.

Benedikt Feldges characterizes this process of iconic production as one that defies temporal and chronological boundaries; visual codes create meaning in visual and social fields simultaneously by operating discursively, oscillating between realms of truth and fiction, “life” and entertainment by iconicly linking present images with past icons and framing past images with present cultural filters (Feldges 2-3). The image’s mobility mirrors the evolution of the stereotype. In the case of the “hillbilly,” the reduction of diverse regional identities to a distinct and single social type occurred over the course of a hundred and fifty years as images of hillbillies, feuding mountain men from the “holler,” and backwards hill folk evolved into a short hand means of referencing both land and people (Harkins 3-8). As seen in the images by Kesslor and Stern, a child is first a sign of parental neglect and cultural and moral ineptitude and then a heart-wrenching sign of regional poverty. But looking back at Kesslor’s figures, we can see the same signs of poverty in these children, and therefore, develop a similar empathetic stance toward these figures. However, viewers may not develop the same empathy for the adults in Kesslor’s image. Important in this visual trajectory—Feldges’s anti-chronology of time, space, and meaning—is the absence of parents in Stern’s photograph, anchoring figures whose presence invites the satire and moral indictment through inappropriate behaviors and provides viewers with subjects to blame. The visual rhetorical absence of parents in Stern’s photograph suggests not blame but isolation; the
child is alone because of poverty and not parental irresponsibility. Images of Appalachians will often share similar iconic characteristics but function in specific rhetorical ways according to time and place. What is worth remarking on is the continual production, rehashing, and dissemination of these particular iconic, cultural images.

Because of the overabundance of stereotyping imagery, its variety of media forms, and its resulting symbolic social and visual values, images such as these become the most potent force in the production of cultural meaning within mass culture. The image category of “hillbilly-as-other” predates the great migrations of the twentieth century, preparing city dwellers to perceive Appalachian migrants as different from other classes of Americans. Its origins can be found in another social practice: the creation of stereotypes. While I have suggested that ideas about stereotyped peoples precedes images depicting them as stereotypes, the practice of stereotyping itself cannot be communicated in today’s dense material culture without images to particularize and exemplify subjects’ difference. Within the traditions of visual studies and feminist theory, the visual is understood to be a potent arbiter of difference.

The most profitable way to reveal the ideologies behind stereotypes is, as Michelle Wallace argues, to contextualize both the macro and micro systems of culture (Wallace 266). Wallace reveals the ideologies at work in such things as museum displays

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12 Twentieth-century out-migration had another unpredicted consequence: the decimation of educated classes within Appalachia. According to Marvin Pippert: “contemporary Appalachian out-migrants are most likely to be young, better educated, and single. Their primary reason for leaving the area is to find employment. Persons who are least likely to migrate are those who are older, have less education, and have families” (Pippert 342-3). Waves of migration in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s meant that, as the rest of the nation experienced a boom in college graduates because of the G.I. Bill and post-World War II increased prosperity, Appalachia was the only region to exhibit a decline in these cultural resources (343).
by pointing out the synthetic nature of such narratives. Wallace, discussing the short
history of visual material culture, writes:

Presumably, human beings used to live their entire lives almost
completely without [images]. Now they are everywhere and it has almost
become impossible to imagine life without the constant flow of imagery of
one kind or another through the television, through the computer, through
video, film, and advertising billboards and neon signs, through T-Shirts
and articles of clothing, and so forth. This situation did not come into
existence in some organic way. It was constructed, and constructed fairly
recently, over a period of the last two hundred years or so. It was
constructed simultaneously with the rise of certain ideological
assumptions regarding the immutability of certain categories of existence
or identity, namely gender, sexuality, and race, and the relationship among
them. Needless to say, these ideological assumptions work best when we
remain almost entirely unaware of how they function, although self-
consciousness doesn’t automatically negate them either. (266)
Appalachia remains an unquestioned other in American discourse which must be examined within national and international contexts, not merely regional studies, the national ideologies and discourse that set it up as an other remain hidden and difference is left to reside in images and thus, perceptually, the bodies of Appalachians.
CHAPTER TWO: APPALACHIA: HISTORY, MYTH, AND POSTMODERN STUDIES

What is Appalachia?

Appalachia is both a geographic location as well as a population of people who share distinct cultural characteristics. Dialects, foodways, music, art, and family social structures are just a few of these mutual traits identified by historians, ethnographers, and sociologists (Smith 224). In 1965, in response to new public policies designed to improve the living conditions of America’s poorest, the Appalachian Regional Commission was formed. The ARC, as it is referred to, included all of West Virginia and parts of New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi (224). This federal designation and recognition is one moment in a series of historical periods in which Appalachia attracted national attention. Just as the ARC self consciously constructs the boundaries of Appalachia, so too have other identifying factors of the region and its people been imposed by outside observers.

An early example of this is the term “Appalachia.” Appalachia’s name was coined by the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in 1540, who named the southern Blue Ridge mountains for the Apalachee Indians (McNeil 1).13 The name was later modified to “Apalechen” by Gerardus Mercator in 1569 and was used to refer to the mountain chain that stretches from southern New York to Alabama (1). The etymology of the word

13 De Soto, who served as adelantado (captain-general) of Florida for the Emperor Charles V of Spain, colonized Florida and brought it under Spanish military rule (“Hernando de Soto” Encyclopedia of World Biography 510).
metaphorically reveals Appalachia’s history; the region was claimed by colonists who displaced indigenous peoples and misnamed the region for a people whose names they mispronounced. Today, this term extends beyond the geographic delineation of the Appalachian mountain chains to include peripheral areas where populations experience severe poverty, such as in northern Mississippi. This extension also designates the region for governmental committees concerned with transportation, poverty, and American history.

People have been living in the mountains of Appalachia for more than three thousand years. The mountainous region was successively occupied by Native Americans, Iroquois, Cherokee, and Shawnee; English and French colonists; and German and Scottish immigrants. Settled by Native Americans as long ago as 1300 BCE, Appalachia’s population did not begin its shift toward its modern configuration until European settlers began to expand into the back-country of the colonies during the period between 1700 and 1761 CE (Straw 150). This expansion led to conflicts with and displacement of native peoples as Europeans moved westward into the great valleys. The European expansion into the region originated from three primary sites in colonial America: central valley of Pennsylvania, the Piedmont of North Carolina, and western Pennsylvania (150). It was not until 1720 that the Scots-Irish, an ethnic group whose cultural traditions and racial make-up helped form the core of “Appalachian identity,” began to migrate into the region (150).  

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14 Appalachian apologists, like Berea College president William Goodell Frost, have suggested that the rurality, religious beliefs, and isolation of this region combined to place Appalachia outside of the colonial and American slave economy that endured for three and a half centuries (150). However, recent scholarship by John Inscoe and Gordon McKinney suggests otherwise. Inscoe and McKinney, in their book,
Appalachia featured as an important region for both the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) and Civil War (1861-5) as a source of raw materials, land, and labor. Indeed, George Washington, prior to and during the Revolutionary War, surveyed segments of the land that later became the western parts of Virginia and, during the Civil War, West Virginia (Williams 5). President Washington was important to Appalachia in three ways. His work as a surveyor helped distinguish and demarcate the features and boundaries of the region for other powerful colonists. He owned extensive tracts of land in Pennsylvania, Western Virginia, and Ohio (McKnight 343). And his role in the Revolution as a leader who led the opposition against the British initially earned him the trust of the Appalachian frontiersmen who opposed the Proclamation of 1763 issued by the monarchy, which limited settlement west of the mountain chain (Stock 33). Thanks to Washington and others, this prohibition was lifted and with it fled any trust between the mountain folk and new state and federal governments.

Settlers of the Appalachian mountains quickly realized that survival would be harsh in such rugged mountainous terrain. The difficulty of life would become legendary among eastern elites, resulting in perceptions that people who would choose such a lifestyle must be different from those who did not. Catherine McNicol Stocks writes:

> During and after the Revolution, poor farmers, war veterans, and German and Scots-Irish immigrants took their devotion to liberty and suspicion of

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The *Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War*, argue that abolitionist attitudes themselves were late in coming to the southern Appalachians. They write: “Wartime Unionism in western North Carolina [. . .] hit its stride only during the second half of the war and reemerged primarily in response to the exigencies of the war rather than to any deeply held love of the Union or opposition to slavery or slaveholders, sentiments that many people assumed were indigenous to mountain society” (86-7). These sentiments were shaped by politicians and journalists in a post-war south who sought to affect the political affiliations of mountain whites (87).
centralized authority to the trans-Appalachian frontier—those very counties that had been put off limits by the Proclamation of 1763. While life had always been difficult in the backcountry, the terrain of western Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, and Georgia made this country seem even farther back than most. (44)

Stock suggests that the demands of the mountains on its new population created such poverty and material difference from other Americans that visitors to the area were shocked at the condition of life found, which included “hard dirt floors and roofs and filthy blankets on lice-infested beds, when there were beds at all” (44). People’s spirits suffered, too, as other religiously minded visitors reported “that parishioners seemed more interested in fighting and drinking on Sundays” (44). Such a climate created a sense of difference between settlers of the mountains and eastern residents, a sense sewn by the economy of the new government which pitted one group against the other (44).

Susan Sarnoff indicates that this emergent sense of alienation was brought on by the belief that the new government and its Constitution “favored merchants and speculators” over frontier and mountain settlers and farmers (Sarnoff 125). Eastern elites benefited from new government economic policies that favored eastern interests while ignoring calls from Appalachia for policies to support and protect their rights as stakeholders in river trade (the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, for example) and alcohol production (125-26). The model established by wealthy landowners like President Washington was one in which absentee landowners controlled land use and held the right to act as government representatives even when they were not residents of the region
Finally, regional underrepresentation combined with unrest and local poverty conditions to produce active resistance to government policies and laws that harmed Appalachians and benefited people outside of the region.

The best known example of this unrest was the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 (McKnight 343). Beginning with the arrival of a federal tax collector in western Pennsylvania sent to collect unpaid taxes from small-scale whiskey producers—distillers who were mostly Scots-Irish—the Whiskey Rebellion was a combined protestation of taxation and resistance to control by absentee landlords (343). The “whiskey boys,” as protestors became known, were quashed by 30,000 federal troops sent to enforce tax law. The need to exact taxes came not from a fair practice of taxation of all spirits; rather, it came about because of successful lobbying efforts by the molasses importers and rum distillers (Rorabaugh 52). British blockading of molasses and rum imports before the Revolutionary War, combined with the increased immigration of Irish and Scots-Irish who brought with them new corn and rye distilling technologies, made whiskey a serious competitor. It also made Pennsylvania whiskey distillers a ripe tax target for the new government, which was in dire need of revenue (52). As a result the interests of Appalachian whiskey producers mattered not in the push for new funds.

This economic battle benefited another group: absentee landowners. Obtaining large swaths of land through speculation before and during the Revolutionary War, absentee landowners after the war found themselves in control of commodities that would become important to a fledgling government. Through land ownership, they could

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15 Rum made up two-thirds of all alcohol produced while whiskey made up one-third at this time (Rorabaugh 52).
control grain and alcohol production as well as the markets for both. This placed these commodities in the control of absentee landowners and thus gave them control of the real currency of the Appalachian mountains: whiskey (52). W. J. Rorabaugh writes that “some farmer distillers lacked cash, and whiskey often circulated as an item of barter on the frontier, where it was traded at general stores. A barrel of whiskey was a convenient way to keep assets in easily saleable liquid form” (52). When controlling whiskey, the government and landowners also controlled micro-economies.

Appalachian historian Barbara Rasmussen argues that it was this kind of land speculation that placed large swaths of land under the control of political leaders of the nineteenth century, a period of great industrial development in the mountains. From the beginning, both imperial and American governments were “carefully structured to protect the interests of those who owned vast lands, not the independent mountain farmers” (Rasmussen 2). This political structure endured into the twentieth century. Rasmussen writes: “During the Gilded Age, population increased rapidly. Farmers and their descendants were outnumbered, as manufacturers brought tens of thousands of desperate immigrant workers to the Appalachian Mountains for numerous industrial jobs” (2).

Immigrants were not the only laborers imported into the region. Slaves were also brought in to work in salt mines in the Kanawha River Valley of then Virginia (Inscoe 4). Historian John Inscoe indicates that:

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16 These were not the first African slaves to live in Appalachia. Wagner and Obermiller write that slavery was practiced throughout all of Appalachia (Wagner and Obermiller 5). The first blacks “accompanied the earliest French and Spanish explorers into the region as both freedmen and as slaves. William Turner believes that blacks in Appalachia were some of ‘America’s first blacks—appearing almost a century before the landing at Jamestown’” (5).
From the War of 1812, Kanawha manufacturers, not having sufficient white labor available, relied primarily on slaves for their workforce. The phenomenal growth of the salt industry and its economic opportunities attracted slave owners as furnace proprietors and lessors of chattels. The resultant slave society that emerged there was unusual in the antebellum South: Bondsmen located in the Appalachian Mountains produced an extractive commodity for interstate commerce. (Inscoe 50)

At first a modest emergent industry in Appalachia, the Kanawha River Valley salt mine industry by 1808 had become one of the largest producers of its kind in the country. This industry was successful because companies leased slave labor from the south to work in the mines, thus enabling them to extract the highest yield of productivity from their “leased property” for the least amount of investment capital (4). This economic model would affect Appalachian laborers for the next century.

The three groups of laborers in Appalachia—mountain farmers and white natives, European immigrants, and leased slaves—ensured that the labor force in Central Appalachia (southwestern Pennsylvania, West Virginia, western Virginia, eastern Kentucky, and eastern Tennessee) lacked control over its own labor economy, was competitive, and culturally and linguistically different, enough so that these groups would not cohere (Wagner and Obermiller 10). This situation would be codified as class difference by the end of the nineteenth century.

While pre and post-Revolutionary War labor practices would foment Appalachia’s class system as one based on pluralism and colonialism, it was the Civil
War that brought about the conditions that permanently delineated the boundaries of Appalachia’s cultural difference from the rest of America. Richard Straw suggests that the Civil War and the booming industrial economy of the second half of the nineteenth century were responsible for highlighting Appalachia’s natural assets and distinctive culture for the consumption and observance of the rest of the country. He writes:

As the result of their Civil War experiences, a great many northerners came into contact with the southern mountains, and many were surprised by what they found. Great mineral and timber wealth was coupled with a romantic beauty, just at a time when untamed urban growth, foreign immigration, and technological developments were beginning to unfalteringly change northern urban society. Capitalists responded to the call of profits, but writers, missionary workers, and teachers accompanied industrialists into the mountains, and their work there was in some ways as substantial and the effects as long lasting as those of their entrepreneurial counterparts. (Straw 151)

Rich natural resources in Appalachia—coal, natural gas, and water—were pointed out to Union armies and northern capitalists, making Appalachia an attractive site for industrial investment and expansion following the Civil War. However, the war had also discouraged already-present industries from remaining during the conflict, sending industrial headquarters out of the region to locate north of the battle lines. The feudalist, absentee landlord economy that emerged in pre-Revolutionary America was reestablished (Straw 152). While companies extracted resources and produced goods in the region,
company ownership and profits remained outside of the region’s geography and economy.

Within this framework, companies little understood the needs and traditions of their workers. Since Appalachia was a primary battlefield of the Civil War, it, along with the South, was in need of social and economic resuscitation. Instead, many capitalists seized the opportunity to invest in and develop new industrial factories like textile mills and coal mines. Barbara Rasmussen describes it:

After the Civil War, absentees [company and land owners] and speculators began to develop their lands. Their power and influence left local inhabitants helpless to defend themselves against the rapid increase of absentee-led extractive industries in the 1880s. [. . .] By 1880 corrupt control of political institutions by industrial leaders ensured their continued tenure in office and silenced their critics. (6)

As a consequence the disparity in power distribution was further codified through the corrupt political influence of wealthy capitalists (like Collis P. Huntington, see figs. 1, 2, and 3).

This opportunity for investment also brought knowledge of Appalachian ways to urban communities outside of the area, making it a popular destination for missionary and social workers. This dissemination of knowledge about Appalachian “difference” served the agendas of wealthy capitalists. Aid workers and missionaries knew little of Appalachian cultures and were quick to judge them against the new urban society of the
Gilded Age (152). Failing to identify and remedy economic and social disparities caused by the war and uneven industrial development following the war, outsiders were quick to blame mountain peoples for their plight. Straw writes:

The dominant stereotype of Appalachia that was formed during this era of industrial development was ironically an image of a society that still held within it much of its late-eighteenth century-frontier heritage. Mountain people were described as noble and savage, independent and proud, rugged, and violent, but also as dirty and uneducated, yet crafty and practical. They drank too much and were lazy, but managed to produce excessively large families. (Straw 151)

Industrialization, urban expansion, and Romantic ideals constituted a nineteenth-century sense of fated modernity and progress. Those who did not keep up with these international sensibilities were considered inconsequential and relegated to a past deemed obsolete.

Urban northerners brought with them to Appalachia a new awareness of class distinction, labor, and economy, causing mountain peoples’ difference to be cast in sharp relief against this new modern world. These distinctions developed into a complex

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17 The Gilded Age (1866-1900) was a period of prosperity and rapid industrial, technological, and communicational development in the United States during the latter half of the nineteenth century. During this period, white Americans rejected the Civil War and Reconstruction promises of racial equality. Thus the reality that followed was one in which racism transitioned from its overt capitalist form, slavery, to more covert and violent institutional forms (Vandecreek 318).

18 Romanticism, which manifested as Transcendentalism in the United States, was an international movement in Western cultures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In art, it involved the reevaluation of nature as both a real subject and as a means of understanding and defending the presence of God (Vaughn). In philosophy, Romanticism was a reaction to Enlightenment, whose rationalist ideals were invested in the “belief in the perfectibility of man on logical principles.” These ideals were challenged by late eighteenth century French and American revolutions (Vaughn). Therefore romantics believed that rationality could not out-plan fate.
system of identity and perceived difference that persists in contemporary perceptions of
the region. Because of the already-present internal colonial structure and the powerful
Romantic rhetoric of promise, progress, and idealism, these social distinctions may have
been inevitable conclusions for observers of Appalachia.

The Myth of Appalachia

According to Ronald L. Lewis, the “Appalachian Myth” is the nation’s perception
of Appalachia as a backwards culture that residually continued the frontiersmen-
mentality of the eighteenth century (Lewis 38). This belief “in a distinct, regionwide
Appalachian subculture resistant to economic development was shaped by a large body of
literature that accepted uncritically a fictional Appalachia invented by local color writers
of the late nineteenth century” (38). Writings about Appalachia in this vein fit in with the
internal colonial economic and labor structures and preconceived notions of
“Appalachian-ness” first remarked upon by missionaries during the Civil War.

Traditional definitions of the region establish Appalachia as a place of isolation
and long term poverty. Such perspectives on the region have their roots in a literary
tradition that depicts Appalachians as “distinct,” a body of work that has undergone
scrutiny in the last three decades. Perhaps the most important collection of primary
sources is W. K. McNeil’s anthology Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture,
first published in 1989. Included among some twenty primary sources on Appalachian
culture from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are essays and letters written by
Harper’s Magazine and Lippincott’s Magazine contributor Will Wallace Harney, Berea
College President William Goodell Frost, and Kentucky novelist John Fox, Jr. All three
authors’ works offer insight into the “nature” of Appalachia as told through descriptions of the people, their isolation, and their material culture. All three authors worked also to create specific political and cultural views about Appalachia.

Figure 7. Portrait of William Goodell Frost. Late 1880s.
The characterization of the region as traditionally poor and folkish can be traced to identificatory campaigns by William Goodell Frost, president of Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, from 1892 to 1920 (fig 7). Frost offered insights into the “spirit” of the Appalachian in his 1899 romanticization of the isolated Appalachian for the benefit of a New England audience—one upon which he depended and was courting for enrollment in his college. Characterizing Appalachian backwardness as a kind of purity that evolved because of the isolation of its peoples, Frost writes: “In examining social life, and its variations in the mountains, we discover a new kind of isolation, a higher potency of loneliness. The people are not only isolated from the great centres and thoroughfares of the world, but also isolated from one another” (Frost 100).

Frost was also largely responsible for garnering the national attention that led to the development of Appalachia’s touristic arts economies and attracting northern white students to Berea College, a school known today for its unique arts education curriculum. Most powerfully, however, was Frost’s theological campaign to designate white Appalachians as “racially and spiritually pure” (Frost 91-2). In “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains” he writes:

In this vast and inland and upland realm may be found a contemporary survival of that pioneer life which has been such a striking feature in American history [. . .] The feeling of toleration and justification of

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19 Berea was founded as the first interracial and coeducational college in the American South in 1855. Its most distinctive characteristic is that it does not charge its students tuition, instead offering education opportunities to Appalachian students with strong academic credentials. Its abolitionist roots and missionary origins make it a distinctly Appalachian organization, a product of both Christian and Romantic reformatory efforts within the Appalachian South of the nineteenth century (History of Berea College).
slavery, with all the subtleties of state rights and “South against North,”
which grew up after the Revolution did not penetrate the mountains. The
result was that when the civil war [sic] came there was a great surprise for
both the North and the South. Appalachian America clave to the old flag.

(Frost 91 and 99)

Frost’s declaration that Appalachians were unsullied by slavery and were akin to the
“illiterate patriarchs of the Bible” legitimized beliefs about Appalachians formed outside
of the region (101). The demographic shift sought by the college would pull it into
debates on race and education at the state level as his argument of a “pure” Appalachia
pulled the college away from its abolitionist roots. Weakened by the college’s campaign
to recruit northern whites, segregation was later imposed on the school by the Kentucky
state legislature in the early twentieth century (Inscoe 3). The rhetoric and vision that
Frost employed to attract northerners evolved into what scholars refer to as the
“Appalachian Myth,” a myth of identity that characterizes the region’s occupants as
secluded and pure descendants of Scots-Irish origin who lived in innocent isolation apart
from the slave economy.

The turn of the twentieth century should be considered as a watershed moment
since it as at this time that these writers emerged to describe Appalachia. William
Wallace Harney, using the descriptive language of an un-invested observer, remarks on
both the physiognomy of nature and humans in the region, alternately judging and offing
empathy for the people he encounters (Harney 48). Harney writes:
We passed a poor man with five little children—the eldest ten or twelve, the youngest four or five—their little stock on a small donkey, footing their way over the hills across Tennessee into Georgia. It was so pitiful to see the poor little babes-in-the-wood on that forlorn journey; and yet they were so brave, and the poor fellow cheered them and praised them, as well he might. (48)

Using the language of both tourist and voyeur, Harney textually paints for the magazine-reading public a picture of a physiognomically poor Appalachia. Rather than heroize Appalachians for not participating in slavery, Harney romanticizes their poverty for an empathetic public who had come to expect such images of the region, thus carrying on the rhetoric of post-Civil War missionary workers.

John Fox Jr, in his essay called “The Southern Mountaineer” first printed in 1901 in *Scribner’s Magazine*, like Harney sketched out the material and cultural character of Appalachians for his readers (Fox 123). Fox writes:

So, in the log cabin of the Southern mountaineer, in his household furnishings, in his homespun, his linsey and, occasionally, in his hunting shirt, his coon-skin cap and moccasins one may summon up the garb and life of the pioneer; in his religion, his politics, his moral code, his folk songs and his superstitions one may bridge the waters back to the old country, and through his speech one may even touch the remote past of Chaucer. For to-day he is a distinct remnant of Colonial times—a distinct relic of an Anglo-Saxon past. (123)
The mountaineer was a creature of the earth, a romantic fantasy of white-man in his primitive state. For Harney, he was the tragic figure of isolation and poverty. For Frost, he was the heroic mountain man who remained untouched by the filth of slavery. And for Fox, he was the anecdotal character who lived anachronistically as a pioneer, a backward contemporary of inventions such as the telegram, telephone, and automobile.

This rhetorical fantasy of poverty and heroicism can be found in other texts from the early twentieth century. Horace Kephart, in his 1914 book *Our Southern Highlanders*, begins chapter three by describing his Appalachia as a kind of Eden:

> For a long time my chief interest was not in human neighbors, but in the mountains themselves—in that mysterious beckoning hinterland which rose right back of my chimney and spread upward, outward, almost to three cardinal points of the compass, mile after mile, hour after hour of lusty climbing—an Eden still unpeopled and unspoiled. (Kephart 50 )

A “report” of his experiences in the Appalachian mountains, Kephart marks an important change in the myth of Appalachia as he extends his reductive description of the people to the land itself; the awesomeness of mountain beauty correlates with the singularity of mountain peoples.

As all of these texts make clear, the myth of Appalachia did not originate in the minds of yellow journalists or sweet imaginings of crusader Protestant missionaries; it was merely reproduced by these people. Rather, the myth emerged as a fantasy of travelers, reporters, and intellectuals prepared by capitalism to detect backwardness,
poverty, and signs of isolation in the people in Appalachia. Therefore, the myth has simultaneous origins, occurring from both within and without the region.

The effects of such a view about Appalachia—promulgated by early American capitalists and later by people such as President Frost, Fox, and Harney—were far-reaching. Not only was the perception of Appalachia permanently shaped by such attitudes but Appalachians themselves were mistreated based on such perceptions. This mindset was not simply the product of a few people; it was also a by-product of identity formation in the nineteenth century. In order to understand Appalachia, one must also understand the structures, sources, and effects of identity.
CHAPTER THREE: THE CODIFIED MYTH

William Goodell Frost’s myth that the region is comprised of isolated whites untouched by slavery linked with existing fears about rural peoples. The urban public, with its Romantic views of a fearsome natural world, conflated mountain folk with the harshness of rural life. These two views: one that Appalachians were pure and two that they were to be feared because they were of nature, made the myth of Appalachia self-perpetuating. The ways in which Frost’s myth was integrated with later accounts is also important as writers repeatedly gravitated toward the same idealized and caricatured traits.

At the heart of the belief is that the land was settled by poor Protestant Scots-Irish immigrants who moved to the mountains to work in the mines, play old country instruments, and hide from the modern world. While it is true that Pennsylvania Scots-Irish were the distillers primarily targeted by the federal government’s response to the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794, all Appalachians did not share this identity. Rather, notoriety of such incidents became synecdoches for all mountain dwellers.

Archaeologist Audrey Horning, in her 2002 article “Myth, Migration, and Material Culture: Archaeology and the Ulster Influence on Appalachia” disproves the long-held belief that Appalachians are predominantly Scots-Irish descendents:

Although the southern mountains, like the rest of the American land, were settled by a variety of peoples from a variety of nations, the Ulster heritage remains paramount in the myth and ethos of the region. That the 18th-century Scotch-Irish migration had an indelible impact upon the nature of
the mountainous south is indisputable. That the Ulster migration
continues to receive top billing in the cultural attribution battles of
southern Appalachia is testament to the power of legend and the power of
maintained, adopted, and created identities. (Horning 129)

Horning suggests that, in spite of the wealth of evidence to the contrary, the myth of a
Scots-Irish Appalachia persists partly because of the disconnect between general and
specific knowledges produced by the field of archaeology. Therefore, in addition to
economic imbalances and social prejudice, intellectual structures perpetuate the myth
through disciplinary bias and the use of insufficient evidence as the bases for theories
about region-wide ethnicities and behaviors. This suggests that archaeologists have been
too ready to believe in essential difference and preventing them from expanding their
archaeological samples. Through generalizing information about the region in studies of
non-Appalachian excavations and by producing theories about the region through studies
of just a few sites, difference in Appalachian lives and cultures has been blended together
by archaeologists into a rustic, archaic whiteness, thus lending social scientific credence
to President Frost’s anecdotal claims. This credence was instigated by social science, but
simultaneously imaged and verified by textual and visual cultures.

The medium in which some of the most caricaturing occurs is in the nineteenth-
century magazine, a crossroads of both visual arts and literature. Many of the early
writers who recounted Appalachia for the nation published in magazines. For example,
William Wallace Harney not only published for Lippincott Magazine, but also for
Harper’s Magazine. Harper’s Magazine, first published in 1850, printed articles and
literary and visual art works by renowned writers and artists. Contemporaries of Harney, such as the American realist artists Winslow Homer and Frederic Remington, were published by the magazine. Therefore, art work coexisted with literature that recounted the nature of Appalachia in fiction for the young American nation (“History of Harper’s”). This blending of arts and journalism guaranteed the blending of the subjective and informative, eliding difference between opinion and reportage.

One can see the ideological investment of magazine contributors in presenting a particular view of nineteenth-century America when looking at works by artists such as Frederic Remington. Renowned for his depictions of the American frontier, Remington embarked on his art career as an illustrator for Harper’s Weekly (as the magazine was then known) (Pohl 238). Noted by art historian Frances K. Pohl for his dichotomous depictions of the “virulent cowboy” and “savage Indian,” Remington contributed to the insatiable American appetite for images of the West (see fig. 8; Pohl 238). The early twentieth-century magazine’s juxtaposition of “art,” “real images,” and literature reveals the contingent nature of image and text. In this relationship images illustrate and justify textual assertions. This is one site in which the construction of myths and identities can be seen to occur. In this case, myths of the West were revealed through pictures and stories about conflict between European Americans and Native Americans. The visual depictions of these conflicts powerfully wove “cowboy” and “Indian” character types
into the American psyche through both deceptive simplification of their scenes of the Plains and accompanying texts that “verified” the truth of such images.  


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Like writers about Appalachia who wrote about their travels through the region for an audience back home, Remington based his depictions of subjects on memories of short trips to the American West (Foxley). Remington himself even admitted that his work was based more on emotional impressions and intentions than on any “real” image. In speaking of his proclivity for painting horses, he said: “I have always wanted to be able to paint running horses so you could feel the details instead of seeing them’” (quoted in Foxley). In figure 8, we can see Remington’s emotive expression of a horse in action, with its rider clinging to the horse during a wild ride. But the form of the rider and mount also suggest something about place; the steep incline that should be forcing the horseman from his mount instead emphasizes his environmental roots: the mountains. What we are given is both a memory picture and an essentialized portrait of man-as-mountain.

Remington’s many depictions of horses and riders included frontiersmen, cowboys, Native Americans, and here, a mountain man. Like President Frost before him, Remington aligns the mountaineer with a heroic icon. Thus, the mountain man is aligned with the stalwart cowboy depicted in such images by Remington as On the Southern Plains (see fig. 9; Foxley).

Alongside images of the backward mountaineer/hillbilly, Remington’s works illustrated for America an already disappearing American West, edged out by the civilizing effects of the train, communication, urbanization, and the new era of manufacturing in American culture. Harper’s Weekly, then, was a periodical that sponsored and generated myths about the not-yet distant American past, creating nostalgia for the West on the one hand and encouraging forward thinking on the other
through its depictions of heroic Americans and its literary accounts of mountain people. *Harper’s* history demonstrates the coexistence and codependence of seemingly disparate traditions, literature and the visual arts, which were important in deploying these ideological myths about America in popular culture.


The tendency to positively or negatively frame subjects in art and writing in the late nineteenth century can be noted in writings about Appalachia already discussed. Most writers point out the essential qualities of their subjects and in the next breath romanticize their subjects’ isolation or use their character to suggest exactly where the blame should lie for their economic condition. For example, Harney attributes impoverished conditions to his subject’s racial identity. While a poor and dirty white mountain man in writings of the time might be a nostalgic remnant of the American
Revolutionary past, a poor black mountain woman is poor because she is black. In his account of the Appalachians that appeared in *Lippencott’s Magazine* in 1887, he wrote of his encounter with an African American woman:

Another miserable picture was at the white cottage near our camp. The lawn showed evidences of an old taste in rare flowers and vines, now choked with weeds. I knocked, and a slovenly negress opened the door and revealed the sordid interior—an unspread bed; a foul table, sickly with the smell of half-eaten food and unwashed dishes; the central figure a poor helpless man sitting on a stool. I asked the negress for her master: she answered rudely that she had no master, and would have slammed the door in my face. Why tell the story of a life surrounded by taste and womanly adornments, followed by a childless, wifeless old age? The poor, wizened creature was rotting in life on that low stool among his former dependents, their support and scorn. The Emancipation Proclamation did not reach him. But one power could break his bonds and restore the fallen son and the buried wife—the great liberator, Death. (Harney 48)

Harney, like Fox and Kephart, saw poverty as a sign of laziness and uncivilized nature rather than an indication of economic disparities experienced by African and Appalachian Americans. By the 1940s, this view of African American Appalachians would also be applied to mountain whites. Thus, characteristics of black Appalachians merged the evolving myth of Appalachia with racial categories of the early twentieth century. As time would unfold this racial and class designation would be extended to white
Appalachians as “the Appalachian,” like African and Native Americans, were defined in visual culture in relation to an emerging potent brand of white American identity. This identity would be the counterpoint of images of Appalachia produced throughout the twentieth century.

*Appalachian Studies on the Myth of Appalachia*

Over the past few decades, the scholarly literature on visual imagery and texts that “represent” Appalachian cultures and identities has done much to further our understanding of how and why stereotypes of Appalachians exist and circulate. These images studies and histories of American popular culture also address the question of “why” because the emergence and popularity of images occurs simultaneously with coherent negative stereotypes.

Recent scholarly works contribute to a visual history of Appalachia, offering a survey perspective that affords a more cogent and explanatory view of national perceptions of the region. Some of the research addresses the myth’s roots and deployment in national discourses, focusing primarily on the musical and literary origins of Appalachian identities. An example of this kind of musical essentialism comes from a 1948 musicologist’s reference to “hillbilly” sounds in American music. Musicologist Wilfried Mellers writes:

> But even at its most concentrated and subtly personal, the contract with the ‘popular’ source is not entirely lost. A melodic line and a texture such as this from the transitional section to the piano Sonata’s slow movement […] is a rarefied distillation of the essence of the hillbilly. But it has
become the vehicle for a loneliness typical not only of the prairie but to some degree of any industrial civilization.” (Mellers 19)

As this excerpt suggests, the myth of Appalachia extends beyond defining the region; it also comes to define the ethnic and emotional qualities of Appalachian music.

Literature studies trace and assess the history of Appalachian identity as written by local color writers, researched by social scientists, narrativized by authors, and sung by musicians for the record and music industry; a most recent example is Jeff Biggers’ book *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America,* which retells the history of Appalachians as a story of the American frontier. Biggers’ Appalachian-centered history of American culture argues for recognition of the diversity and cultural/intellectual heroism of Appalachians in American history, demanding that it be “embraced for its historic role as a vanguard region in the United States” (Biggers xi). In outlining the negative treatment of Appalachians in American history, he outlines four archetypes:

Four paradoxical images have enjoyed incredible staying power: *pristine Appalachia,* the unspoiled mountains and hills along the Appalachian Trail, notwithstanding centuries of warfare, the wholesale destruction of virgin forests by the timber industry, and the continual bane of strip mining; *backwater Appalachia,* home of the “strange land and peculiar people” in thousands of stories, novels, radio and TV programs and films, even though he region has produced some of the most important writers, artists, scientists, and politicians in the country; *Anglo-Saxon Appalachia,*
once defined by *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* as a mountain region of “white natives,” despite its role as a crossroads of indigenous cultures and vast immigrant and African American migrations for centuries; and *pitiful Appalachia*, the poster region of welfare and privation, the haggard faces greeting Charles Kuralt on *CBS News* on Christmas 1964 [. . .]. (xii-xiii)

Pristine Appalachia, Backwater Appalachia, Anglo-Saxon Appalachia, and Pitiful Appalachia are not only rhetorical images of Appalachia but are also four categories of Appalachian identity within images about Appalachia. Biggers’ retelling of American history as an Appalachian-centered story fails to problematize the process of othering that created these categories and instead focuses on the heroic importance of these mountain peoples. Going so far as to claim that we are all Appalachians, Biggers writes:

> Southern Appalachians have roamed to all ends of the United States and the rest of the world, spreading their traditions and changing the way we live. Beyond their contributions to indigenous struggles—the American Revolution; the abolitionist, labor, and civil rights movements; and literary and musical innovations—they have literally peopled the nation. I dare say that if older American families took the time to do a little genealogy, they’d find an Appalachian or two in the woodpile. (Biggers 195-6)

While attempting to connect Appalachia to the rest of the civilized West, Biggers himself must engage in stereotyping. First, “Southern Appalachians have roamed” disclaims Appalachian isolation, arguing that these people do leave the mountains
matter in an international context. Second, Appalachians “spreading their traditions and changing the way we live” and “literally peopled the nation” are reflective inversions of the fear of hyper-fecundity of Appalachians and the corrupting power of degenerate whiteness on normative whites. Finally, Biggers’ final reference to Appalachians existing in everyone’s genealogical woodpile is a folksy reference to mountain life. Unfortunately, it could also be suggestive of the fear of mountain whites in a family tree as snakes are often found hiding at the bottom of a woodpile.

Like essentialist feminists of the mid twentieth century, Biggers chiasmically inverts the negatives associated with Appalachia into positive and heroic attributes, ones that America could not have survived without. And like the musicologist who hears “hillbilly sounds” in music, such a positive reading of Appalachian contributions to American history continues many of the characteristics of the early myth of Appalachia: a heroic untouched mountain people important to the nation’s formation because of their unique essentially Appalachian identity. Biggers’ work is yet another manifestation of President Frost’s myth of heraldic mountain peoples.21

Not everyone in the field re-inscribes an essentialist Appalachian identity. Scholars in the 1970s, such as Henry Schapiro, began to question these taken-for-granted visual and textual truths, suggesting that Appalachia first emerged as a distinct locale in the American imagination at the end of the nineteenth century through the texts of local

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21 Like Biggers’ work, *The Appalachians: America’s First and Last Frontier* edited by Mari-Lynn Evans, Holly George-Warren, and Robert Santelli, offers an interdisciplinary introduction to Appalachian history with brief essays on the landscape, cultural diversity, and ancestral/racial cross-fertilization in music and literature. These and other histories do much to counter the many myths about Appalachia—its isolation, degeneracy, whiteness—yet they do not provide an understanding of why America’s majority culture is so persistent in its reduction of regional identity to a set of damaging and untrue characteristics.
color writers and in the illustrations of national magazines as tropes of entertainment and as a means of coalescing a national sense of “American-ness” (Schapiro 86). In his book *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (1978), Schapiro explains that these stereotypes emerge because of global ethnic politics and national discourses about “modernity” and “progress”:

> It was thus almost inevitable that the language and concepts of “social Darwinism” and popular genetic theory should be utilized in discussions of the mountaineers defined as a discrete group within the American population, and that the contemporary fascination with the ethnic or racial distinctions should play a role in the redefinition of the mountaineers as distinct people. By the 1890s in any case, consideration of the characteristics of the mountain population, as distinct from the characteristics of mountain life, had become an essential element in discussions of Appalachian otherness, and seemed to provide an effective mode of explaining the fact of Appalachian otherness. (Schapiro 86)

David C. Hsiung agrees with Schapiro’s position, suggesting that “[b]y the turn of the twentieth century, they came to explain it by defining and accepting Appalachia as a non-American place. . .[a] type of generalization [that] must take place for stereotypes to arise” (104). Thus late twentieth-century scholars have questioned the “essential-ness” of Appalachian identity, recognizing the power external forces exerted in shaping and identifying Appalachian difference.
Rodger Cunningham argues in his 2003 essay “Appalachian Studies among the Posts,” published in the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, that Schapiro failed in his critique in one important way; like many constructionist theorists of the ‘70s and ‘80s who argued against essentialism in favor of the constructed and non-material “reality” of identity, Schapiro failed to account for practical experiences that prove that identity has currency in the real world regardless of the means through which identity comes into being. Schapiro, according to Cunningham in his critique of both his work and his behavior in regards to the Appalachian studies community, “acted, in fact, as if there were indeed literally no region to discuss and no group to defend” (Cunningham 379).

Schapiro writes:

> It was only in the context of such new notions about the nature of America, however, that the southern mountains and mountaineers became Appalachia, a “strange land and peculiar people” whose existence engaged the attention of Americans after 1870 as it does again in the 1970s. It was only in the context of such new notions about America, that is, that what had earlier seemed normal or at least explicable came after 1870 to seem nonnormal and inexplicable. And it is only in the context of other new notions about the nature of America and American civilization that Appalachia in our own time will ever cease to seem an “other” America.

(Schapiro xi)

Schapiro argued that Appalachia was effectively a product of change and not the result of a “real” or tangibly different group of people. The nation, he argued, was the entity
responsible for synthesizing *Appalachian-ness* as something distinct (Schapiro 86). This national consciousness, experiencing a kind of climate change in its identity at the turn of the twentieth century, projected the byproducts of its identity formation onto Appalachians.

Primary sources verify this sensibility identified by Appalachian studies scholars. McNeil’s essays vividly illustrate the *Zeitgeist of othering* in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America.

Both books and articles have combined to fix in the popular mind an image of Appalachia as a unique region with its own distinctive traditions. Essays on the subject began around the time of the Civil War, and books specifically addressing the matter first appeared in the early twentieth century. If one takes into account novels and short stories about Appalachia, then the date can be set back at least twenty years, when Mary Noailles Murfee and others began producing their fictional accounts of mountain life. (McNeil 17)

Literature included in the anthology—ranging from published articles to private diaries of visitors to and observers of Appalachia and including the works of President Frost and William Wallace Harney—had been viewed by traditional folklorists as evidence of Appalachian ethnic difference rather than tools in the construction of an internally colonial region (17-18). McNeil’s primary source reader offers a wonderfully revealing glimpse at how post-bellum America viewed Appalachia, a response largely colored by the nation’s cognitively dissonant efforts to justify the poverty and difference wrought by
the war and the carpet-baggers and industrial tycoons who took advantage of Appalachia’s vulnerabilities.

Darlene Wilson’s essay “The Felicitous Convergence of Mythmaking and Capital Accumulation: John Fox Jr. and the Formation of An(Other) Almost-White American Underclass” also examines late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature’s contributions to myths about Appalachians. Focusing on Kentucky local-color writer John Fox Jr.’s self proclaimed status as literary cultural interpreter of Appalachia, Wilson situates Fox as an important link in a chain of misconceptions and stereotypes about Appalachians (Wilson 4-8). Fox’s writing, especially his two short novels *Trail of Lonesome Pine* (1901) and *Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* (1903), illustrates a bleak and sorrowful picture of Appalachia for the American public which, according to Wilson, made Appalachia a region of interest for progressive reformers at the turn of the twentieth century. Wilson writes:

In broad terms, then, the life and works of John Fox Jr. may best illustrate the felicitous convergence of mythmaking and capital accumulation. Influenced by self-identification with, in his terms, a Boston-to-Bluegrass corporate and social “aristocracy,” he helped to create and/or perpetuate myths of Appalachian “otherness” for two purposes that can be traced within his texts and journals: 1) to facilitate corporate and class hegemony by marginalizing indigenous peoples and existing socio-cultural structures, and 2) to undermine local resistance to the “new order” and to absentee
control by implementing land and political policies that encouraged depopulation. (6)

Wilson, like others, merges humanities criticism with sociological theory in order to develop an interdisciplinary and complete view of how social and cultural structures are linked to economic and social pressures external to the Appalachian region. The turn of the twentieth century, as the demand for electricity matured and the industrialization of urban centers in America was nearly complete, was an intensely complex moment of cultural identity formation, most of which was linked to class and political power relations. These formations relied on existing power structures already existing in Appalachia, like those absentee capital investors and landowners of the Revolutionary and Civil War periods. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the signs of difference attributed through such power disparity were clarified by a nation solidifying its own identity. The history of power relations between Appalachian and national economies is not only relevant to a study of Appalachian difference, it is the cause of it. Therefore any study of Appalachian culture is actually a study of national structures of culture and power.

While McNeil’s anthology and Wilson’s essay are critical in understanding the process through which the myth of Appalachia evolved into particular Appalachian identities, the rest of Appalachian scholars’ works on culture and identity are in actuality critiques of the stereotyped image of Appalachians, the visual manifestation of these “essential differences.” These critiques occur from within the region as a means of outlining the greater cultural history of Appalachia in America. Further, these critiques
from the interior are made more potent in that they are produced by Appalachian scholars of Appalachian studies, arguably the only group of people both able to and invested enough in Appalachia to question this history. In order to uncover the sites and boundaries of these differences, scholars chart the material evidence of difference.

Scholars of other regions have found this material approach to Appalachian history relevant in other fields. Larry J. Griffin and Ashley B. Thompson, scholars of Southern studies, find six important methods in Appalachian studies that are relevant to Southern and other regional studies: the emphasis on the mythic and socially constructed nature of regions and people; the forging of internal ethnicities in the mountains and lowlands as the result of collective experiences, especially of difference; scholars’ interdisciplinary attention to the mutual importance of economic and social problems; the scholarly positions that either Appalachians and Southerners did or did not affect a national conception of “self”; the study of the pervasive attitude that Southern and Appalachian peoples’ were inherently different (read also as deviant) in the eyes of the nation; and postmodern strategies to deconstruct the “truth” of Appalachian and Southern stereotypes (Griffin and Thompson 297-98). In spite of important postmodern strategies pioneered in Appalachian studies, the relativity of the strategy to the region is still site-specific. Griffin and Thompson write:

Whatever the exact social mechanism of identity imposition and formation, certainly both Southern and Appalachian Studies have agonized over the roots, meaning, degree of separateness, and cohesion of the collective identities of the “folk” that they study. But Appalachian
Studies has, from its inception, seemed to work with, and play off of, a past more mutable, more elastic, less crystallized and less damned in the collective American memory than that most commonly associated with “the South,” and so has greater scope for re-inventing Southern highland identity. [...] Appalachian Studies has been able to do for much of its “folk” what Southern Studies is unable to do either cognitively or morally for white Southerners, namely to elicit and activate a form of revisionist scholarship empowered to re-present the past, and memory of the past, so thoroughly as to re-present the region’s “white folk” as well, to redefine the very meaning of regional identity. (Griffin and Thompson 305)

This process of deconstruction, representation, and fragmentation of monolithic archetypes is not the product of a single scholar or field. Perhaps the most important nature of Appalachian studies in translating scholarship, social critique, and the (re)writing of history into real life strategies of activism is the necessarily interdisciplinary nature of the endeavor of regional studies. Those interdisciplinary works in Appalachian studies to focus on the visual history of the myth of Appalachia are important to note; but first, we should understand what is postmodernism and how it is relevant to the study of identity mythmaking.

Postmodernism in Appalachian Studies

Twentieth-century Appalachian scholars emerged as the first to question ideologically based views of Appalachian origins. Recognizing how myths of racial purity have both exempted Appalachia from inclusion in dialogues about diversity and
multi-culturalism while sanctioning it as a space of American culture reserved for prejudicial denigration, Appalachian studies scholars now problematize the entire canon of Appalachian history. Much of the scholarship from the *Journal of Appalachian Studies* and the *Appalachian Journal* over the last few decades analyzes the various ways in which identity and power are linked. All of this literature unveils one connecting truth about visual representations: that none of the images, artworks, literature, or televisual depictions of Appalachia are concerned with the “truth” of Appalachia. These images are deployed according to national cultural, economic, and social anxieties and prop up class, race, and gender ideologies in American culture. Ultimately, the stereotypical identities linked to Appalachia through the evolution of its myth continue to circulate; therefore this myth is not one of the past but is really one that is continually being reproduced.

This constant circulation occurs in part because of larger historical conditions that produce Western identities through discourses about seemingly unrelated aesthetic, rhetorical, and social ideologies.

The only way to effectively reveal the processes that produce myths and in the process reveal how all viewpoints are privileged and narrow perspectives is through studying the discourses that produce difference and question the consistency of difference itself. Rather than revealing something “real,” postmodern scholars suggest that the perception that something is real is actually the product of repetition.

Appalachian studies scholarship does just this: it speaks from the interior of a “space of difference” (itself an exterior of “normal” America) in order to reveal the reasons in which difference is created in the first place, unveiling the mechanics of repetition (for example, absentee landownership evolved into an exterior/interior dichotomy of power). According to postcolonial and feminist theorists like Edward Said and Coco Fusco, these relationships are necessarily established through materials that act as “signs” of cultural identities (Said 1979; Fusco 1994). This kind of power relationship was first described as an othering relationship by Said, who identified this mechanism of power through identity in his explication of the discursive power relations between the “West” (Western European culture) and the “Orient” (East Indian and Middle Eastern cultures) (Habib 480). For Said, the subsequent identity and cultural constructs the West employs simultaneously define and distance the Orient from Western culture and identity, thereby establishing a hierarchic power relationship between knower and known, viewer and viewed (480). In this model, Appalachia is the “other,” a two-dimensional Appalachia that is white and poor instead of diverse and modern. Both racial and class

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23 Decentering is a spatial metaphor used to describe minorities’ challenge of Western hegemony, according to Mark A. Pegrum (113-115). This suggests that a majority remains “in the middle” and is able to masquerade its power because it holds the center while minorities are scattered at the margins.
signs are invoked in stereotypes of Appalachians. Postmodernists are invested in revealing how these signs are linked with the subject of study and not produced by them. Thus, Appalachian studies are multi-interdisciplinary studies of the regional, cultural, and socio-economic forces that establish “signs” of cultural difference.

Postmodern strategies include emphasizing plurality, avoiding the creation of definitions while critiquing external definitions, and critiquing from “within.” In order to thoroughly address this material history of cultural difference, Appalachian studies scholars have looked at the economic models that established difference. Therefore, early studies have sought to critique definitions without creating new ones.

Since the 1970s and the birth of Appalachian studies, the region has been identified as a subordinate place in a system of late-capitalist internal colonialism. Helen M. Lewis, in her introduction to the collection of papers *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (1978), lays out a clear picture of why and how the region came to be an underdog in robust, Cold War, imperialist America whose “outside industrial interests [would] establish control, exploit the region, and maintain their domination and subjugation of the region” (Lewis 2). Wilson writes:

> Appalachia is a good example of colonial domination by outside interests. Its history also demonstrates the concerted efforts of the exploiters to label their work “progress” and to blame any of the obvious problems it causes on the ignorance or deficiencies of the Appalachian people. We believe that there are peoples all over the world who have experienced this sort of “development” and consequently life in conditions similar to those found
in the mountains. Thus, they can easily identify with the process described in this book as the colonization of Appalachia. (2)

The 1970s in the United States saw several academic and intellectual transitions that destabilized universalist and traditional modes of thinking. What began as a debunking of the myth of Appalachia evolved into a study of the creation and evolution of Appalachian stereotypes. This “debunking” occurred mostly through literary analysis and visual material histories.

Literature and image studies provide important historical information about visual stereotypes and make important and insightful connections among images over time especially since hillbillies in literature preceded the invention of the hillbilly cartoon (Harkins 50). These recent studies have situated stereotypes within material culture, thereby clarifying difference as a product of power relationships—complicated ones that are also dependent upon social concepts of race and class (and, as this study argues, gender). Such studies include Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford’s *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* (1999); Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt’s *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature* (2003); and Anthony Harkins’ *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (2006), cultural studies that connect images and literature to external (class and raced) power relationships.

*Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* critiques the discourse of the Appalachian-as-other through a collection of responses to a theater project at the end of the twentieth century, offering one of the most critical analyses of stereotyping among
works from or about Appalachia. Indeed, the theoretical position that Billings and the other authors put forth achieves a view of Appalachia as diverse, modern, and sensitive. Their work counterbalances the damaging effects of (high arts) projects like Robert Schenkkan’s 1992 *The Kentucky Cycle*, which professed that a history of Appalachia was one best told by its “backwoods” people (Billings et al 9-10). *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* proposes that Appalachian stereotypes—from literature and theater—enable an American public to feel nostalgic about the past and pride about its own (sophisticated) present.

Elizabeth Sanders Delwiche Engelhardt’s *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature* examines the writing and activism of Appalachian women and women visiting Appalachia at the turn of the twentieth century (Engelhardt 6). In many cases, these women “tourists” and “reformers” were contributors to the growing sense that Appalachia was a sorrowful place in need of well-intended intervention (7). Englehardt writes:

> The literatures of the voyeur and the tourist ultimately support the status quo systems of hierarchy and power that led to Appalachia’s environmentally damaging extractive industries and the region’s economic and social oppression with which so many women had to struggle through the century. (6)

For Engelhardt, the social and environmental reform rhetoric unfolding in America was very much alive and at work in Appalachia. She argues that these women were not only conscious of these debates, but were also important participants in them. Engelhardt thus
contributes a critical study of women’s roles in the circulation and perpetuation of the Appalachian-as-other discourse.

Since the majority of images of Appalachians produced by non-Appalachians are for popular consumption and therefore circulate in mass produced mediums, most studies of images focus on the most widely disseminated examples: Appalachian characters in American film and television. In Anthony Harkin’s book *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, which is a history of the hillbilly in popular culture from the late nineteenth- through the early twentieth-centuries, we see that these images also function at a deep, psychological level. This internal function of the hillbilly stereotype enables America to construct identities of an internal other while consolidating a sense of national identity, make sense of “Appalachia difference,” and justify industrialization and the extraction of natural resources from the region.

Specifically, Harkins traces the ways whiteness and class are co-present and codependent in the processes of cultural signification. Harkins writes,

Thus, while often dismissed as a debased and trivial “mass” culture stereotype, the hillbilly instead served at times of national soul-searching and throughout the twentieth century as a continually negotiated mythic space through which modern Americans have attempted to define themselves and their national identity and to reconcile the past and the present. (Harkins 4)
According to Harkins study, the hillbilly is malleable, a blank canvas upon which the anxieties of an America in crisis can visually play out. Therefore, his is both a theoretical and historical study of images.

The hillbilly is not solely a construct associated with the Appalachians. Ozark studies scholar Brooks Blevins notes much overlap in the hillbilly character of the Ozarks and Appalachia.

The presentations of Ozark life in mass-published, national magazines and books during World War II and in the decade and a half following the conflict generally consisted of two types, both of which either explicitly or implicitly established connections with pre-war romantic literary visions of the region and maintained the bucolic, static image of the hill country with only subtle adjustments. (Blevins 262)

This “bucolic character”—Appalachian and Ozarkan—reminded Americans of their colonial roots and was an important part of the discourse of American identity in the first half of the twentieth century as the United States became an important international power (Harkins 4-5). Yet, the nostalgic tenure of the hillbilly as-innocent-mountain man was short lived. The hillbilly image would become the last “safe” visual site of discrimination.

In a larger national context, Harkins locates three potent moments of “Appalachian difference” in American culture: the Great Depression, the 1960s and 1970s response to civil rights movements’ threats to white hegemony, and 1990s encoding of stereotypes in identity and entertainment (Harkins 47, 141, and 205). The
Great Depression would bring out these images as signs of class difference as part of middle-class American whites' denial of economic disaster. Harkins describes it as a time when class difference, suffrage, and diversity threatened white hegemony thus making the hillbilly a popular identity among southern mountain whites.

At the same time, many southern mountain folk, often trapped in regional low-paying industrial work or forced to migrate outside the mountains to survive, embraced elements of both the rugged and pure mountaineer myth and the hillbilly label and its implied hostility to middleclass norms and propriety, in the process of intensifying the national perception of their status as an American “other.” (Harkins 5)

By the mid-twentieth century, “hillbilly,” “cracker,” and “white trash” were identities attached to Appalachian difference, all of which worked to encourage the notion among minorities that they were no longer the object of racist stereotypes (4). On the one hand, stereotypes of whites lulled the public into believing that prejudice was on the decline by hiding class structures and encouraging minorities to believe they were not the direct victims of white privilege—African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, Hispanics and others were no longer directly assaulted by the majority because it was othering itself (8-9).

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24 Peter La Chapelle ties this period’s imagery to eugenics baiting and pervasive myths of whiteness that appeared in places like California—the “Mission Myth,” the “Nordic outpost,” and the “seaport of Iowa legend (Chapelle 23). These myths in the first quarter of the twentieth century “were a set of fictional stories that sought to make the region more attractive to middle-class newcomers by emphasizing the white heritage of Los Angeles” (23).
On the other hand, mid twentieth-century, post-war America revisited these images as it began to promote itself internationally as an industrial, economic, and military superpower. Indeed, imagery was an important tool in this strategy of spreading American hegemony—in the arts and design fields, images demonstrated both American genius and cultural singularity (4). America was a sophisticated, wealthy nation dominated by a class and culture of whiteness.

The hillbilly in music and film as well as in touristic imagery was in truth the visual cultural expulsion of difference from the white suburbanite cultural body (Harkins 9). The abundant visual trope of the hillbilly receded from the consumer market in the 70s, 80s, and 90s as the discipline of Appalachian studies emerged as an intellectual, interdisciplinary field of critique of Appalachian identity, heritage, and its relationship to American culture and history.25

Even though academic critiques emerged, these images and the identities they connoted did not disappear, they merely shifted their rhetoric. Today, hillbilly is once again employed as a racial and classist epithet, ready to be used in media descriptions of real Appalachians even as Appalachians themselves use it, along with terms like “redneck” and “white trash,” as a form of self identification and white agency. The hillbilly continues to circulate as a gendered, raced, and classed sign of Appalachian

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25 Harkins cites three causes of the ebbing of the mainstream hillbilly: environmental, labor, and social activists of the southern mountains worked to debunk these images because of the identity they promulgated about Appalachians, an identity that encouraged the exploitation of workers and degradation of the landscape; the launching of the field of Appalachian studies in the late 1970s produced “work that weakened the notion that the southern mountaineers and their people somehow existed outside the realm of social and economic reality”; and the emergence of urban Appalachian activists, particularly in places like Cincinnati, OH, which “led to the November 1992 passage by the Cincinnati City Council of a human rights ordinance expressly protecting the civil rights of Appalachian Americans—the only ordinance of its kind in the nation” (Harkins 213).
difference. Adding to Englehardt’s, Billings et al, and Harkins’ contemporary and postmodern studies of Appalachian difference, these visual examples will also be situated within the social processes of stereotyping itself.
CHAPTER FOUR: STEREOTYPES, POSTMODERNISM, AND VISUAL CULTURE STUDIES

Important Differences in Visual and Historical Methodologies

The difference between historical and visual cultural methodologies is important to note as each results in a decidedly different understanding of the past and the present. Historical surveys of cultural phenomena typically include empirical information about events and people, often presenting them in a chronological narrative form. An art historical approach to the study of visual material, a traditional history of high or “fine” arts, gathers historical and visual data and rewrites it as a narrative of a historical moment. A primary component of art historical scholarship is to come to an understanding of the ways in which the processes, producers, and products of visual media are subject to the forces of a given historical epoch, an understanding that meteorologically aids in the determination of their relevancy to academic and stylistic traditions of the past and art historical movements yet to come. More recent art histories have altered their approaches to the past from a kind of scholarly retrospective of themes and changes that scholars “uncover” to scholarship that strives to remain sensitive to our own contexts. For post-modern art history today, the present is acknowledged as a powerful influence, a force that guides the ways in which history gets written.

This dissertation adopts this last approach by disputing the historical condition of Appalachian stereotypes—that is, the (in-the-past-ness) frame with which we study visual stereotyping—that presents these phenomena as having already happened, making it difficult to see how these images are part of power relationships and structures still with
us. An analytical art historical view of the past would, as Donald Preziosi instructs in his essay “Art History: Making the Visible Legible,” constitute a lens that captures past and present as points within a cultural system, a matrix of visual and cultural meanings (Preziosi 13). Preziosi writes, “Art history is one of a network of interrelated institutions and professions whose overall function has been to fabricate a historical past that could be placed under systematic observation for use in the present” (13). This scholarship revisits the past by expanding Harkins’ history to include gender and visual analysis of these identities and to study these visual subjects as points within “a network of interrelated institutions” and identities.

_Anatomy of the Appalachian Stereotype: Identity Theory_

Harkins is one of the few scholars to address whiteness as an important condition of Appalachian difference. Whites in the United States are the racial and economic majority. When white Americans view these constructed, rhetorical images of Appalachians, they see a kind of whiteness to be denounced for its uncouthness and ignorance, an inclination manifest in the deployment of such terms as “white trash.” Anthony Harkins recognizes this as racial identity rhetoric and employs theories from white studies to articulate this relationship: “I strive to do justice to sociologist Richard Dyer’s recognition of the ‘complexity of representation’ with its ‘unequal but not monolithic relations of production and reception [. . .] (Harkins 9). The class difference that is the true cause of anxiety about Appalachian difference is complicated by the racial identity of Appalachian stereotypes. Specifically, images of “hillbillies” and “rural rubes” become the only signs of whiteness in an increasingly multi-cultural society
Cultural studies scholars like Dyer argue that whites who dominate in Western culture succeed in denying their own racial identity by expelling from their majority-bodies those signs of whiteness that give it visibility. Dyer suggests that this works through the fetishization of skin, leaving those not fetishized invisible:

> There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that—they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for the do no represent the interests of a race. The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequalities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world. (Dyer 2)

Examining the rhetoric of Appalachian difference does just this: dislodges the invisibility of white privilege by undercutting the process through which white privilege establishes itself.

It is important to note the historical links of images with ideologies that occur in other cultural settings. Race and racial categories were not only applied to Appalachians, but to other identity groups as well. For example, nineteenth-century social Darwinists sought to justify racism and colonialism through studies of race. Using essentialist studies of the human body, many argued that physiognomy and intellect were inseparable and that another person’s intellect and even capacity for “civilization” could be determined by studying how they looked (Sekula 12). In discussing the emergence of
photography as a tool for criminologists in nineteenth-century France, Allan Sekula focuses on the influence of pseudo-science—in the form of physiognomy and phrenology—on studies of the human subject. Sekula writes:

Since physiognomy and phrenology were comparative, taxonomic disciplines, they sought to encompass an entire range of human diversity. In this respect, these disciplines were instrumental in constructing the very archive they claimed to interpret. [..] In the almost exclusive emphasis on the head and face we can discover the idealist secret lurking at the heart of these putatively materialist sciences. These were discourses of the head for the head. Whatever tendency of physiognomic or phrenologic thought [..] these disciplines would serve to legitimate on organic grounds the dominion of intellectual over manual labor. Thus physiognomy and phrenology contributed to the ideological hegemony of a capitalism that applauded its own progress as the outcome of individual cleverness and cunning. (Sekula 12)

These disciplines not only determined which subjects were worthy of study, they also developed methodologies based on racist and classist assumptions to make such choices. Thus, as ideologies, racial theories were grafted onto technologies of seeing, used to measure human behavior and intellect, and form the foundation of professional practices (medical, criminology, and psychology).

While these ideologies predate Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, Darwinian theory gave them the scientific rhetoric necessary to legitimize their findings. Samuel
Roberts Wells’s *Physiognomy, or, Signs of Character, As Manifested through Temperament and External Forms*, “The Human Face Divine” (1871) rationalized racist perceptions as evolutionary physiognomy. Wells writes of racial difference based on his analysis and comparison of craniums, suggesting that difference corresponds to a scale evolution in which the darker races are more animalic than lighter ones:

The falling back of the facial line, it will be seen [. . .], depends either upon the projection of the jaws, the recession of the forehead, or upon both combined, and the character of the angle is determined by those conditions—the first of which (in excess) betokens animality, and the last (negatively) a low grade of intelligence. *Other things being equal* [Wells’s emphasis] then, the smaller this angle, the lower the degree of intelligence; and the greater this angle, up to ninety or perhaps one hundred degrees, the higher the grade of intelligence. (Wells 126)

To support his analysis, Wells offers an illustration of the angles of cranial difference that reveal racial and thus animal difference. The well-known image “Grades of Intelligence” from Redfield’s book is a series of faces that represent the ranges of intelligence possible by man ranked according to race (see figs. 10 and 11).
The falling back of the facial line, it will be seen (fig. 141), depends either upon the projection of the jaws, the recession of the forehead, or upon both combined, and the character of the angle is determined by these conditions—the first of which (in excess) betokens animality, and the last (negatively) a low grade of intelligence. Other things being equal, then, the smaller this angle, the lower the degree of intelligence; and the greater this angle, up to ninety or perhaps one hundred degrees, the higher the grade of intelligence. By throwing the line forward so as to form

Figure 10. Samuel Roberts Wells. “The Falling Back of the Facial Line.” From Physiognomy, or, Signs of Character, As Manifested through Temperament and External Forms, “The Human Face Divine” 1871.

Figure 11. Samuel Roberts Wells. “Grades of Intelligence.” From Physiognomy, or, Signs of Character, As Manifested through Temperament and External Forms, “The Human Face Divine” 1871.
Of course, the most intelligent visage looks strikingly similar to Greco-Roman sculpture, with his aquiline nose and high forehead signifying his intellectual superiority to the Scottish, Gypsies, Jews, and Africans.

Another example of this racist theoretical mentality is James Redfield’s 1852 book *Comparative Physiognomy or Resemblances between Men and Animals*. According to Redfield, comparing the physical appearance of humans is the only way to determine why some people fail to live up to (Western) standards of reason, intellect, and civilization. For Wells, man’s actions prove that humans derive from animals, “[. . .] a humiliating truth, of which many people seem proud; but, as humility is a rare and inestimable virtue, it is well that we should be reminded of our frailty by a just comparison of ourselves with the brute creation” (Redfield 213).

Like Wells, Redfield compared the physiognomy of humans in order to suggest the origins of human characteristics such as nobility, mental illness, and brute strength. Using portraits of well known people or kinds of people, Redfield would juxtapose their visages with images of animals in order to suggest something about the origin of character, the natural structure of racial identity, and the natural origins of such a social hierarchy.
In figure 12, Redfield compares an image of an American businessman with that of a lion, writing of the comparison that:

A sordid look, we see, is compatible with the lion, otherwise there would be no pertinence in the allusion to “lion’s share.” But there is on littleness in anything that he thinks or does. It is not emulation that makes the lion-like individual do things on a larger scale than others. He has the desire of doing great things, but they are little in his estimation when he has done them. He therefore takes no pride in what he does; and to show that what others stare at, is nothing in his eyes, he may give it away. (See fig. 12; Redfield 25)

Astor, a late eighteenth-century German immigrant, made his wealth via the fur trade, where he invested internationally in trade with China. He became an important figure in
In comparing this American capitalist with a lion, Redfield evokes ancient iconographic associations of lions with heroes, such as the Sphinx in Egypt, which combines the head of a man with the body of a lion (before 2500 BCE) and King Richard I of England (twelfth century), who was known as Richard the Lionheart. While this characterization is not in itself racist, other comparative portraits in Redfield’s text are.

Figure 13. James Redfield. “African and African Americans as Elephants.” From *Comparative Physiognomy or Resemblances between Men and Animals*. 1852.

In a chapter comparing people with elephants, Redfield makes the claim that Africans are human versions of the pack animal. He writes:
The inferior class [Redfield’s emphasis] who bear this resemblance, are suited physically to perform the function of executioners, and to be the instruments of power. The stoutest laborers—in size, form, motions, and expressions of the countenance—resemble the elephant. This is so with herculean negroes particularly, and they have been regarded as the executors and as the labor-saving machinery of the world from time immemorial. This is doubtless in some degree a perversion of the grand principle which they illustrate, but it shows an instinctive recognition of this resemblance, not only in those who make a slave of the negro, but in the negro himself. There is something peculiarly noble, dutiful, and trustworthy, in the features of the “black fellow” who bears this resemblance—rude when caught, and yet beautiful from his adaptation to his various uses. (Redfield 51-52)

Racist views such as Redfield’s and Wells’s supported class division, economic difference, and discrimination. As Harkins articulated in his introduction to Hillbilly, the physiognomy of the Appalachian in stereotypes is part of this visual tradition, essentializing their difference in their large feet, sinister eyes, darkened and dirty skin, and laziness (Harkins 3-7). Other scholars, such as Peter La Chapelle, identify the political function of such rhetoric in relation to migrant whites from the Ozarks in California. Characterizing it as “eugenics baiting,” La Chapelle sees the same physiognomic science informing middle class whites’ attitudes during the Great Depression as they use it to justify interring Ozarkan whites in migrant worker camps in
California to prevent them from mixing with the general population (La Chapelle 21-23). Californians themselves, like writer Thomas W. McManus, spoke to the necessity of segregation: “No greater invasion by the destitute has ever been recorded in the history of mankind.” The migration onslaught “has overwhelmed us; they will soon control the political destiny of California. We must stop this migration or surrender to chaos and ruin,” (quoted in La Chapelle 22). La Chapelle argues that this attitude was espoused by many Californians and was part of a conflict based on religious difference. He writes:

The result of this onslaught was a rather remarkable circumstance in the history of American prejudice: a group of ostensibly white citizens became so stigmatized that its members became fodder for the kind of race talk and eugenic baiting normally reserved for racial minorities or immigrants. This race talk took the form of a major political and media campaign that drew from phenotypic and behavioral stereotypes to racialize migrant bodies and actions. As a system imbued with “scientific” authority, eugenics—the effort to beget well-born, or “eugenic,” children as opposed to poorly born, hereditarily deficient offspring—was also an important part of this equation. Eugenics and race talk allowed native white Californians to create myths that downgraded the status of white Dust Bowlers to such an extent that migrants were subjected to forms of harassment typically faced by racial minority groups. (La Chapelle 23)
Consider this division within the white race in terms of Wells’s “Grades of Intelligence” racial hierarchy. The racial order is threatened by the existence of Ozarkans and Appalachians. This is why we see dual origins of the hillbilly stereotype in literature about Appalachians and Ozarkans as demonstrated in Marion Hughes’ pamphlet (see figs 4 and 5). They experience poverty, mistreatment, and despair and are essentialized by Wells and others as racial minorities. When white bodies exhibit conditions normally explained away as problems of a specific racial minority class, then the naturalization of the class hierarchy itself is threatened.

These stereotypes, then, are part of a larger visual practice of the nineteenth, twentieth, and now twenty-first centuries which displace difference from economic and class causes to the human body through essentialization. Indeed, the process of essentialization is dependent not only on the physiognomic difference between stereotypes and a norm, but also on differences between masculinities, femininities, and so-called “normative” sexualities. Finally, essentialization requires traits be repeated both visually and behaviorally in order to collapse the visible into biology.

Feminist scholars of art history and visual culture were among the first to identify this process through which difference is associated with the body through repetitious identity processes and practices. For example, while identifying the sites where gender difference is invoked, Whitney Davis redirects attention from the conditions of difference to the conditions of “sameness” or agreement in the formation of categories of gender. Agreement classes of gender difference are the real sites of difference—that is, the agreeable and repeat(able)ed boundaries of gender difference are the forces that actually
produce difference. Difference is not uncovered but constructed through the imposition of classificatory categories (Davis 342). Davis writes that:

Finally, gender agreements in representation must be realized by the makers and users of representation—for example, by painters and viewers. In fact, agreements obtain not only between the formal and thematic concords, but also between representational inflection as such and the inflection introduced by the user. (343)

In order to understand the signs of race, class, or gender in visual culture, we need to focus on the specific replicated forms of all identity categories that are in agreement with cultural beliefs about the nature of identity difference. Their circulation is what produces this agreement, providing proof of these categories’ boundaries when they are in reality performative masquerades, universalized stereotypes of people who appear to signify essential difference. Difference comes from the inflection, the rhetorical gesture that we read from these images. So, the same visual processes that produce iconography also produce identity categories. Therefore visual studies theories are important in developing an understanding of the structures and grammars of imagery.


The visual cultural system that circulates in American culture transmits information rapidly, leaving its audience little time to reflect on its content. Indeed, this system is the very engine of its economy, circulating commodities (including art) and controlling the middle class by calling forth its subjectivity via advertising, production, and consumption habits (Althusser 140). The resulting creation of an economic or social
subjectivity that such a process brings about is by no means a simple emotional response to images; rather, it is the dynamic interplay between the process of psycho-socialization (how we respond vis-à-vis our perceptions about our own identity), the many forms of culture, the pressures of material consumption, and the proliferation of images which constitutes the psychological power of the visual.

Visual imagery is often perceived to be straightforward, an unaltered production. Processes of image production, circulation, and consumption are, however, dependent on the creator, system of circulation, and audience. At any step in this process, the meaning or message can be altered, misconstrued, or replaced. Yet, too much of our modern culture assumes that images are truthful, that they are mere records of the “real world.” Images’—both visual cultural as well as artistic—*inherent ideological* status is difficult to expose in this culture of visual plentitude. Indeed, the cultural emphasis we place on seeing—because, of course, seeing is believing—and our subsequent reification of empirical experiences and material testimonies as truth, sanctify the visual as reality and hide the very real influence that context and creator have on the image and its meaning. These conditions are particularly true for photographic, filmic, and cyber materials because of such images’ constant deployment as witnesses, recorders, and reflectors of reality; for the non-inquiring viewer, they are objective because they mechanically record reality. All of this makes these kinds of images potent tools in constructing public ideologies, perceptions, and stereotypes, circulating visual venom alongside truthful imagery within a visual identificatory system that “documents” without bias. These materials, as they circulate in visual culture, have rhetorical structures—semantic visual
bytes of condensed information that draw the direction of our gazes as we absorb the stories they tell us.

Within this culture of ultra-real media we find the processes that naturalize stereotypes as visual truths taking place, replacing drawn caricatures and their recognizable bias with photographic truth—and in the case of language, too easily using words loaded with history, potent in their meaning—glossily reproducing “poor white trash,” “hillbillies,” and “rednecks” in their native environments. These problems do not merely reside in American identity relations. Social theorists and philosophers, like identity scholar Susan Bordo, suggest that identity is not only socialized, but circulated by material culture, creating multi-layered visual identificatory systems (Bordo 6-8).26 The dilemma is in part created by the passivity of viewers, an inertia that encourages audiences to consume, without pause, all of the visual material that circulates.

Charles A. Hill argues that scholars of rhetoric must give more consideration to the structures and power of imagery (Hill 25-28). Rhetoricians have traditionally dismissed imagery as mere instigators of emotional response in viewers, thereby denying the subtlety and grammar of the images and the intellectual response of viewers (27). Such a limited view of the rhetoric of imagery is inadequate; humans are too smart for this to be true. If humans all responded to images in emotional and not intellectual ways, then Western history would be very different, to say the least. The structure and function

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26 Susan Bordo specializes in the relationship between Cartesian Dualism and identity in Western culture and how these two aspects of culture are codependent and co-present—even in today’s most “innocuous” cultural practices and phenomena (Madonna, advertisements, hunger and appetite). She has written several works on masculinity, femininity, and popular culture that trace the evolution of mind/body dualism and its effects on human psychology.
of images are neglected by such a simplistic view of human response to imagery and results in the under-examination of image rhetoric and the under-appreciation of the effects of these images on humans but also on other cultural phenomena such as advertising, art, architecture, and even social behaviors. In order to address this disparity in rhetoric studies, Hill calls for an evaluation of image rhetoric that takes into account the dynamic interplay of emotion and intellect in humans’ psychological responses to visual culture (30-1). This, according to Hill, must happen through the interdisciplinary integration of social science and image studies (and, as this project suggests, Appalachian studies). Hill writes that:

The psychological approach that I take [. . .] is not meant to replace or compete with cultural or textual studies, but merely to address the phenomenon from a different perspective. Neither is it meant to denote a set of processes that are entirely distinct and separate from the cultural and social processes that are explored so well in other chapters in this volume, for psychological and cultural practices are inextricably linked. [. . .] Ultimately, a comprehensive theory of visual persuasion will need to incorporate the insights gathered from a variety of viewpoints and methodologies, including cultural, psychological, and textual studies, and attempt to explicate how the mechanisms identified by these different methodologies work together in the production of, reception of, and response to persuasive images. (Hill 26)
His interdisciplinary theory of the psychology of rhetorical images explains *why* images elicit emotional responses and *how* those emotional responses mediate our processing of images. First, such emotional responses to the presence of powerful imagery are an evolutional condition of humanity that continues to work right alongside aural and textual exchanges (33). If information is communicated verbally, the pace instituted by the form of communication allows for the time necessary to process information abstractly. The pace in which imagery is discriminated and consumed, however, does not afford such time for critical thinking. Humans have the capacity for both modes of response but, because of our evolutionary predisposition, we take the shorter route.

In short, because our minds prefer to take the fastest and easiest route to making a decision, and because images or imagistic texts offer shortcuts toward the endpoint of making a decision, then images (or, to a lesser extent, imagistic, concrete language) will prompt the viewer to make a relatively quick decision, largely ignoring the more analytical, abstract information in verbal form. (Hill 33)

This evolutionary process that encourages us to respond to images emotionally and texts intellectually is also mediated by culture, resulting, according to Hill, in a triangulation of meaning (image-slow response of brain-cultural filters). When texts and images are combined, this triangulation takes on a fourth dimension (Hill 34).
The “Visual” in Western Thought

The persuasiveness of the visual has only expanded over time, becoming more convoluted and rapid in its production and transmission and saturating contemporary culture. Scholars, such as Paul Virilio, argue that contemporary culture is in a textual-visual paralysis (Virilio 113). While we might intuitively believe that technology, education, and quality of living in the Western world have all contributed to sharper, more critical audiences, the opposite is true; we are duller, less aware viewers in this digital age. Virilio writes:

With the industrial proliferation of visual and audiovisual prostheses and unrestrained use of instantaneous transmission equipment from earliest childhood onwards, we now routinely see the encoding of increasingly elaborate mental images together with a steady decline in retention rates and recall. In other words we are looking at the rapid collapse of mnemonic consolidation. (Virilio 113)

Technology, instead of sharpening our vision, has focused and then fragmented our sight, making it difficult to mull over the things we see and digest the things we hear. As technology has exploded into millions of increasingly dynamic and speedy forms of information, our minds have focused on the minutiae and fragmented under the weight of information, complicating our efforts to detect larger contexts and blurring capacity for far-sighted vision. If Charles A. Hill’s theory that we are evolutionarily disposed to respond emotionally rather than rationally to images is true, then the situation is further complicated by the evolution of technology and the speed of the visual. While we must
become aware of our disposition towards instinctive response, the very density of aural and visual information impairs critical thinking and makes this effort doubly impossible.

Charles A. Hill and Paul Virilio were not the first Western writers to argue for a critical focus on the visual as this problem has been an important theme in Western thought since the ancient period. Perhaps the most famous thinker to be suspicious of image and its relationship to reality was Plato. In Plato’s epistemology, there are several kinds of knowledges: professional, technical, and experiential, for example. These knowledges, however, are faint reflections of metaphysical truths and prototypes. The most important knowledge, for Plato, is purely intelligible: the knowledge of the realm of Forms, a realm that is accessible only through philosophical reasoning (as illustrated in his allegory of the cave in Book VII of the Republic). Indeed, Plato proclaims philosophy to be the best, if not the only, way of knowing the invisible world that produces and maintains our reality because all particulars (especially facile constructions like art, poetry, theater) distort the “truth” of reality; and, of course in Plato’s mind, philosophy is the only profession to rely on the human mind rather than abstract human endeavor for the discovery of truth and is therefore the only means of arriving at any sort of truth. Plato’s philosophical structure of knowledge—a kind of reality twice removed from the truth of its origin—is the model he uses to understand art, an image of an idea many times removed from the truth of its origin (Plato 602c-e).

In Plato’s ideal city (the Republic), art (read as “the visual” in this study) is not to be trusted—its persuasive abilities are too dangerous for a philosophy-kingdom whose foundation is based on a deep mistrust of illusion. In discussing measurement and how
illusion exploits human weakness, Plato suggests that we are so weak that *trompe l’oeil* painting competes with the real:

> And something looks crooked when seen in water and straight when seen out of it, while something else looks both concave and convex because our eyes are deceived by its colors, and every other similar sort of confusion is clearly present in our soul. And it is because they exploit this weakness in our nature that tromp l’oeil painting, conjuring, and other forms of trickery have powers that are little short of magical.

> That’s true.

> And don’t measuring, counting, and weighing give us most welcome assistance in these cases, so that we aren’t ruled by something’s looking bigger, smaller, more numerous, or heavier, but by calculation, measurement, or weighing?

> Of course.

> And calculating, measuring, weighting are the work of the rational part of the soul. (602c-e)

For Plato, art (the visual) is further removed from its original because the idea is ultimately based upon a vision of reality that is processed through fallible senses and conceived in the mind of an imperfect being. This would mean that art is three times removed from its generative prototype. If we consider Plato’s ontology of Forms, art is actually *four* times removed from its prototype because reality—the place of human
inspiration—is a mere reflection of the prototypes from the transcendent realm of Forms, a reflection that is incomplete and far from the perfection of its origins.

Plato’s suspicion of the visual is carried on by the works of Charles A. Hill and Paul Virilio. Indeed, other philosophers over the last two thousand years have dealt with the power of images, even if obliquely; one might argue that Renee Descartes’ philosophy of universal doubt was yet another moment in this history of questioning. However, twentieth century scholarship expanded the direct study of the visual beyond its aesthetic and iconographic valuation by historians, connoisseurs, and aestheticians. Hill and Virilio represent two modes of study; Hill represents the structural turn in the social sciences and the humanities and Virilio represents the philosophical observation of material culture’s impact on human thought and cognition. And there are more recent theories that deal explicitly with the power of the visual in creating cultural meanings.

Another foundational structural analyst and semiotic theorist is Roland Barthes. In his essays written in the 1970s and collected in the book *The Responsibility of Forms*, Barthes argues that images are comprised of a series of overt and covert codes that conduct their meaning (Barthes 1991, 137). Using a print advertisement for analysis—since such an image has more clearly defined layers of meaning, rhetoric, and ideology—Barthes argues that there are three layers of meaning in the visual artifact: a linguistic, non-coded iconic, and coded iconic. The first meaning can be easily detected as it is the text that accompanies an image. The second and third are more significant as they identify manifest and latent meanings. The non-coded iconic meaning is the one that is legible in the visual forms grouped together (1991, 137).
In Barthes’ example of an Italian food advertisement, the non-coded iconic components are the vegetables, shopping bag, and Panzani products. These objects are just objects until they are activated by a viewer who connects them to other times, places, and things. When a viewer, knowledgeable of the Italian tradition of visiting street markets to purchase fresh produce for cooking, looks at this ad, another layer of meaning emerges. Barthes’ third message, the coded iconic, is the “Italianicity” of the vegetables, pasta, and sauce, the ethnicity invoked by their grouping and framework that results in rhetorical meanings: fresh vegetables and Italian market shopping equals Panzani pasta (see fig. 14; Barthes 1985, 36-40).

One of Barthes’ goals is to refute structural linguists’ beliefs that language and visual structures are comprised of inflexible meanings; meanings are there in the language and not in the viewer or reader. Plato, Barthes, Virilio, and Hill all offer methodologies for analyzing the visual—both in the broad category of visual culture and in the elite category of art. Plato believed that images could corrupt. Like Plato, Virilio is suspicious of the potency of images. Like Virilio, Barthes argues that the trappings of an image, that is its appearance, its very visuality, weighs us down and prevents us from seeing the symbolic or iconic message. And Hill, like Barthes, reveals a rhetorical process through which images and texts psychologically and socially create several levels of cultural, intellectual, and emotional meanings. Theories that view such structures taking place in the instantiation and circulation of identity are also relevant.
Identity and the Visual

Theorists (like Edward Said, Richard Dyer, and Whitney Davis) have argued that power exists within a system of relations that constitutes our understanding of what is
“normal.” Such authority cannot be “overthrown” because, although its rhetoric suggests centralization, it is not centralized. Power operates laterally through the accumulation of connections and relations that appear, through their hegemonic plentitude, to operate from the top down, masking the ways in which personal practices submit to ideological forces.

Feminist and queer studies scholars pursue this investigation. Poststructuralist Michel Foucault argues in his *History of Sexuality* against a “repressive hypothesis” of normative identity and asserts that there exists a discursive formation of identification, boundaries, studies, production, and confession that does not repress, but rather, delineates precincts of normality and abnormality through expressions of power over life (Foucault 304). Thus power is not imposed from above; rather it is circulated laterally through shared behaviors. He indicates that one of the most important frontiers where this formation has revealed itself is in the study of sexuality. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her seminal work *The Epistemology of the Closet*, expands Foucault’s theory of discursive formations into a taxonomy of identity that traces the relational ways in which sexual identity is based on binaries *inside and outside* (Sedgwick 1-3). In her 1998 essay titled “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” and published in the anthology *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Judith Butler deconstructs Western notions of being, exposing the ways in which the Western subject is constructed to normative discourses—the same discourses that create fields of knowledge and establish power relations (Butler 1990, 13-14).27

27 Butler analyzes Western notions of being by addressing her own subjective self as she reduces the entire material world to the transient fluidity of the visual. What you see in this world, including how
Critique of such systems of power—and tangentially the images they produce—is most productive at the borders, along the lines of inside and outside, nation and region, middle class and low class, black and white, masculine and feminine, normative and non-normative—those meeting points where we believe boundaries exist but are in reality territories whose lines are drawn by cultural practices. Difference is not always a “one-way street,” solipsitically imposing its power from various points of origin on those without. Judith Butler, in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, argues that first, there is no interior self, no *tabula rasa* upon which identity plays out. Rather, Butler suggests that our sense of “self” is in truth an amalgamation of psycho-social phenomena that coalesce as identity structures (Butler 1990, xviii).

For Butler and other postmodernists, reality is the product of our own making and not an effect of the will of an individual, or of essential aspects manifested in the body of a person, but rather the cumulative effect of social networks and self perceptions that you perceive yourself, your own identity, and your place according to that identity, is not to be trusted, for there is not only the potential for deception but also the chance that none of it exists as we know it. She begins her essay by acknowledging her presence as author and, therefore, her culpability in constructing meaning in the essay. But in the acknowledgment of her authorship she places the word *I* in quotation marks, thereby calling into question its status. Status and position of an author are understood by readers to be perspectivally fixed. But what happens when the being-ness of the author is an amalgamation of fluid, amorphous identities that never converge into one single being? She is concerned by the knowledges that are of and relational to a person’s identity as it is constructed through self declamation. Other identities in which that person participates or acknowledges are precluded once a specific announcement of self is made:

The prospect of being [Butler’s italics] anything, even for pay, has always produced in me a certain anxiety, for “to be” gay, “to be” lesbian seems to be more than a simple injunction to become who or what I already am. And in no way does it settle the anxiety for me to say that this is “part” of what I am. To write or speak as a lesbian appears a paradoxical appearance of this “I,” one which feels neither true nor false. (Butler 1993, 13)

Butler’s epistemology assesses the superiority given to authorship and authorial subjectivity by Western philosophic tradition and the structures of language. Yet, this view of identity, individuality, and academic equivocality fails to account for real world signs of difference. Whether or not our identities are constituted by the simultaneous circulation of visual and linguistic structures affords little relief for peoples suffering from oppression.
coalesce into a single thing: identity. Gender and sexual identity—identities she analyzes and whose structures interlock with other identities such as race and class—are produced for the individual through systems of language and through self policing of the body (Butler 1990, xv). First delineated by Michel Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality*, Butler argues that these linguistic and behavioral utterances occur in response to normative cultural prescriptions and practices of sexuality, repetitious practices that she terms *performativity* (xiv). She proposes poststructuralism as a theoretical framework for analysis, one that, because of the amorphous nature of its boundaries, seeks to explain the universal cause(s) of difference by tying them to particular instances of behavior.

The primary evidence that Butler presents that such a system, first, exists, and second, can be cognized, is the panic that people experience when they encounter anomalous, disruptive, and mimetic gender behaviors (xv). Her most famous example is that of drag performance. Rather than being an example of the production of gender or normative sexual behaviors, for Butler, drag is a site for the *revelation* of a pre-existing notion of gender that is challenged and displaced during drag performance. This awareness is simultaneously threatened by the realization that, as easy as it is for gender mimicry to occur and (sometimes) pass for a “real” gender—that is, be so convincing that the viewer is unaware of it as mimetic performance—normative genders, those that we see being displaced during performance, can just as easily be constructed. In clarifying her position in the preface to the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains it as thus:
The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures. (Butler xv)

Her radical philosophical proposition not only questions thousands of years of Western philosophical investment in the existence of a mind and a body, but also shifts models of identity and power away from subjective to projective strategies. For Butler, gender is a kind of unconscious performance that we can strategically shift by altering body practices, behaviors, and signals through a process that queer studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz calls disidentification (Muñoz 1-3). Instead of ignoring these identities, some take them up as a kind of touristic performance. Difference here, as articulated by Appalachians themselves, can be and is a strategic mode of intercultural performance that takes charge of its own identity.28

Using such visual and identity theories as discussed above to understand the structures of Appalachian stereotypes expands existing Appalachian studies scholarship. Including the semantic and grammatical structures of both the visual and identity allows a history of the myth of Appalachia to fully comprehend the resiliency of these images and

28 I use “intercultural performance” here in ways similar to Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez Peña’s 1992 “Two Undiscovered Amerindians” counter celebration project. Like “Couple in a Cage” as the piece became known, Redneck Games and Hillbilly Days satirize these histories by occupying them, performing these characters as “authentic” public spectacles. Fusco wrote about the experience in her 1994 essay “The Other History of Intercultural Performance” published in TDR.
ideas over time. Existing genealogies of images and identity fall within this grammatical system and enable the historical and continual othering of the Appalachian.
CHAPTER FIVE: LAND AND KIN AS RHETORICS OF APPALACHIAN DIFFERENCE

Anthony Harkins has democratized the visual history of the hillbilly, uncovering the material history of the icon and linking it to social identity codes (Herbert 452-3). Yet the history of the hillbilly is not merely a traceable material and social encounter between America and its white “other”; it is also one in which the initial racial and classed function of the rhetoric of the hillbilly gave way to other identity performances, such as gender difference and sexuality. Signs of Appalachian difference were not merely attached to cartoons, films, and television shows; they were also attitudes circulating in news media as stories about well-known Appalachians. Such stories were rationalized in the context of this visual identificatory system of Appalachian identity.

Specific racial moments of the nineteenth-century gave birth to the hillbilly icon. James Redfield and Samuel Roberts Wells visual examples of nineteenth century attitudes toward racial and class difference go far in explaining the milieu in which the hillbilly icon was born, highlighting pervasive racist views that were linked in particular ways to a visual tradition of identification and stereotyping (Redfield 213 and Wells 126). It was not merely Appalachian difference that attracted attention and condescension in nineteenth-century America, but also widespread beliefs about difference, beliefs that were legally and socially institutionalized. This first moment of the hillbilly yields much understanding about racial and class difference and the visual means through which such difference was instantiated. If, as a glimpse at the evolution of diversity and equality in American history suggests, the creation of the hillbilly-white-other should have followed
the route of other racist behaviors such as black-face minstrelsy and ceased to have
currency, why did this caricature persist in the late twentieth and into the early twenty-
first centuries? As the hillbilly evolved from a lazy bumpkin into more threatening
forms, his/her identity function changed as well. Now the hillbilly no longer serves
identity functions external to Appalachian people’s control. Now the hillbilly is enacted
within the region.

As James D. Herbert suggest the job of a visual cultural study is to look at those
moments and spaces in which image and meaning are at their most dense (Herbert 463).
Such density occurs on the periphery of visual culture where thematic boundaries
emerge. Instead of revisiting Harkins’ history of the hillbilly icon, let us look at the
hillbilly in the periphery of American culture both as a visual code linked with allegories
in art and visual culture as well as a social code attached to real bodies and “authentic”
artifacts of Appalachian identity, codes that circulate within and without Appalachia.

In adopting Herberts’ visual cultural approach and examining the periphery, it is
helpful to separate the hillbilly into three categories in order to see how he/she has
shifting rhetorical functions along the boundaries of both identity and visual culture.
First is Jeff Biggers’s recognition that the hillbilly has acted as a portal to the heroic past.
Longstanding rhetorical links between the hillbilly and the past include Appalachians
associated with rugged independence as the Revolutionary soldier or mountaineer,
cornerstones of American masculinity (the frontiersman as cowboy, for example) and
caricatures of feuding Appalachians (Biggers xii). This first category has been
adequately problematized as an identity imposed on Appalachians, but not as an identity
engaged in by Appalachians themselves. Appalachians self-identify as “hillbilly”; some high school and college Appalachian sports teams have adopted the mountaineer as a mascot (West Virginia University); a festival called Hillbilly Days is celebrated in Pikeville, Kentucky where participants become “hillbillies for a day”; and Appalachian filmmakers believe in the authenticity of the hillbilly, making documentary films about their mountain brethren (Jesco White: The Dancing Outlaw). Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and José Esteban Muñoz’s theory that agency can emerge through performance of extreme and pastiched difference—disidentification—may both be used to explain the continuation of the hillbilly icon in American culture as well as the perpetuation of it within the borders of Appalachia by Appalachians.

Second, as Harkins has argued, the hillbilly icon has come to distinguish Appalachians as native whites in a land of mixed ethnic and racial identities (Harkins 4). The icon circulates along the boundaries of Appalachian culture. Visual culture has been an important system for the establishment of racial boundaries since at least the Civil War. In her analysis of the consumption and circulation of lynching images, Leigh Raiford suggests that visual materials, such as postcards, were important tools in establishing racial boundaries for African Americans. By selling and mailing images of lynchings, dismemberments, and other kinds of murder, “white America” institutionalized violence against African Americans and established rhetorical racial boundaries that clearly communicated consequences for their violation (Raiford 267). Raiford writes:
By uncovering and pulling apart the threads of white supremacy and black resistance embedded in, or perhaps more accurately, read into these photographs, we can begin to understand how lynching photography simultaneously makes and unmakes racial identity. Indeed, the very need to use photographs in campaigns for racial domination or racial justice points to cracks and fissures in these identities. Exposed are the social, sexual, and political anxieties that the framing of these images attempt to deny. (Raiford 257)

The American racial order is much more complex than “color difference” suggests. Class identity and mobility also affected this ranking. While white Americans sought to keep African Americans “in their place” after the Civil War through visual cultural images of violence, the belief that inequality was caused by racial inferiority and not class privilege also had currency. Such attitudes allowed privileged whites to justify the exclusion of other whites from their racial class, establishing degrees of whiteness within this racial order. The hillbilly icon was one such exclusion.

Third, the Appalachian-as-other has come to be recognized as a character whose link to the landscape and purported isolation have unnaturally affected his/her biology, making Appalachians exemplars for why Americans should submit to the standards of the normative family structure. Blended with this third category is the notion that their biological difference also equals sexual deviance, either in the form of the violation of sexual taboos by marrying cousins or by engaging in “unnatural” sex acts. And the third category, what one might call the hillbilly other as monster, includes contemporary
moments where hillbilly biological and sexual difference is amplified to the point where he/she is no longer human.

*Land and People, Land as People: The Mountain in the Mountaineer*

Country roads, take me home

To the place, I belong

West Virginia, mountain momma

Take me home, country roads

*John Denver Take Me Home, Country Roads*\(^\text{29}\)

John Denver’s 1971 hit single “Take Me Home, Country Roads” is a ballad that marks a return to Appalachia; although his lyrical depiction of the West Virginian portion of Appalachia is geographically tenuous (the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Shenandoah River are only within a small portion of the state at the very tip of the Eastern Panhandle), the song is tremendously popular, representing for listeners a glimpse at the universal journey home. Written by Bill Danoff and Taffy Nivert, *Country Roads* envisions Appalachia as a place of both magnificent natural beauty and familial homecoming (Danoff and Nivert). The song also invokes complex visual histories that have come to be associated with Appalachia, the landscape and mothers, a kind of feminized nature or naturalized femininity—two aspects of the mountaineer not yet theorized in Appalachian studies. “Mountain momma” collapses into one phrase two complex Western traditions whose visual manifestations across time have linked reproduction to the fertility of land.

Pictorial language that exalts land as a site of identity and destiny is part of a larger literary and visual tradition in American history. Denver sings of a belonging, a return to a place of origin and identity. The mythical landscape—with its winding roads, mountains, and misty horizons—is a place of family, love, and longed-for cultural practices. “Almost heaven,” a West Virginia state motto that once appeared on license plates and welcome signs at the state borders, is an extension of this myth of a transcendent landscape. Thus Denver and the West Virginia state government contribute to a new myth of Appalachia, what Jeff Biggers characterizes as the “pristine” wilderness of the mountains (Biggers xii).30

The moniker “mountaineer” is invoked by contemporary Appalachians in order to move past the potent rhetoric associated with the hillbilly. Yet even in this attempt to side-step the problematic imagery associated with hillbilly, the negative associations remain attached. Take for example the term “mountaineer.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary’s first entry for the term “mountaineer,” a mountaineer is a person of the mountains who is “occasionally” believed to be backward:

1. a. A person who is native to or lives in a mountainous region; (occas.) such a person regarded as ignorant, uncivilized, or uneducated; (U.S.) a

30 The mountain itself is an ancient metaphor for humanity’s proximity to the gods, appearing in the organic and mountainous shape of the second millennium BCE megalithic carving of Hammurabi’s code, the journey for truth’s end by the Mesopotamian king of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the biblical story of Moses receiving the laws from the Jewish God on Mount Sinai, the religious and funerary architecture of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt in the forms of ziggurats, mastabas, and pyramids, and the four sacred mountains of the Navajo creation story associated with the geography of the American Southwest. Mountains make sense, in spiritual terms, as sites where humans can bring themselves physically closer to their pantheons. Yet, the spiritual resonance of the mountains of Appalachia differs depending on the American. For the Appalachian, the mountains are the glue of cultural identity. For America, they are the geography of difference—sometimes economic and sometimes cultural—impeding and restricting Westward expansion in the early period of the nation, acting as a collection depot for highway taxes on Appalachian toll roads, and disappearing as former landmarks of coal veins. For the song writers of Country Roads, mountains are the loved ones to which we return, embracing us in a timeless state.

A mountaineer, then, is someone native to an isolated, mountainous region and who sometimes appears to be lagging behind the rest of the modern world. So while Denver and Appalachians employ the notion of mountains to invoke a sense of home and geographical identity, the obverse of the term also emerges and along with it the negative connotations: a backward, ignorant, and uncivilized “mountaineer.”

This dual association of man-of-the-land and man-as-the-land occurred, according to Anthony Harkins, as early as the late eighteenth century. He writes:

> A second major strand from which the hillbilly image would develop was literary portrayals of people (nearly all male) of the southern mountains, initially and predominantly defined as the southern Appalachian region but later also encompassing the hill country of Arkansas and Missouri. Although some antebellum depictions of southern mountain folk emphasized their primitive brutality, antebellum writers and artist more often praised their hunting and fighting prowess, celebrating them as stalwart frontier folk capable of thriving in a hostile wilderness. These representations of the mountain folk added two important new elements to the developing hillbilly persona: a conflation of the land and the people into an indivisible cultural construct; and a conception of innate violence, represented by omnipresence of guns and rifles. (Harkins 21)
This so-called backwardness is also embraced by Appalachians as a sort of freedom. West Virginians call themselves “mountaineers” and the West Virginia state seal bears the motto “Montani Semper Liberi,” which translates as “mountaineers are always free.” *Country Roads*, when invoking the nostalgia and freedom of a West Virginia homecoming—no matter how inaccurate the myth is when examined in light of geography or the songwriter’s “authentic” knowledge of Appalachia—it also invokes these rhetorical layers of Appalachian identity as it is articulated through land and stereotype. These associations of the mountaineer with the mountain share one important feature: they are all rhetorically masculine. What of feminine associations of the landscape in American visual culture?

The landscape is not without a feminine anthropomorphic identity. Indeed, the envisioned landscape in visual culture is linked to a complex visual arts tradition that allegorizes Western identity through spectacular images of untouched land, one that is often associated with sexual attitudes about virginity and chastity. This metaphor of the untouched landscape has also been allegorized as a distinctly female form. However, the landscape was also an important rhetorical space for the expression of new nationalist and masculine sensibilities in the nineteenth century.

*Country Roads* is a cultural product that links both land and women in its imaging of the mountainous homeland of songwriters Bill Danoff and Taffy Nivert. It also enacts the projection of identity seen in landscape photographs of the nineteenth century: women-of-the-land enable a return to the land, a primitive place of “home.” Land and women are important metaphors for Appalachia, reflecting the sublime natural beauty of
the land or embodying the desecration of the land and the perceived degeneracy of its people.

_The Landscape in Nineteenth Century Visual Culture_

The beauty of the land as a political rhetorical device would emerge in the nineteenth century in discourse between government, land, and westward expansion. In this instance, the rhetoric was accompanied by a Western art tradition whose roots lay in European philosophy and Romanticism: landscape painting. There were two branches of this painting tradition, a European school driven by Romantic ideas about nature and the necessity of man’s return to a morally primitive state, and an American school whose roots were tied to the observation of nature, the European search for the sublime, and the American ideology of Manifest Destiny (Brettell 181-186).31 European landscape painting tradition in the 1830s responded to growing tensions between artists and the art establishment and the new kinds of social classes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, social revolutions, and the new European capitalist economy. Landscape painting was a means of celebrating rural culture while denying the hegemony of Western painting traditions as governed by Paris’s Salon, the British Royal Academy, and the state-sanctioned Neoclassical tradition. It was also an important move by artists toward a new modern artistic identity, one that would use the female form as the visual focus of anxiety about masculinity, industrial technology, and urbanization. Like this artistic tradition, Danoff and Nivert’s song uses land and the female subject to suggest place and emotion.

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31 See earlier discussions of the Gilded Age and Romanticism.
The song *Country Roads* rhetorically conflates women and land, thus invoking a particular Appalachian identity. In the song’s journey, the traveler is led by a loving woman across majestic land over winding, mountainous roads. Indeed, there is a prolific visual history of female figures who allegorically characterize lands colonized during the industrial age and Enlightenment period of Western culture. In this visual tradition, individual and social identities—usually masculine ones—were constructed through a dialectical relationship between self and land. In American culture, these dialectics centered on nationalist ideologies and supported a coherent sense of nationhood and capitalist expansion.

Frances K. Pohl writes at length about masculine rhetoric of landscape in American visual culture. Nineteenth-century artists, continuing the traditions begun by European artists, used flowery and grand pictorial descriptions of the land to describe the purity of the American landscape (Pohl 131). Pohl writes:

Through displays of the heroic wilderness or the cultivated landscape, American artists attempted to formulate an image of nationhood that accommodated religious, scientific, and commercial concerns, that celebrated God’s wonders while at the same time promoting the expropriation and exploitation of the land crucial to the expansionist plans of America’s political and industrial elite. (Pohl 131)

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32 One famous woman who led Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, the leaders of the 1804-6 expedition, across the Western frontier in a journey that led to the expansion of American borders to the pacific coastline was the Shoshone guide Sacajawea.
Within this visual discourse of land and expansionist ideology, moral themes structured the rhetoric of the landscape. These themes dichotomized whites versus blacks, whites versus Indians, whites versus nature, civilized versus uncivilized, or rural versus urban. Albert Boime, in his book *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting c. 1830-1865* (1991), argues that the American version of the Romantic landscape painting tradition was not only linked to particular American ideologies, but also to specific technologies of seeing that emerged from these ideologies (Boime 1). In his opening *The Magisterial Gaze* he writes:

> The privileged nineteenth-century American’s experience of the sublime in the landscape occurred on the heights. The characteristic viewpoint of contemporary American landscapists traced a visual trajectory from the uplands to a scenic panorama below. Almost invariably the compositions were arranged with the spectator in mind, either assuming the elevated viewpoint of the onlooker or including a staffage figure seen from behind that functioned as a surrogate onlooker. This Olympian bearing metonymically embraced past, present, and future, synchronically plotting the course of the empire. (Boime 1)

The landscape was a significant tool in structuring the debate about American expansion. In photographs, this expansion was legitimized through the situation of white male observers within a vast landscape that appeared to remain untouched and pure, save for the traces of exploration visible in these images. Graham Clarke writes that “[t]he photograph allowed the land to be controlled, visually at least—to be scaled and ordered,
in the way that white colonial settlement attempted politically” (Clarke 55). Timothy O’Sullivan, who worked for the United States government to photograph the western territories, contributed to this visual parceling of land (see fig. 15). Clarke writes of O’Sullivan’s work that:

[his photographs] were extreme landscapes, sublime in scale and presence (the Grand Canyon) and bereft of evidence of settlement (the Nevada Desert). The Eye, as it were, looked upon land denuded of cultural reference. Such terrains were to be painted by the likes of Albert Bierstadt and Frederick Edwin Church in the same century, and in their use of intense colour and panoramic space extolled a grandeur which renders the scene sublime. (Clarke 58-9)

Figure 15. Timothy O’Sullivan. Desert Sand Hills near Sink of Carson, Nevada. 1867, photography. The Getty Museum.
As figure 17 illustrates, “man” is swallowed by the land, literally leaving a pioneering path of footsteps across the landscape. By rendering a desolate landscape at the rhetorical moment that it is “touched” by a white gaze and physically marked by white footsteps, O’Sullivan and others suggest a kind of colonial ownership, establishing a connection with the land at the expense of Native Americans and other minorities.

Martin Berger supports Clarke’s argument that the landscape functioned as a space within which nineteenth-century American whiteness could be enacted. In describing how this whiteness was encoded in photographs by Carleton Watkins in the second half of the nineteenth century, Berger writes:

> For European-Americans, whiteness was not a stand-alone construct but one produced by a confluence of other dominant markers of identity. Objects were coded white to the extent that they exhibited (valued) traits associated with their essential nature. In other words, the whitest objects possessed positive cultural resonance and also expressed valued secondary traits that epitomized what was seen as the intrinsic nature of those objects. The uniquely masculine geological forms at Yosemite—powerful, singular, and civilized—came to be considered paradigmatically white. Whiteness is thus a metalabel of identity, in play when other dominant indicators valued by European-Americans are appropriately attached to an object or person. (See fig. 16; Berger 57)

Generically, the landscape was a visual trope that enabled its physical domination. And, as figure 18 illustrates, the “best general view” is one that is determined by the
photographer, establishing a path to be followed by visitors to these sites and thereby establishing the boundaries of their experience in these western spaces. The photographer maps the gaze for the American audience, establishing masculine privilege and making him “monarch of all he surveys.”

Figure 16. Carleton Watkins. *Yosemite Valley from the Best General View*. 1868. Photograph.

Because of the veracity of the photograph as a documentary medium, it was used more as a viewing and measuring device that enabled a sense of ownership over the land. This rhetorical vision was predicated on a white male viewer who would empathize with the photographer, an alignment of vision produced by a history of viewing that positioned the observer and assumed that he occupied a masculine perspective. Jonathon Crary
writes of the camera obscura, a Renaissance invention that enabled accurate renderings of the landscape and progenitor to the camera, that this tendency to physically and psychological structure vision is as old as the modern period itself:

Beginning in the late 1500s the figure of the camera obscura beings [sic] to assume a pre-eminent importance in delimiting and defining the relations between observer and world. Within several decades the camera obscura is no longer one of the many instruments or visual options but instead the compulsory site from which vision can be conceived or represented. Above all it indicates the appearance of a new model of subjectivity, the hegemony of a new subject-effect. (See fig. 17; Crary 244)

Figure 17. Athanasus Kircher. *Large Portable Camera Obscura.* 1646. Engraving.

By performing what the author terms “individuation,” the camera obscura was able to define, isolate, and establish autonomy for its viewing subject. Crary aligns this
rhetorical experience with Western philosophers, such as Renee Descartes, and their attempts to map interior and exterior experiences. The history of viewing images through such devices reveals the codependence of identity and the visual, and identity and political agency. These align as masculine positions in the examples discussed thus far. However, there are also fantasies of landscapes that allegorize them as feminized spaces to be conquered and mythologized. Photographic devices and media made this difficult as they present a “literal” world. So it was in print media that the woman was envisioned as the land in visual culture, a practice that began in European art.

In prints, the land was sometimes represented as a continent, which depicted the Americas as a Greek goddess, standing in contrapposto in classical garb next to her sister continents Europa, Africa, and Asia. The deployment of the female form as personification in elaborate allegories is a Neoclassical art tradition; sculptures, paintings, and architecture revived the classical language, forms, and subjects of ancient Greece and Rome, using them as a kind of class-based visual language that merged the past with the present (Crow 55-81).
Indeed in mid-nineteenth century Europe, when landscape painting emerged, new allegorical figures appeared in paintings depicting contemporary political events and conflicts. One of the best known works that employs the female subject as an allegorical rallying point for the French is Eugène Delacroix’s *The 28th of July: Liberty Leading the People*, painted in 1830 (see fig. 20).

The French king Charles X was challenged by the public in a street insurrection on July 28, 1830 for his autocratic rule and corruption. Delacroix rendered the event as an allegory of victory and valor, using a large female figure to represent freedom and the
French spirit. Thomas Crow writes that Delacroix had drawn on non-French sources to establish classical rhetoric in his painting. Crow argues that:

Delacroix turned to his immediately previous personification of the same urgent demands: a change in headgear to the Phrygian cap of the great Revolution (the mark of a freed slave in antiquity) and *Greece* becomes Marianne, emerged from the long darkness of royal tyranny to fight for France. In that she is a woman, she completes the whole of humanity; in that she can be nude, she represents the natural condition of humankind, suffocated by oppression but revealed again in revolt. (Crow 80)

In Delacroix’s allegorical female figure, freedom is represented by a classical nude, simultaneously linked to the moment of revolt and to the first freedmen of ancient Greece two millennia prior vis-à-vis her classical garb and purified nude form thus preventing the viewer from seeing her as a “real” woman. Freedom, in this instance, is also France as she carries the French flag and rallies the fighters in the revolt behind her—a goddess whose tattered garments signify the imperative battle between two ideologies: freedom and oppression.
America, too, has been allegorized as a classical female figure. The best known example is *Liberty Enlightening the World* (commonly known as the *Statue of Liberty*),
sculpted by Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi, gifted to the United States by the French government, and dedicated on October 28, 1886 (History and Culture; see fig. 19).


Allegorical women appeared in nearly every medium and were institutionalized as part of the national rhetoric of America’s classical inheritance. Francis K. Pohl, in writing about the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, describes a stock certificate published in the nineteenth century using women figures as allegories for the American landscape (see fig. 20). In her discussion of the F. O. C. Darley and Stephen J. Ferris *Centennial Stock Certificate* from 1874-5, she writes:
The stock certificate is divided into three registers, each containing groupings of figures that, together, frame the text in the center. The main characters in the top register are women—not historical characters but allegorical representations of continents and concepts. America, dressed in the classical garb of Liberty and wearing a liberty cap, stands in the center, her arms extended in a welcoming gesture to either side. (Pohl 241)

Lady Liberty represents a particularly American reading of the classical allegory. Her widespread arms, in conjunction with the value of a stock certificate—a document that represents the value of exchange in a market based on commodities—invite the viewer to see America as a land of wealth. Liberty represents the abundance of America, her land, classical heritage (and therefore civilized status), and capital wealth. Her open arms invite us to step into their comforting circle, to be nurtured by her wealth. Women-as-classical-personifications of freedom and nation were yet another manifestation of the beauty of the “New World” written about by explorers and depicted by landscape painters as sublime.

Image devices helped establish a particular viewing relationship between observer and subject, founding a masculine gaze all viewers were meant to adopt when viewing these subjects. In American visual culture, the landscape operated as a masculine space in two ways: one in which masculine power is expressed and one in which masculine fantasies are allegorically realized. These visual rhetorics relate to the mountaineer, working within a larger visual system in which masculine identity was dependent upon
spatial and allegorical expressions. Isolation was the necessary means for establishing white masculine dominance in the American frontier—the absence of Native Americans in such paintings lent credence to the belief that God intended for the U.S. to expand westward. Whereas isolation for the mountaineer suggested something else altogether: the absence of hegemonic masculinity in a place long ago colonized.33 By the mid 1930s, the hillbilly came to represent nature-gone-wrong, appearing as a “threatening and organic force of nature,” according to Harkins (see fig. 21; Harkins 115).


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33 Sharon R. Bird defines hegemonic masculinity as a normative set of homosocial behaviors enacted among men that are established through repetition, marking of difference, and competition. In her essay “Welcome to the Men’s Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity,” Bird writes that “When it is understood among heterosexual men in homosocial circles that masculinity means being emotionally detached and competitive and that masculinity involves viewing women as sexual objects, their daily interactions help perpetuate a system that subordinates femininity and nonhegemonic masculinities. Nonhegemonic masculinities fail to influence structural gender arrangements significantly because their expression is either regulated to heterosocial settings or suppressed entirely” (Bird 120).
Billy DeBeck’s 1930s comic strip *Barney Google*, the comic from which *Snuffy Smith*, an iconic hillbilly comic character, emerges, aligned the mountaineer with nature as a threat. Anthony Harkins writes that:

DeBeck also relied on many of the same tropes and themes as his literary predecessors. In the early months of the mountain episodes, he portrayed the mountaineers as impoverished (Google’s “estate” is nothing but a run down shack similar to other domiciles in the region); ignorant (Google expresses shock that there is no school or kindergarten); and culturally isolated (in a strip titled “Catching Up with History!,” a mountain woman who serves as Barney’s maid has never seen a movie but has heard that D. W. Griffith is planning to direct the new film *Birth of a Nation*). In his most dramatic panels, he presents his mountain man as an almost supernatural force of potential violence that emerges spontaneously from the surrounding woods. (Harkins 114)

In DeBeck’s image, the mountaineer jabs Barney Google in the back with his firearm. Spatially, the mountaineer emerges from the forest. His clothing, texture, and swarthy face all suggest a physical kinship with the shadows and textures of the forest. This physiognomic alignment continues the relationship between man and nature. Because of the means through which he chooses to “settle” his argument with the outsider, this mountaineer demonstrates that he has moved too far into the darkness, too far from the civilized world, too far into nature.
The mountaineer’s morphology as a hillbilly defies a teleological study of this visual history. Because of the interrelations of tropes between dominant visual systems (like art), racial and class-based ideologies (the hillbilly as a foil for whiteness), and other pertinent identity tropes linked to these images across time, the hillbilly should also be studied thematically.

Normative Families and Non-Normative Hillbillies: The Rhetoric of Kin

Sago Miners’ Kin Seek Truth, Solutions: West Virginia Governor Calls Hearing a Step toward ‘Closure’

Headline
May 2 2006
CNN, cnn.com

Kin Lay Blame at Hearing on Mine Disaster

Christopher Maag
Headline
May 5, 2006
New York Times, nytimes.com

Local magistrate Chad Brock said the deaths would touch many lives. "There's not going to be a family that's not affected in some way," he said. "You either know them or you're kin to them."

Quote from “Five Dead in Kentucky Coal Mine Blast; One Walks Away”
May 20, 2006
Fox News, foxnews.com

Miners’ Kin Demand Answers

Video from “Sago Survivor Sues Mine Companies”
August 23, 2006
CBS News, cbsnews.com

On January 2, 2006, an explosion in Upsher County West Virginia’s Sago Mine left thirteen men dead and one disabled. On May 20, 2006, a coal mining accident killed 5 miners in Darby Mine No. 1 in Harlan County, Kentucky—the same site of the 1973
miners’ strike against the Brookside mine operators and the Duke Power Company as well as the subject of Barbara Kopple’s 1976 documentary film *Harlan County, USA*, which recounted the miner uprising. In these news stories online in the winter of 2006, one word kept surfacing, both in the statements made by witnesses and in the headlines of newspapers. Frequently, authors, commentators, journalists, and television news correspondents used the word “kin” to describe these family units. Through the context and repetition of its use, the use of the word by CNN, *The New York Times*, CBS, and others changed the nature of its meaning, imbuing it with rhetorical inflections that not only invoked visions of family, but also of clans, feuding hordes, and extreme emotional responses (see figs 24, 25, and 26).

“Kin” on its own is innocuous; but when combined with scenes of mourning Appalachians, angry outbursts, and small town poverty, it invokes a particular visual history. As Roland Barthes suggested, images have two levels of meaning: overt and covert codes that operate through layers of meaning. But the rhetoric of the image is not only established by text attached to images; when such identities, as with Barthes’ example of the Panzini advertisement’s “Italianicity,” are ubiquitous enough the image can link to non-linked text (Barthes, 137). Since these identity rhetorics work as dependent visual and textual frames, one merely needs to present one (in the right context) to invoke the other.

Benedikt Feldges pushes this system further by characterizing the evolution of potent visual meanings as one that transitions from sign, symbol, and then icon (Feldges 213). Discussing this process, Feldges writes that potent symbols “begin to develop
iconic patterns of visual signs that can be memorized, which development adds to their symbolic comprehensibility within larger groups of visual terms” and thus leading to increasingly dense visual codes (212). The term “kin” is just such a product when framed in terms of Appalachian experience, contexts, and relations. Kin becomes an iconic concept with a visual history that is richly dense, performing what Feldges describes as: “a form of iconicity [that] impacts understanding by comparing visual signs to their counterparts within visual literacy, which are drawn both from past individual life experience and from socially traded visual signs” (212). In the context of cyber media images, “kin” no longer conveyed the rich familial traditions of Appalachians; it became a tool used in the specularization of disaster and grief, defining victims’ families as specifically Appalachian and framing them for the public as the hillbillies of yore. All they lacked were shotguns, overalls, and whiskey jugs.34

The frequency of use, contexts, and the different levels of its meaning(s)—assuming that it can be both a generic term for family as well as a colloquial term for family specific to Appalachia—are rhetorical inflections of “kin” with specific connotations for Appalachian identity. As Feldges suggests, this production of iconicity is a process that occurs over time and through a context of contrasts. In the case of “kin” a non-normative family identity is invoked because the normative core does not need to

34While by no means solid proof of targeted cultural othering of Appalachians, the absence of the word in media coverage of another disaster, the August 6, 2007 Crandall Canyon Mine collapse in Utah, underscores the relational specificity of its use in reference to Appalachia. Indeed, as the Fox News quote above suggests, Appalachians themselves employ the term, suggesting that both within and without the region the word is strongly associated with Appalachia. Is the word Appalachian, then, a sign of ethnic identity that is specific to Appalachians in geographic Appalachia? Of course this word is used in other contexts in reference to other families; but, is there a particular rhetorical level of the word that aligns it with the region in our imagination? In other words, why and how is it used to describe the people of Appalachia?
be defined; the normal “goes without saying.” It is through the specific use of the term in this moment of history that determines its relation to Appalachian identity. Indeed, another mining incident, whose similarities to the Sago disaster make it apt for comparison in this context. Because of its repeated use by the media in characterizing people involved in this mining disaster, “kin” reframes the story as iconicly Appalachian.


In the year that followed the Sago incident, the media covered the story of a mining disaster in Crandall Canyon, Utah; six miners were trapped by an accidental explosion almost three and a half miles below the earth’s surface in August of 2007. As
before, images of families, rescue efforts, and heartache appeared on television, on websites, and in newspapers. Yet, as of September 4, 2007, no online or radio news correspondent described the Utah mining families as “kin.” So, why did the media choose to describe West Virginian families and not Utahns as “kin”? The frequency of its use in coverage of the previous incident mark not the catastrophe as special—a disaster by nature is “out of the ordinary”—but delineates the people caught in the drama of tragedy as different. And, the absence of its use in coverage of Crandall Canyon points to a textual relation of “kin” to Appalachia and not “kin” as an American colloquial term for family.

Feldges’s process of iconic production is not applicable to just the production of visual iconicity, but also to visual/textual iconicity. Iconic Appalachian difference in both categories is dependent on geographical context, either literal or as metaphors of the environment. As suggested by Billy DeBeck’s image of the mountaineer (see fig. 21), the land conditions Appalachian identity. It is the source for many of the myths about Appalachians—the isolated, rugged, and fearsome land can only be occupied by isolated, rugged, and fearsome people. In this case, context marks difference in its peoples. Context, in the case of stories about the disaster, is created through the simultaneous invocation of the notion of kinship and Appalachian space.

35 Interestingly, Utah mine operator Robert E. Murray is from Appalachia and worked extensively in mines in Ohio and Kentucky; yet no mention was made of his Appalachian heritage.
Writers of the myth of Appalachia also invoked space and familial identity in order to suggest difference. Because survival in such a rugged place, from the perspective of non-Appalachians, required toughness visitors to the region commented on the conditions of domestic spaces in order to illustrate hardships for readers. For example, William Wallace Harney’s “A Strange Land and a Peculiar People,” written in 1892 nearly three decades after his late 1860s tour of post-bellum Appalachia, remarks upon both geological and ethnic peculiarities in the land and its people.
In addition to the geological and botanical curiosities the mountains afford, my companion had been moved alternately to tears and smiles by the scenes and people we met—their quaint speech and patient poverty. We passed eleven deserted homesteads in one day. Sometimes a lean cur yelped forlorn welcome: at one a poor cow lowed at the broken paddock and dairy. (Harney 48)

“Kin,” as it signifies an intense and emotional familial bond, is rhetorically Appalachian because of the people *in* the land and the land *in* the people. Indeed, the sadness conveyed by the yelping “lean cur” and the cow desperate to be milked demonstrate how ubiquitous this internal condition was in the Appalachian environment: nature herself reflected the desolation of mountain life and cries out for help.

Normative social mores are violated in this scene as well. Indeed, the father as sole caregiver for his five children is itself unnatural for a nineteenth century audience; their pitiable state is amplified by the absence of a mother. Such desolation, as the term “kin” suggests rhetorically, is invoked through relations between people—absent mother and present father, overburdened father and impoverished children—and between people and spaces—abandoned homesteads and migrant Appalachians trudging across the Appalachian mountains. In stories about Sago, “kin” is used to conceptualize the essential link between land and people in the imagination of the public. The people are “of” the land which in turn conditions people through rugged existence. These relational spheres: kin-to-kin and land-to-people, also essentially triangulates people, land, and tragedy. In Harney’s story it is poverty; in Sago it is a tragic accident.
“Kin” is therefore an Appalachian familial signifier activated by geography and bodies. When activated it invokes past, present and future identities. Of such an iconic process Feldges writes that:

As long as the familiar iconic pattern is basically preserved, every new angle also presents an emblem or an icon within a new dialectic interrelation to other symbols, adding each time a new shade of meaning to the symbol’s semantic field. Visual symbols based on an iconic pattern reference less their actual model in reality, than all those pictures that in a diachronic fashion have established the possibility of recognizing them in the first place. (Feldges 212)

So, it is not a particular identity that is teased out of the visual culture by the invocation of “kin” but a visual identificatory field in which images, ideas, and texts link to one another in a system of identity. “Kin” not only invokes negative images of Appalachians, but also collapses all regional peoples into one: poor, white, and degenerate, thereby further linking Appalachian identity to geography, natural resources, and socio-economic class. “Kin” also points to the boundaries of Appalachian identity, rhetorically establishing difference in the public sphere.

In this visual identificatory field, economic status, geography, labor, and whiteness identifies the Appalachian today, identifying in the national media a particular “kind” of people and indicting an entire region through the flaws of that stereotype. It is important to note the difference between images and caricatures in print media and television before the 1960s and images in media and film today. Harkins’s survey
presents a history of images of Appalachian difference largely comprised of transparently “made-up” examples—comic strip characters and television buffoons. These images in the past were illustrations, social commentaries on Appalachian difference. However, contemporary media examples are more “realistic” snapshots of Appalachians, reporting stories about them through the use of photographic images. These “real” images work as visual re-presentations of an unquestioned truth—no longer can we analyze works for marks of the illustrator or voices of the reporter, we are now presented with “real” bodies. Through the inclusion of such “real” images and the concomitant rhetorical shift of hyperbolized Appalachian difference to a naturalized identity, this visual identificatory system has expanded to include “real” images of Appalachian difference, presenting them as unfettered truths about these people (see figs. 27, 28, and 29). Let us consider how the identity relies on visual and linguistic tools in determining perceptions about identity.

Claire Pajaczkowska argues that the visual is itself the evolutionary means through which humans negotiate the difference between language and experience. Language is a system of meaning whose structure in building meaning occurs through antimonies or binary pairs—visible/invisible, life/death, man/woman, inside/outside, white/black, heaven/hell, good/bad, ordinary/extraordinary, normative/non-normative, just to name a few (Pajaczkowska 6-7). These antimonies fail to account for the “reality” of matter and life:

For example, our culture uses a concept of “life” that has meaning only in contrast to the antimony of “death”, and because the science of physics tells us that matter is neither created or destroyed but is transformed, there
is a contradiction between the analogical reality described by science and the reality of the digital coding of the human experience into language. This contradiction, which issues from the monological belief that language denotes reality, is symbolised [sic] in representational form by what structuralism calls ‘mediating categories’, concepts that contain contradictory ideas that are mutually exclusive to antonymic categories.

(Pajaczkowska 7)

Figure 24. Hatfields. Photographer unknown. 1897. Anthony Harkins writes that this is the “crystallization of mountaineers as violent feudists.” Second from the left in the bottom row is “Devil Anse” Hatfield, a famous West Virginia “hillbilly.”
Imagery is the way in which these antimonies are established and “imagined” difference is made “real.” For example, in religion imagery gave form to symbolic thought by anchoring abstract ideas to characteristics represented by visual forms. In the case of Appalachian identity, visual stereotypes are key in the suggestion of “otherness” as they mediate difference suggested by language, social structures, and class disparity by embodying difference in Appalachian bodies (and not in the cultural structures that oppress them). Imagery hides the instability of these categories. But images are also dependent on language. In the case of the word “kin,” its use was not to overtly declare Appalachian otherness but covertly suggest difference. In this case, textual references can be suggestive without hyperbolizing, making them difficult to challenge; “kin” can be explained away, only if we ignore other referents.

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36 There has been much recent scholarly attention given to stereotypes, whiteness, and visual culture. Maurice Berger’s 2000 book *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness* assesses the production and deployment of myths of whiteness for the preservation of ethnic, racial, and class hierarchies in a national context.
Figure 25. “Mountaineers as Simpletons.” E. W. Kemble, printed in *Harpers New Monthly* (June 1886)
Figure 26. “A Mountaineer Dame.” E. W. Kemble, printed in *Harpers New Monthly* 73, Harkins page 33. (June 1886)
Figure 27. “The construction of the ominous mountaineer; ‘Devil Anse’ Hatfield. Mr. Graves, printed in T. C. Crawford’s *An American Vendetta: A Story of Barbarism in the United States*. Harkins page 37. (1889)
Of course, not all negative images are invoked, merely those that align with the particular structures at work, embedded as they are in the consciousness of Americans ready to be foregrounded when certain codes align. One of the most important “kin” iconic sources is two feuding Appalachian families, the Hatfields and McCoys. More a conflict based on post-Civil War economic competition and the emergence of new dominant social classes in Appalachia after the Civil War destabilized the region, this feud was known to the rest of the country as a murderous conflict over territory, vendettas, and violence for the sake of violence (Harkins 36). Describing perceptions of this feud by nineteenth-century America, Anthony Harkins writes:

"Of all the conflicts in the southern mountains, none fired the public imagination more than the Hatfield-McCoy “feud” of the 1880s. Neither the first, longest, nor bloodiest interfamilial conflict in the southern Appalachians, the two families nonetheless rapidly became household names, a dubious distinction that has lasted for over 100 years. [. . .] The actual conflict had much more to do with economic disputes and interstate rivalry than a “culture of violence,” but most accounts eschewed any such political or economic analysis and instead presented it as a prime example of the irrational violence and dangerous ignorance of all rural people of the region. (Harkins 36)

These most notorious Appalachians were encapsulated in visual culture through family photographs (a “clan” portrait with firearms) and prints of infamous clan members like Devil Anse McCoy and even early prints of the proto-hillbilly “lazy mountaineer” (see
figs 26 and 29; Harkins 38). As these images gained iconic status in American visual culture they also became synecdochal references for Appalachian family structures and behaviors. By the twenty-first century, these “clannish” families could be rhetorically invoked by the mere suggestion of “clan” or Appalachian “kin,” bringing with them the characteristics of the early twentieth-century hillbilly into the next century.

Figure 28. BBC Screen Capture, “Daughter of Miner, Tallmansville, West Virginia.” <www.bbc.co.uk/1xtra/tx/weekinpictures/060106.shtml?select=05> (29 December 2007)

The young woman captured by a photographer in figure 30 for the British Broadcasting Corporation webpage textually codes as Appalachian through the
combination of expression, the camouflaje of the man’s hat, the embroidered name of
deceased NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt, and the assumption the viewer makes that she
is among family. Like the shotguns and serious gaze of the Hatfields in the family
portrait in figure 26, the new codes of Appalachian-ness are visible. Camouflage in many
parts of America is a standard in working class fashion, signifying the wearer’s affiliation
and perhaps engagement with hunting culture. The NASCAR jacket memorializes a
driver who is a hero to many Appalachians and southerners in a sport that has
Appalachian roots (moonshine ridge-running and early stock car racing that evolved out
of that mountain tradition). Both the contemporary signs in the BBC photograph and the
historical codes in the nineteenth-century Hatfield family portrait circulate as signifiers of
the same identity: West Virginian/Appalachian. What is more, the BBC also referred to
these Appalachians as “kin” suggests that the visual identificatory system extends past
the geographic borders of America. These images do not merely “float” in visual culture,
but are contextualized, deployed, and hierarchically placed according to codes of class,
race, and gender. Let us look at how this process works in studies of art, a fixed visual
system where there is a clear producer, audience, and communication, and use that as a
platform for understanding this visual system in terms of gender.

According to Griselda Pollock, the symbolic structure of the Western world is
conditioned by the “noble lineage of male textuality” (Pollock 5). In her essay “About
Canons and Culture Wars,” Pollock unpacks the psycho-social process of art production,
appreciation, and historical analysis, arguing that the privileged few of the Western art
canon are elevated not because of their abilities, genius, or aesthetic acuity. Rather, the
canon is a product of the evolution of privilege over time. Pollock reveals a structure within this process that she describes as the “patrilineal genealogy of father-son succession,” a relational structure that invisibly replicates itself in all aspects of art history because it is the fundamental social building block of Western culture (Pollock 5).37 Genius, like any hyperbolized character, cannot be materially located because it is a psycho-social condition.

This process separates the artist from the real conditions of art production. Artists become *mythic* figures in art history, a status that decontextualizes and depoliticizes them as art producers. Instead of real world events, social relations, economic privilege, or happenstance factoring into the calculus of greatness of artists in Western art history, Pollock suggests that they are mythically removed from the “real world” and, therefore, their artist-status is transformed into a mystical (and intangible) condition. If this psycho-social structure pervades all aspects of culture, then we can assume that speech is subject to this kind of social organizing where a figure is set apart from the “real” world by the process of observation. While in art history, the mythopoetic veneration of the artist *elevates* him above the everyday, this same mechanism of depoliticization can create *difference* and lower the social status of a figure in the larger context of culture. Thus the mythopoetic degeneration of the hillbilly excludes him/her from the everyday, politicizing him/her as a subject of difference.

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37 But what is particular to the discourse of art history—here a substructure that observes art and art production which is in turn a substructure of culture—is the way in which the father-son unit props up the artist as a subject of both “empirical” study when in fact he is the object of veneration; the artist is really the object of worship by scholars who spill great quantities of ink in their efforts to empirically identify the roots of talent and genius. In reality, genius is an intangible quality.
This rhetorical process of isolation and identification delineated by feminist art historians is not native to art and its histories. Indeed, this is a process in which a symbolic character evolves into an iconic one. Regardless of where this happens, this process relies on a two-fold encounter: first isolation and then contextualization. For example, notorious Appalachians were notable for their behavior and their bodies. Like the mythification of the artistic genius, the mythification of Devil Anse first removed him from the socio-economic structures and pressures of the “real world,” setting him outside of time and apart from the standards of contemporary, turn of the century American culture. Instead of being elevated by this process, the Appalachian is placed lower on the social scale and the viewer is positioned above him or her through the contextualization of Anse within a visual system of Appalachian identity.

The young woman in figure 30 experiences a similar isolation and contextualization. By focusing on her emotional response the photographer establishes her as a stand-in for all emotional responses during this event. Through other media characterizations of these Appalachians as “kin,” the young woman is contextualized as universally Appalachian. Thus this photograph, like images of Devil Anse, all situate the Appalachian as other psycho-socially through image and textual codes of the past. As both an antimony to modernity or “normal” American culture, the Appalachian in imagery is the opposite of the genius in art history—the genius sets the standard at the top of the scale of intellect and class and people like Appalachians set the foundation for this scale (occupying a place classified as “kitsch” by art theorists such as Clement Greenberg, Greenberg 540). Such imagery works within the psycho-social scale of class
and intellectual identity as a mediator between language and experience, simultaneously explaining and justifying the low status of Appalachians in American culture.

The word “kin” is one contemporary thread wherein the de-elevation of Appalachian identity occurs. In other images, Appalachians are mythically constructed as separate from the “everyday” of American culture, different in their cultural practices, and ignorant of the “standards” of polite society. Beginning with the mountaineer’s transformation into the hillbilly—Devil Anse Hatfield, for example, this process happens linguistically and visually as such identity structures (and judgments) are imposed on them rather than revealed within them. Most importantly, this process occurred through the production, circulation, reception, and subsequent naturalizing effects of such images.

Textually, Appalachian identity is socialized into being through internal “realities” confirmed by external imaginings through a kind of loop of information and identity between the people of Appalachia and America conducted through the medium of culture. This is not merely an aural or linguistic process. Indeed, text and sound only have verity as identifiers because of the rich visual history that they link to, accompany, invoke, and suggest. This relationship is dependent on the abundant visuality of American culture. Therefore, Pollock’s analysis of the discourse of greatness in the discipline of art history is useful in making sense of how Appalachians are visually socialized in relation to the rest of America.

In this system, the construction and study of identity are important ideologies carried by imagery. Yet images alone are not enough to congeal identity; they require a backdrop or context for the process to be complete. The role that the Appalachian
landscape plays as the geography of “wilderness,” source of natural resources, and the
timelessness of the descendants of mountaineer peoples is critical in this process of
identity formulation. Land is the framework and sometimes the architecture of identity.
In Sago, Appalachian ethnicity is invoked not just by the people but also by the site of the
disaster: a West Virginia coal mine. The land is tragically misshapen by natural resource
extraction practices just as the people are tragically misshapen by the hard demands of
life in the mountains. The land is the setting of “rurality,” the context that “produced” the
backwardness of Appalachians. And, the land is the “untouched” vista, the signifier of
American bounty. The land is also the site of those Appalachian mountains, rolling peaks
that demand rigorous living and promise wealth through the lure of black gold, hidden in
their veins, waiting for a country hungry for energy to extract it.

Finally, identities are conditioned by the history of Appalachia. “Kin”
rhetorically invokes visual histories like those of the Hatfield’s and the McCoy’s family
feuds, framing the scenes of mining accident victims’ mourning families and their
righteous anger within these other stories of anger, feuding, and violence. Images of
tearful women and angry men today in Appalachia are linked through this term with that
history. This linkage rhetorically eclipses the poignancy and singularity of the tragic loss
of loved ones, coloring the experience as particularly Appalachian. Therefore, the
spectacle of emotion transmitted by the media to the rest of the country (and the
community members of the World Wide Web) was the rhetorical focus of these news
stories. Once again, America watched mountain folk come unhinged, calling out in anger
and demanding justice, showing the world their true nature.
Even though no Hatfield-McCoy image nor caricatures of these people in hillbilly
garb circulated with photographs of Sago families, for Appalachians sensitive to these
stereotypes they were invoked through the alignment of visual codes and textual codes
(emotion, tragedy, rural identity, “kin”). So, while the international audience may not
have seen “hillbillies,” Appalachians watching did.38

38 Identity and imagery are interwoven into the class structures of the American subconscious in
such a way that class is visible when it is low class—i.e. through absence, the lack of wealth or knowledge
of normative standards of behavior—and invisible when it is normative, the most pervasive kind of which
is white privilege. Therefore, non-Appalachians not socialized through visual culture images of hillbillies,
rednecks, and white trash identities used to characterize themselves or their people may not see the covert
nature of such social images. Those who are sensitive to it are because of their “difference” and those who
are not can negotiate class boundaries because of their privilege. For Appalachians the codes are very
clear.
The relationship between land, people, and family identity has been studied by numerous scholars of Appalachian studies (Harkins and Biggers, just to name a few). Yet the roles that gender and sexuality play in constituting Appalachian identity in this visual identificatory system have yet to be analyzed. A next step in Appalachian visual
studies is to examine the ways in which gender and sexuality also frame, amplify, and condition the reading and effects of stereotypes. In other words, a cultural history of Appalachian identities in visual culture must theorize the ways in which these stereotypes function as signs of difference “within” Appalachia.  

Accompanying these staple images of Appalachians in American visual culture are media characterizations of notorious Appalachians—real people who are often stuffed into the molds of stereotypes by the way they are depicted and the language used to describe them. Pfc. Lynndie England was characterized as a “hillbilly twit” by Rolling Stone Magazine and the news media was obsessed with 1977 Miss West Virginian Patsy Ramsey’s “obsession” with a beauty queen daughter, Jonbenet Ramsey (see discussions below). The stories these Appalachians are associated with are not what make them notable; rather, their “hillbilly” pedigrees are highlighted as necessary contexts for understanding their essential, inherent difference. Add the media characterizations of these figures to the pantheon of hillbilly images, a repertory that includes shows like The Beverly Hillbillies or comedic skits like Saturday Night Live’s Appalachian Emergency Room, and the larger cultural pattern of the persistent othering of Appalachians emerges, a visual system that has increasingly relied on gender and sexuality difference to amplify

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39 For example, women of Appalachia experience pressures particular to the regional identities that American visual culture projects on them; in a culture that objectifies them, Appalachian women not only experience pressure to maintain a “perfect” body but are also indicted for their inability to condition their bodies accordingly. Being skinny, responding to pressures of cosmetics, and embracing fashion cycles are pressures not lessoned in a context of poverty; television has ensured the circulation of such physical standards to nearly every American. While American women in general experience these pressures and respond to them, Appalachian women are indicted for their inability to act on them when they are consistently represented as “trash,” typed as obese or de-sexualized altogether.

40 Proof of the media’s continued view that there is some truth to these stereotypes was further demonstrated by CBS’s attempts to host a “Beverly Hillbillies” reality television series in Appalachia—reality in the sense that there are people who look like the Clampetts and would compete for money to bring these fictional characters to real life.
stereotypes. Let us first look at the hillbilly as a masculine character and theorize his
gender codes in relation to femininity and American masculinity.

*The Hillbilly and Hegemonic (Heterosexist) Masculinity*

In order for the hillbilly man to be characterized as less than the standard for
masculinity, he must be pictured without those requisite standards. In order for this
displacement to rhetorically function, it requires the presence of a female subject who
provides gendered contrasts that clarify the topsy-turvy-ness of gender roles
characterizing the hillbilly’s world. The hillbilly man is lazy, ignorant, and drunk, an
unproductive figure who does nothing to elevate himself, a status that is amplified by his
hard-working wife (see fig.4 Interior of a Typical Arkansaw Home). Another mechanism
determines sexual morality. This stereotyping underscores the hillbilly identity’s
dependency on gender as the necessary contrast that constructs the hillbilly man as lazy
and subsequently sexually deviant. Once masculine anchors—labor or hard work—is
removed, then other cultural “norms” are overturned (such as white hegemony).

As texts like “clan” or “kin” are applied to Appalachians, other attributes follow.
Eventually, the stigmas of inbreeding and incest are associated with these people. By the
mid-twentieth century, this familial propensity morphs into sexual deviance among the
men and hyper-sexuality among the women. If the hillbilly man is lazy, ignorant, and
drunk than the hillbilly woman is aggressive, overly fecund, and masculine. For a
cultural context that prizes women as feminine and men as masculine, the Appalachian
woman is often rendered as at least as unnatural or uncivilized as the man because she
takes on the duties he lays aside and thus striping herself of the passivity and femininity
desired by western culture. If there is a clear and articulate history of the emergence of the mountain man and the later hillbilly man, then there is an obverse history of the hillbilly woman.

Not only are Appalachians such as the Hatfields othered as hillbillies, rednecks, white trash, crackers, and rural degenerates, men and women of Appalachia in these identities are separated in several ways from a so-called norm at the center of American identity, through race and class but also through deviant genders and sexualities. There are many examples of this process of identity construction occurring through engagement with visual culture. Images, such as the 1897 photograph of the Hatfield family, are used to prove that Appalachians are “clan-like” (see fig. 24). This famous photograph is a family portrait with all of the men, women, and children lined up in front of a family home. Most of the women and children sit in the first row while most of the men of the family stand in the back row, posing with hand guns and shotguns. All of the figures are austere in their Sunday best. Harkins identifies this image as iconicly feudist, supporting the notion that these hill families were angry fighters (36-8). The notoriety of William Anderson “Devil Anse” Hatfield as the quintessential hillbilly was constructed in magazines of the time, which often depict him wearing a misshapen hat, overhauls, and a long beard while standing without shoes and carrying his shotgun (see fig. 29). This male identity echoes the masculine mountaineer. His bare feet indict him as uncouth and impoverished, pointing to his generation’s failure to live up to the masculine work ethic of his progenitors. As an image that contributes to the construction of a particular kind of American masculinity, it doubly binds him as both a impoverished masculine male and a
man of a fading American past. This nostalgic view of the American male appears in a period of American history when artists and writers were seeking an authentic and essentially American brand of identity and producing the coherent stereotype “the hillbilly.”

There are two important ways in which difference among stereotypes rhetorically functions to constitute the mechanism of stereotyping itself. First, the stereotyped figure is the inversion of a “normative” set of behaviors. This is an inversion of normative and non-normative masculinities. Initially, in figures like “Devil Anse” Hatfield, Appalachian masculinity is based contradictingly on aggression and laziness; his reputation as a violent man pairs with images of the hillbilly moonshiner to create two iconic hillbilly tropes. Aggression illustrated in these stereotypes points to a state of corruption brought on by isolation. Laziness (along with dirtiness and alcoholism) is, pictorially, the proof that their poverty is their fault. Hillbilly men are lazy because they lack the attributes of normative masculinity and whiteness. American masculinity is constructed by demonstrating a possession of some sort of symbolic power. Symbolic power is an important gender device that occurs throughout history in American visual culture.
Decades after the notorious Devil Anse, masculinity, as forged in works such as illustrator Norman Rockwell’s all-American-boy, becomes inseparably linked with the American work ethic, motivation, and action. Eric Segal argues, in his essay “Norman Rockwell and the Fashioning of American Masculinity,” that Rockwell’s works set up two kinds of male figures as opposing masculinities: the all-American boy scout/baseball-playing boy and the upper-class, overdressed coddled boy. Segal writes that these archetypes emerge as opposing masculinities and that: “Such an account [of these images] dovetails with an incipient stage of what Theodore Roosevelt dubbed the ‘strenuous life,’ a response to the anxiety about manliness which perceived salvation of the Anglo-Saxon race itself in well-reared American adolescents” (see fig. 32; Segal 1996, 267). Segal’s two antimonies exist within the higher orders of American class: rich middle-class boys and “normal” middle-class boys. Thus both kinds of masculinity are normative, only by varying degrees. The hillbilly, however, moves downward in this class scale. The further from middle class one moves, the closer to nature, emotion, and primitiveness a character gets.

If both Harkins and Segal are correct, then American identities are at their most negative in times of anxiety, brought on by challenges to masculine identity. Rockwell sought to differentiate himself from European masculinity; creators of hillbilly characters sought to differentiate themselves from poor whites. The hillbilly, like Rockwell’s sissy boys, shored up American masculinity using active life and labor as moral characteristics that defined normative masculinity. The hardworking figure, it seems, was the only acceptable kind of American man. The sissy boy and hillbilly both fail to meet this
uniquely American standard of masculinity, one that taps into labor rhetoric native to American culture (Theodore Roosevelt and the “strenuous life”).

Two more waves of cultural anxiety revived gender stereotypes about Appalachians, corresponding to other moments where American masculinity asserted itself in the face of cultural changes that threatened (white) hegemonic masculinity. The hillbilly thrived in television and film in the mid-twentieth century and then again in these media in the last part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The civil unrest of the 1950s and ‘60s threatened the autonomy and privilege of many white Americans (Harkins 174). In other words, as American masculinity cycled through visual culture to reassert itself throughout the twentieth century, its rhetoric became increasingly potent.

Stereotyping of both men and women also took on a (deviant) sexually explicit edge absent from early hillbilly images. The hyper-sexuality of hillbillies in Paul Henning’s 1967 The Beverly Hillbillies, mainstreamed by characters like Jethro and his Elvis-like good looks and Ellie Mae in her virginal charm and tight-fitting clothes, was accompanied that same year with the sexual degeneracy of hillbillies lampooned in the television series The Monkees in the episode “Hillbilly Honeymoon” (Meyerson 1967). Centering on the love interest between Ella Mae Chubber and Monkee Davy Jones, the episode includes a character named Uncle Raccoon, played by Monkee Peter Tork, who allegedly has eight wives, one a coyote and another a bear. Not only is Uncle Raccoon a bigamist but he also engages in bestiality. This sexually deviant masculinity reaches its peak in the characters of James Dickey’s 1970 novel Deliverance. Made into a film in
1972, *Deliverance* became staple of American cinema, enjoying regular television viewing.

![Figure 31. John Boorman. *Deliverance*. Film poster. 1972. IMDB.](image)

During a hunting and canoeing expedition of the Cahulawassee River prior to its damming, four Georgian men encounter trouble at the hands of “backwoods” men who capture, rape, and threaten to kill members of the party. The four main characters, Lewis, Ed, Drew, and Bobby, embody the strenuous life prescribed by Teddy Roosevelt by varying degrees: Ed, who is often seen with his tobacco pipe and looks contemplative,
and Bobby, who is slightly paunchy and is often anxious and sweaty, are less masculine than the sportsman and hunter Lewis, the group leader. The two mountain men who attack Ed and Bobby are hunters, men of the land (read as both hillbillies and mountaineers). These mountain men lack the civilizing agency that makes Lewis’ masculinity appear normative and therefore more potently natural than theirs: heterosexuality. Further, this deviant masculinity is particularized as Appalachian when other social mores are violated, such as breeching the division between humans and animals. The association of Bobby with a pig, made by one of the mountain-man rapists, marks the act of rape as a sign of both bestiality and sexual violation. In the picturing of mountain men’s sexuality as rape, homosexuality itself is marked as deviant, similar in its “un-naturalness” to the sexual abuse of animals. These stereotypes of mountain men are not just the product of anxieties about people of Appalachia and white identity; they are also the subjects through which debates about sexuality take place.

Encapsulated also in the storyline is a particular brand of deviant motherhood, which is revived later in twenty-first century horror films set in Appalachia. John Boorman’s film as a modern tale of journey, threat, and urban man’s discovery of rugged masculinity offers a particularly tragic image of an Appalachian mother. During the “Dueling Banjos” scene near the beginning of the film, we glimpse the interior of a poor Appalachian family’s home in a rural village where the mother sits inside in the dark with her numerous children, most of whom are sick or deformed. The mother appears “normal” as she offers succor to the child she holds, contrasting sharply with the abnormal children who surround her. In this instance, the Appalachian mother is like
Harney’s occupants in the rural, broken-down cabin (Harney 48). The African American woman, apparently a freed slave, is indicted by Harney for the dirty state of her home, insinuating that it is her “absent master” who is to blame for her inability to keep a tidy domestic sphere and that only under supervision can she be expected to have a home that meets Harney’s standards. These cabin dwellers are also the characters in C. Kesslor’s *Interior of a Typical Arckansaw Home* with the clutter of bodies and signs of poverty (see fig. 4). Like these scenes, *Deliverance* indicts the mother for the state of her family.

Boorman also suggests blame by the way in which he frames the scene—juxtaposing interior and exterior spaces so that we understand that the dark interior of the home is meant to *hide* the hideousness of the children. Once we see them, we are meant to understand that the combination of isolation, questionable familial relations (in the form of inter-family marriages), and poverty bring out the worst in this Appalachian family’s gene pool; their physiognomy testifies to the deviance of the family structure. The only coherent sign of civilization comes when one of the children, using a banjo, engages in a musical duel with one of the story’s characters who is a guitar player. Of course, the child is incapable of speaking and thus his music speaks for him, signifying some semblance of the civilization once known by ancestors of these mountain whites.

The banjo itself has come to represent a film viewer’s entrance into the alternative universe of Appalachia. In perhaps a re-conceptualization of the *Deliverance* story as a horror film, Neil Marshall’s 2005 film *Descent* anchors his story in the Appalachian mountains, even though it was filmed in the United Kingdom, through the music the women listen to as they are driving through the mountains. The faint strumming of a
banjo can be heard on the radio as a group of women begin their journey to the mountains of North Carolina to go spelunking. The protagonist is a recent widow who lost her daughter and husband in an accident the previous year and sets out on a trip with her friends to get her life back on track. The women find themselves trapped in the caves they are exploring, threatened by an ancient species of human cannibals who have adapted to the cave climate and darkness. The theme of motherhood in this film is more ambiguous. First, the protagonist finds herself drawn into the cave by what she believes to be the ghost of her child, making her feel as if she belongs there. Second, the deviant children of Deliverance are re-imagined as hideous cave creatures who themselves are the threat to the party of adventurers, whereas in Deliverance mountain men are the sexual and murderous threats to the exploring hunters in Georgia. The deviance has shifted into more horrific terms in Descent, collapsing all Appalachians into a hideous race of cave monsters who can no more stand the light of day than the children in the cabin in Deliverance. In both films, the landscape is more than a backdrop for the drama, it becomes a significant player in the narrative—the wildness in Deliverance the setting of Georgian city-dwellers’ hunting playground and mountain men’s sexual crime scene and the sublime darkness of the mountains’ dark and seeping interiors in Descent the setting for the heinous deaths of beautiful women. How does the hillbilly evolve from a haplessly lazy buffoon to a monster? Perhaps an understanding of discourses on sexuality will illuminate this.

Homosexuality, until 1973, was characterized as a medical disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (De Cecco 11). While difficult to
prove a direct correlation between these images of sexual deviants and the national
debate on homosexuality and subsequent medical definitions, it is highly probable that
such a relationship exists because the rhetoric of these images reach a critical mass during
the counter-culture, Gay Liberation, and sexual revolution movements of the late sixties
and early seventies. As Harkins and others have convincingly demonstrated,
Appalachian bodies reflect many kinds of anxieties centering on whiteness, class, and
gender and at this moment in history that anxiety shifted to the heterosexual body. Only
hillbilly men, however, are depicted as homosexual (which is meant to be read as sexual
deviance). Hillbilly women are depicted as hyper-heterosexual.

*From Ellie Mae to Daisy Duke*

Appalachian women have also been subjected to stereotypes about their sexuality.
Characters like Ellie Mae from CBS television program *The Beverly Hillbillies* circulate
images of hillbilly women who are hypersexual in spite of their poverty. This sexuality is
naturalized as part of women’s nature through the dichotomous characterizations of
women like Ellie Mae as both sexy and naively virginal. Ellie Mae is not promiscuous,
so her sexuality is not quite a conscious behavior thus locating that behavior biologically.
However, her short pants and tight blouses frame her as an object of sexual attention and
pleasure for a viewer. Sexual pleasure through viewing has been an important subject in
both art history and women’s studies. Irit Rogoff, in her essay “Studying Visual Culture”
writes:

> The discussion of spectatorship *in* (rather than *and*) sexual and cultural
difference, begun with feminist film theory and continued by the critical
discourses of minority and emergent cultures, concerns itself with the gaze as desire, which splits spectatorship into the arena of desiring subjects and desired objects. (Rogoff 31)

Figure 32. Donna Douglas as “Ellie Mae.” *The Beverly Hillbillies*. 1966. IMDB.

For a character like Ellie Mae and later embodiments of her sexual characteristics in television figures like Daisy Duke from the show *The Dukes of Hazzard* in the 1980s,
spectatorship of the female body is the essential mechanism through which these women are stereotyped as sexual objects.

Figure 33. Catherine Bach as “Daisy Duke.” *The Dukes of Hazzard.* 1981. IMDB
While the stereotypes of hillbilly men circulate specific versions of deviant masculinity and sexuality, stereotypes of hillbilly women circulate larger patriarchal narratives that do more than other them as Appalachians. Image history and philosophy in western culture have been critical in understanding how viewing relationships are established between humans and objects and between men and women. Western culture’s academic and philosophic knowledge posits a universal view of humanity and the world around us while in reality this knowledge is perceived and constructed from a specific subject position. Immanuel Kant, in his 1790 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, posits that aesthetic experience is based on disinterested judgment—that the internal parts of a work that make it great are not the source of greatness or aesthetic stimulation but rather the combination of the formal properties’ commensurability with our mind’s cognitive abilities (imagination, judgment, reason) (Kant 189-92). These abilities are what cause a quickening or stimulation of the mind.

If we extend this cognitive interaction with visual imagery from Kant’s understanding of “art” to a larger visual culture, the judgment transforms from one of intellectual delight to one that determines a lack of something in an observed image. In other words, viewers are engaging in a kind of disinterested judgment shaped by the ways we are conditioned to look at objects and people. This disinterest parallels the function of visual imagery as modes of typification. Women are aligned with the visual, as femininities and behaviors amplify the to-be-looked-at-ness of femininity and sexuality that Western culture socializes and circulates. Through various philosophic traditions (Cartesian Dualism, original sin, philosophic examination of “Beauty”), women are
socially shaped as passive and material, often denied the intellectual depth favored in
Western culture (Bordo 73). Women, as material (over men as immaterial), can be
molded. Feminist theorists like Susan Bordo argue that women feel pressure from such
materiality, that we should mold our own bodies. Such control is read as moral control.
Bordo writes:

At different historical moments, out of pressure of cultural, social, and
material change new images and associations emerge. In the sixteenth
century the epistemological body begins to be imagined not only as
deceiving the philosopher through untrustworthy senses (a Platonic theme)
but also as the site of our locatedness in time and space [Bordo’s italics] [. . .]. (Bordo 4)

Locatedness leads, for women, to the need to control behavior. In contemporary culture,
pressure to conform to physical standards of beauty is meted out by visual culture: ads,
film, magazines, internet sites, television. Thus “locatedness” makes women vulnerable
targets of normative gender alignment and policing. The most empirical proof of these
visual phenomena and their effects, according to Bordo, are eating disorders and plastic
surgery. One only has to look at the effect American culture has had on other cultures to
realize the link between body image and visual culture. In her study of correlations
between eating disorders and the importing of American visual culture, Bordo writes of
Fiji culture:

Because of their remote location, the Fiji islands did not have access to
television until 1995, when a single station was introduced. It broadcasts
programs from the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. Until that time, Fiji had no reported cases of eating disorders, and a study conducted by the anthropologist Anne Becker showed that most Fijian girls and women, no matter how large, were comfortable with their bodies. In 1998, just three years after the station began broadcasting, 11 percent of girls reported vomiting to control weight, and 62 percent of the girls surveyed reported dieting during the previous months. (Bordo xv-xvi)

Hegemonic femininity is embedded within the strata of American visual culture. This kind of femininity prescribes specific standards for the body. Deviation from these standards are blamed on women’s lack of will. In the case of Appalachian women, they experience stricter standards as viewers look at their bodies not only for signs of visual agreement with hegemonic femininity, but also biological deviations from it in particularly “Appalachian” ways.
If the Ellie Mae and Daisy Duke characters exist in a larger visual matrix that conditions female identity and thus proscribes “appropriate” behavior for women, then studying revisions that such characters undergo can point to other larger power relationships to which hillbilly women connect. The first Daisy Duke character in the 1980s television series wore shorts and tight blouses and had long brown hair. She was always seen wearing high heel shoes, and in many poster images advertising the series, Daisy often poses with cars or bales of hay, much like a pin-up calendar girl posing next to classic cars.

One only has to look at this character outside of the television series to understand how the sexual fantasy of the hillbilly woman operates. In one instance, she performs
domestic chores in a way that is sexually appealing for a male viewer. At a fan’s website, Daisy is paid homage as the object of American men’s sexual desire. The site’s front page bears the title: “Hazzard County: Where we all go to worship Daisy Duke, Goddess!” (see fig. 36). Two images are below the title. The one on the left is a close-up of Daisy, who is wearing a red v-neck blouse and a pink ribbon around her throat. The one on the right is a series of changing photos that flash images of Daisy in different poses. Each pose represents a moment of action where Daisy first bends over to pick up clothes from a laundry basket, reaches into the basket, raises up, hangs the clothes and then bends over again to repeat the act. The most notable features of Daisy’s costume are her short shorts, high heels, and pantyhose. Daisy’s status as an object of a sexual gaze is naturalized by her activity; the mundane chore naturalizes her costume as “just Daisy” (one only has to think about the difficulty of doing laundry in high-heels to recognize the sexual construction of the image). Yet, her costume also proves that her femininity and sexuality are constructs; she puts on her panty hose and shoes one leg at a time.
Jay Chandraeskhar’s 2005 remake of the television series as a Hollywood film casts Texas singer and performer Jessica Simpson as the Daisy Duke of the new millennium. The “new” Daisy reflects how the body aesthetics of heterosexual femininity have changed over the last two decades; instead of the requisite Daisy Duke...
panty hose and high heels from the 1980s television show, Daisy is now smoothly tanned in her high heels. Bordo and others argue that eating disorders are the psychic internalization of social pressures that have intensified over the past two centuries for women in the West (Bordo 15). Body practices, either in the form of restrictive clothing or through diet and figure maintenance, are psychically internalized as necessary conditions of a cultivated, normative flesh: external cultural controls are internalized over time. The new Daisy no longer needs panty hose to slim her legs and make her skin shine, these are now naturalized features of her body. The panty hose represent the psychic internalization of standards of beauty over the past two decades.

This imagery does not merely separate Appalachia from a “healthy” national identity but also circulates exponentially negative images of men and women’s gender and sexuality—binding them by class, race, sexuality, gender, and social sub-status all at once. It is not enough to link class and race, as in studies of white trash, nor is it enough to link industrialization to mountain occupants and their “isolation” as tools in national political discourses. Stereotypes that circulate in visual culture link entertainment, literature, visual media, and social identity together, unifying in this case Appalachians as people of the same class, race, and deviance.

Concomitant to the highly visible images of the hillbilly, redneck, and white trash are intensely degrading and disparaging images of Appalachian sexuality—culminating in recent media depictions of “everyday” Appalachians that equate them with this visual tradition and whose rhetoric not only indict Appalachians for their laziness, but also for their ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender. Such images do not merely transmit
unfavorable perspectives of female and male identity; they also characterize their moral (un)certitude through the visibility of their sexuality. Rather than liberating, this visibility often testifies to their lack of virtue and constraint, sinisterly naturalizing these characteristics as part of an Appalachian psyche. In order for a total understanding of these stereotypes to be achieved, gender must be critically analyzed as a backdrop upon which stereotyping often plays out, and imagery must be studied as tools and sources of gender difference and hyper-heterosexual rhetoric. The phenomena of degenerate Appalachians in visual culture and the media’s circulation of images of hyper-sexual and sexually deviant Appalachian men and women are remarkable in their persistence and intensification. Let us look now at two examples where the visual identificatory system of Appalachian identity has affected two infamous Appalachian women in the twenty-first century.

Jessica and Lynndie

As the media discourse surrounding the Abu Ghraib prison scandal demonstrated in 2004, the hillbilly figure is associated with both men and women. The scandal, produced by the US military’s torture of prisoner’s in Iraq, broke when photographs of abuse by military officials was leaked to the press and circulated on the Internet. The images depicted the torture, sexual abuse, and humiliation of prisoners held by the United States military in the Iraq prison from 2003 to 2005. The scandal had a face: Appalachian and West Virginia resident Lynndie England.

Rolling Stone Magazine published an article in 2005 that excoriated her not just for her role in the abuse or repeated appearance in the images from the prison floating
around the internet and television, but for her *geographic* and stereotyped *ethnic* origins: “What a pathetic ending it was for Pvt. Lynndie England, that little hillbilly twit with the rabbit cheeks and the upturned thumb who made the words ‘Abu Ghraib’ infamous” (Taibbi 47). In the public sphere, England was indicted not just for her participation in abuse, but for her *hillbilly-ness*.

An illustration accompanying the *Rolling Stone* article depicts England standing defiantly in the center of a courtroom. The courtroom audience sits in raised seats, as if they are looking down from opera boxes. The judge and attorneys flank her as they point their long fingers at her—‘fingering’ her as the guilty criminal in a line-up. Behind her lies a steaming pile of nude bodies, presumably inspired by the pyramid formation of some of the victims photographed in Abu Ghraib. Rhetorically, England is the pile of bodies—an abject creature who revels in the debasement of humanity. The illustration, like all political cartoons, exaggerates her features. Her ears stick out from her head more dramatically than in real life and her cheeks are puffed-out. Indeed, the article’s author makes reference to her “rabbit cheeks.” Physiognomy has little to do with human character but here we see both illustrator and writer embracing the notion that her strange appearance—made strange through unflattering photographs and exaggerated illustrations—is proof positive of her inherent deviousness.

Another image from the same article juxtaposes an infamous image depicting England leading a prisoner around on a leash in the prison (a clear image of abuse) with another of England at her trial holding her newborn infant (a contrasting image of motherhood). The caption reads “The photos from Abu Ghraib (left) convicted Lynndie long before her court-martial. But in court she pleaded for mercy, claiming she’s a half-wit and a new mom” (Taibbi 47). These images and caption pose a problem for the viewer. To what extent are we to believe her version of the story, one that maintains that she was coerced into performing these acts and ordered by her superiors to violate these
prisoners? Or, are viewers encouraged to blame her biology for her behavior, a hillbilly “half-wit” who knew no better?

Figure. 37. Lynndie England at Abu Graib and at trial. “Ms. America,” Matt Taibbi, *Rolling Stone Magazine* p. 48. (October 20, 2005)

England’s image here is complicit in indicting her based on her Appalachian identity in two ways. The public disbelieves her “claims” of being a so-called half-wit. Indeed, the deliberateness of the acts committed is proved by the sheer number of photographs that have emerged from the scandal. Clearly, the torture was premeditated. England is not just in one photograph, but several. The layout of the images reveals the magazine’s own view of such a defense as spurious. The word “claims” applies to both
images—Lynndie as abuser and Lynndie as new mother. After viewing the photographs, very few Americans would have an easy time believing in England’s nurturing abilities as mother. The caption of this article image in figure 37 reads “Lynndie England reminded the world of the American tourist who stands in front of the Sistine Chapel drinking a Schlitz” (Taibbi 48). For the writer of the article and illustrator, England is a cultural embarrassment not only because of her crimes, but also because of her uncouthness, her white-trash-ness, her Appalachian difference.

The *Rolling Stone Magazine*’s juxtaposition of one of the prison abuse photos with England holding her infant cannot help but resonate with people familiar with images of “deviant” Appalachian hill folk. Many Americans have been weaned on films like *Deliverance* or *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* that depict rural whites as sexual degenerates or horseflesh-eaters. England standing on the “dog-pile” of prisoners is clearly not a “normal” woman having “normal” relations. Her grinning face, especially when juxtaposed with her serious façade during her court-martial, only enhances the view of her as a sexual deviant; she looks as if she enjoyed her job at Abu Ghraib, grinning in the manner of a witless hillbilly.

Even the U.K.’s newspaper *The Telegraph* felt the need to modify England with class and labor adjectives. Oliver Poole writes, “Eight soldiers, including Lynndie England, the 32-year-old former fast-food worker who was pictured holding the other end of the dog leash, were convicted for their involvement in the scandal, which undermined the moral authority of the Iraq invasion” (Poole). It is unclear how working in a fast-food restaurant is a helpful descriptive detail in an article about prison abuse. Fast-food as a
modifier is a means of identifying the prison scandal with global economic politics, using restaurants to signify the colonial control of the United States in a global economy—control that has occurred most visibly in the form of fast-food restaurants. England’s work in such a business has no correlative relationship to her work in the military save for the fact that both the military and the restaurant industry are among the few career opportunities open to women of Appalachia who do not have access to higher education.

Figure 38. “Deliverance Comes to Iraq” Screen Capture, Douglas Ord blog, <http://home.eol.ca/~dord/deliverance_comes_to_iraq01.html> (May 2007)

This attitude was not solely exhibited by the media; audiences picked up on this rhetorical indictment of England’s deviance and linked it with well known popular culture examples. A quick online image search reveals similar attitudes toward England. A website dedicated to “Ghost News” and stories about global patterns brandishes a photographic pairing of England abusing a prison with a film still of one of the rapists from Deliverance. The title of the image, “Deliverance Comes to Iraq,” puns both the mission and the poster-child of the prison scandal, pointing to the debacle the United States has made of both.

The rhetorical indictment of Lynndie England by the “Ghost News” comparison of her with the mountain men of Deliverance is clear: the U.S. imported deviance to Iraq
in the form of Appalachian half-wits. England is an example of unfettered Appalachian difference and characterizations of her in the media essentialize her difference on the basis of her violation of hegemonic femininity and Appalachian identity.

England’s story is made all the more vivid because of the inescapable comparison made with Jessica Lynch. These women are as night and day—England, a brunette, is characterized as deviant, corrupt, and physiognomically degenerate. Lynch is the opposite—a blond who is depicted as sweet and incorruptible. The government’s (and the media’s) use of Lynch as an Iraq War icon received vociferous protests from detractors of the United States’ involvement in a war with Iraq. Much of the material industry that has sprung up around Lynch’s apotheosis has attempted to capitalize on her plight, manipulating the Lynch saga for gain. Mike Keefe of the Denver Post depicts Lynch in her uniform with chart-like labels pointing to the ribbons and symbols that decorate her uniform: “Private Jessica Lynch,” “Prisoner of War,” “Prisoner of the
Media,” “Prisoner of the Entertainment Industry,” and “Prisoner of Defense Department Propaganda” (see fig. 39; Keefe). Commemorative coins, a *Time* magazine cover, and a made-for-TV-movie are among a few of the visual material used in the mythification of the Lynch imprisonment (see figs. 40, 41, and 42).

Even though Americans rallied behind her as though she were a martyr, the media made parasitic use of Lynch, commodifying the Lynch image to carefully place the blame for the prisoner abuse in the Iraqi prison at the feet of an Appalachian woman. Lynch’s martyrdom is no less damaging to Lynch than her commodity status as many narratives purified her experience (especially eliding references to her sexual assault during imprisonment). The trauma of her experience was used to incite pro-war support, enacting another level of violation on Lynch. She has no more say about her life, story, or even images of her body than she did when she was a prisoner of war (P.O.W). Where
we should have been appalled by the story of this P.O.W. and her plight, the media celebrated her by re-enacting her story on television in the form of the 2003 film by Peter Markle called *Saving Jessica Lynch*, a title that clearly invokes the sentiments of Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). In both, the story is told around the figure. Even with all of the media coverage, television depictions, and newspaper columns, the reality of her experiences—in terms of both injuries and sexual assault—remains unclear. To what end does expunging her story of sexual violence serve? In nearly every scenario, her image trumps her own account.

The nudity, ropes, and pile-formation of the Abu Ghraib prisoner’s bodies are powerful re-formations of the assault enacted on the sportsmen in the film *Deliverance*. The visual pull of Appalachian degeneracy must be resisted and separated from the actions at the prison. By allowing the media to frame these events in classist and prejudicial terms—i.e. their “Appalachian difference” is to blame—the public is prevented from seeing past England’s thumbs-up. Beyond her celebratory pose lies our military and government’s responsibility in creating and encouraging such an environment of violence.

Jessica Lynch’s celebrity status has imprisoned her by the public eye as much as she was by her captors in Iraq. The media stereotypes of these women both embody the gender standards imposed on Appalachian women and thus perpetuate specific kinds of gender agreement associated with Appalachians and Americans. The England and Lynch

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41 When I heard Lynch’s name, read it in a newspaper, or see her picture on television, I cringed at her lack of privacy during her recovery. Jessica Lynch is now living in my hometown in West Virginia, having left West Virginia University for a degree at our local community college, West Virginia University at Parkersburg. News of her pregnancy and gossipy tidbits about her new paramour keep her story in the by-lines: “P.O.W. goes to school,” “P.O.W. is pregnant,” and “P.O.W. has a new boyfriend.”
stories each demonstrate that there are external gender frames that they are assigned to, frames linked to their ethnicity on when that ethnicity explains non-normative behavior. And this gender agreement is contingent upon categories of gender particular to Appalachian identity. As the helpless (virginal) mountain gal and the deviant hillbilly felon, Jessica Lynch and Lynndie England cannot escape the visual rhetorical frames that have informed America about Appalachian identities for over a century.

Figure 41. “The Real Story of Jessica Lynch,” *Time Magazine* cover, November 17, 2003
The status of women in visual culture is such that women are already subjects of spectacle. And the combination of gender and ethnic/racial structures of *Appalachian-ness* invokes another layer of identity. The young woman in the BBC photograph is submitted to this kind of gender structuring; the photograph highlights her grief as the focus of the image with family and friends around her, holding her, comforting her. Her tears are public, but not those of her male counterpart. England is a spectacle as both a criminal and a criminal celebrity. And Lynch is specularlized as a hero/victim whose every move was followed, visually documented, and discussed by America as she tried to
transition into a private life after her recovery. These women of Appalachia are all specularized as *Appalachian women*: deviant, heroic, tragic, and strong with emotion.

This specularization happens because the visual modes of depicting Appalachian difference have expanded beyond the confines of fiction and comic strips: now *real* images plug into this visual identificatory system. These visual modes, as indicated in an earlier discussion of the visual in western thought, themselves work to limit and delimit the boundaries of identity. Thus it is not merely the social identity but also the medium through which identities are rhetorically invoked that work to establish meaning. For the BBC photograph, it is the photograph and digital imagery online; for Jessica Lynch and Lynndie England, it is the combination of documentary footage (photographs and film) and the visual culture history of the hillbilly that establish identity for these women in the twenty-first century. Texts and references invoke the hillbilly while documentary images verify its presence. There is something particular to twenty-first century visual culture that, as Benedikt Feldges suggested, collapses time, space, and visual meanings over time into a simultaneous image.
CHAPTER SEVEN: FILM, THE DOCUMENTED IMAGE, AND THE APPALACHIAN OTHER

Too much trust is put into media based on reality—a problem especially when a medium, like photography, is perceived to be objective. For example, visual recognition, particularly in criminal incidents, carries a lot of power in the American legal system (one only has to consider popular television programs, such as *Crime Scene Investigation*, *Law and Order*, and *NTSB* to see how imagery is fetishized as scientific truth in American visual culture). Paul Virilio identifies this interplay between modern consciousness and visual media as a competition between and dependency of texts and images: “The race between the *transtextual* and the *transvisual* ran on until the emergence of the *instantaneous ubiquity* of the audiovisual mix” (Virilio 112). Meta G. Carstarphen indicates that the information onslaught extends to the internet as well: “[w]here television brings images, and thus the illusions of visual reality based on an individual’s perception, into our homes, the Web allows unlimited access to a variety of images of our own choosing. Thus, levels of visual literacy or how we ‘read’ these images vary from person to person, culture to culture” (Carstarphen xiv). The result is a heavy-handed privileging of visuality without acknowledging the constructed nature of the resulting “reality.” This state is perpetuated by the consignment of visual material to either the realm of eyewitness or that of entertainment. As this study has already demonstrated, all visual images possess elements of cultural rhetoric.

Film and television function as both mechanical re-presentations of reality and modes of art/entertainment. Kate Linker, in writing of representation, insists that reality
cannot exist without representation: “Since reality can be known only through the forms that articulate it, there can be no reality outside of representation. With its synonyms, truth and meaning, it is a fiction produced by its cultural representations, a construction discursively shaped and solidified through repetition” (Linker 392). Reality is a nebulous reflection. It is not straightforward and the reflections are not without distortions. Like a reverberation, it is bounced from surface to surface, changing at each point of contact until it is a mere shell of what it echoes. Yet the echo retains substantive meaning.

Zarvonia takes this notion further by characterizing the organization of visual reality as syntax: “Visual information may include symbol (text), representational (visual material from the environment replicated in drawing, painting, sculpture, and film), and abstract (understructure of the whole message) components. . . From this viewpoint, text and image are connected and approached as individual elements within the composition” (Zarvoina xvi). For Zarvoina, this syntax is constructed of symbols and representations that are not mutually exclusive. In a given art form, like documentary film, these elements may operate intertextually to produce a syntax. And this syntax may exist as a meta-presence where the meaning is not localized to one single work but is a construction of a body of works.

This study has attempted to import such visual theories into studies of Appalachian identity. Using Charles Hill’s theory of image rhetoric, we can see how Appalachian stereotypes are able to operate unchecked. Take, for example, the images included in reports on the Sago Mine disaster in West Virginia in 2006 (see earlier
discussions). When we introduce those images into our reading of the media’s use of the word “kin” when characterizing the miners’ families, a four way structure of meaning emerges: the event, the text used to describe the event, images of the event, and the cultural history of prejudice against Appalachians that the particularized language used by news media in their coverage invokes. Each of these alone is impotent; when linked together, as I argue later, they are a potent cocktail of emotional acculturation that continues the cultural othering of Appalachia. Sago imagery becomes, against Harkins’ best prediction, proof of real, live hillbillies. Hill writes further: “Again, what bothers many of us about this procedure is that our attitudes, opinions, and even our actions are influenced without any conscious processing on our part. In fact, most people are probably convinced that such manipulations do not work on them. But advertisers and political consultants know otherwise” (Hill 37). Thus, we are not facing a conspiracy against Appalachia, but a visual web that helps weave a hegemonic judgment against Appalachian difference. How do Appalachians themselves engage this visual system? One filmmaker’s work on mountain others may illuminate how Appalachians see themselves, how they reproduce these identities, and how they embrace them as a form of cultural agency. This final chapter, then, is an exploration into the ways in which two Appalachian men see “Appalachia” as both a filmmaker and documentary subject.
The Dancing Outlaw

Figure 43. Film still from The Dancing Outlaw 1991.

The 1991 documentary film The Dancing Outlaw and its sequel, directed by Jacob Young, tell the story of the life and experiences of Appalachian dancer and Elvis impersonator Jesco White. Conceived initially as one part of the “Different Drummer” series by the Public Broadcast Service through WNPB-TV in Morgantown, West Virginia, The Dancing Outlaw has since outpaced the rest of the films in the series in popularity thanks to the circulation of bootlegged copies of the film.

The Dancing Outlaw is a series of interviews, musical performances, and film footage of Jesco White in his hometown in Boone County, West Virginia. In it we meet White’s mother, his wife Norma Jean, his sister and brothers. The camera takes us
around town following a dancing White carrying a boombox, into his trailer to his Elvis room, and to a family gathering of revelry and mudbogging. Creeks with wooden bridges, trash, trailers, dilapidated automobiles, and other “Appalachian” tropes appear throughout the film as Jacob Young’s effort to set the scene as a “holler” in West Virginia. While all of these scenes are documented by Young’s camera, they also are part of a larger visual culture of Appalachian identity.

Figure 44. Film still from The Dancing Outlaw, 1991.

Stephen P. Hanna calls these kinds of spatial details “signs of Appalachia.” Films like The Fire Down Below, Deliverance, and even the early twentieth-century picture The Moonshiners all employ these spatial signifiers as the geographic and social marks of Appalachian difference. Hanna argues that the “omni-present mountains and the
violence, poverty, snake handling, incest, and other signs of social degeneracy” are employed by filmmakers in order to demonstrate the inherent nature of mountain deviance (Hanna 179). These signs, according to Hanna, are cumulative forces that work against the inherent goodness and wholesomeness of mountain folk and thus are important to the fictive construction of mountain stereotypes. *The Dancing Outlaw*’s inclusion of such signs essentializes the difference exhibited by Jesco White in the stories he recounts and the spaces he occupies.

Appalachian difference is exhibited as White’s and others’ mistreatment of the environment, criminal behavior, seclusion, and social deviance—characteristics that America has associated with Appalachians for over a century. For White in particular, trash, trailers, poverty, and crime become entangled as facets of the same figure, a character that, through the film’s portrayal of the subject, comes to embody essential Appalachian difference. When combined with the filmmaker’s technique of allowing film subjects’ stories to drive the narrative, this essentializing effect crafts a representation of both White’s and Appalachia’s state of difference. This difference, by Young’s own account was a documentary goal from the beginning.

Young told Thomas Douglas that “At the TV station we had talked a long time about making a hillbilly show—a show about mountain people, unsophisticated people, and what I found was an incredible guy, a completely amazing guy in 18 different ways” (Douglas 314). Not only did he set out to find a “different sort of character” but filmmaker Jacob Young also set out to tell the story in such a way that his subject’s difference was visible from all angles. Thus, the series was conceived of as a portrait of
eccentric West Virginians. Young describes these West Virginians as outsiders, outcasts from mainstream culture who embrace that state of difference:

Figure 45. Film Still from *The Dancing Outlaw*, 1991.

The reason why there are so many eccentrics in West Virginia, I suppose, has to do with the people who originally came here—they just wanted to be left alone. They were outcasts, totally individualistic, totally anti-conformist, the rugged individuals who say “We don’t need our neighbors, and we don’t need the town.” There’s no conformity. (Douglas 311-12)

Young’s view of West Virginia is itself an internalization of stereotypes about West Virginia and is not the only example of this tendency. Keith G. Tidball and Christopher P. Toumey, in their 2001 paper for the Southern Anthropological Society,
argue that just such an instance of internalization of external perceptions occurred in the late twentieth century among Pentecostal Christian snake handlers (Tidball et al, 16). After media attention to such religious practices increased, serpent handlers began to respond to the media attention by performing for the cameras and altering the ways they practiced the tradition. Tidball and Toumey write that:

> the process of media coverage has led some Appalachian Pentecostal-Holiness serpent handlers to switch the signifier/signified relationship so that the snake as a symbol no longer represents a traditional religious meaning, but rather a recent secular meaning. A practice that once signified faith in the Holy Spirit now seems to indicate the value of celebrity status. (Tidball et al. 16)

These religious practitioners went from viewing the practice as a very private and special religious demonstration of faith to a performative practice where bravery and celebrity became increasingly important before a media audience. Thus serpent handlers’ response to media attention was an important symptom of not only Southern and Appalachian awareness of national perceptions but also evidence that these perceptions actively affect the practices, traditions, and sense of self of people in these regions. Therefore Jesco White’s more than passive role in this film is really a sign of his own awareness of the power of celebrity.

Difference, here, is not simply a product of an external agent’s perception of an internal other. That Young himself is an Appalachian is proof positive that Appalachians are aware of and respond to external perceptions. This raises the question: Is difference
really an inherent quality of the people from the region? Or is difference the by-product of cultural, economic, and social oppression? In discussing his interest in West Virginia eccentrics, Young spoke of his childhood:

I lived in a town. When I was a kid, I knew hill people. They were the first kids who had long hair, and their clothes were worn. It wasn’t a matter of style; they just didn’t have money for that. It was a real sign of poverty. I knew those kids, but after the sixth grade they disappeared. They started dropping out, and it was impossible to have a friendship with any of them, so it was good to have a friendship with Jessico [sic].

(Douglas 314)

Young’s own internalization of Appalachia as an unquestioned site of difference is really proof that stereotyping images deeply affect the ways in which the subjects of these stereotypes experience place, time, and self. Young is not alone, Jesco White, too internalizes and responds to difference, albeit in a singular way.

An interesting art historical example of an other’s participation in the process of difference making and exploitation is the eighteenth-century Tahitian Mai/Omai, whose famous portrait by Joshua Reynolds and prints have been traditionally read as images of the “Noble Savage.” Mai was brought to Britain in the 1770s by a British sea captain, whereupon the Tahitian was circulated at parties and at court as an example of a South Pacific native and wild man. Images of Mai have been interpreted as representations of non-European difference (the turban misread as a Middle Eastern detail by Reynolds when it is also a sign of class in Tahiti) (Hackforth-Jones 27). Yet Mai himself engaged
in this process as an opportunity to improve his own status from that of a middle class member from a neighboring island to the arii noble class of the larger island of Tahiti. According to Jocelyn Hackforth-Jones:

Mai could successfully mimic and excel at exquisite gentlemanliness in a manner that, arguably, undermined the very discourses of civility back in England and convinced the Europeans that he was a noble savage from the highest class or arii. [...] Representations of Mai as a natural gentleman embody the very notion of cultural entanglement—he was never really paraded as an exotic specimen, nor given a useful trade or educated in a bookish sense. Rather he was consistently able to mime being a gentleman and an aristocrat in two cultures for his own ends. (Hackforth-Jones 27-28)

If we, by this example, acknowledge the possibility for agency within a dominant state of “difference,” then White himself is not a passive victim in a scenario of exploitation. This also suggests that Young’s reiteration of a century of stereotypes is not simply a restatement. The intercultural performance is produced by both Young and White simultaneously as two Appalachians engaging with perceptions of difference.

Initially, the viewer is led to believe that White’s poverty, violent history, mental (in)stability, whiteness, and dancing are all components of the cultural identity of this Appalachian other and thus all Appalachians. However, a complex portrait of an Appalachian art form and one of its last performers is crafted through the juxtaposition of personal narratives and performances, making the legitimacy of the art form apparent to
the viewer and open for appreciation. These two facets of identity—one brought into being by the filmmaker and the other by the history and tradition represented by the subject/object of the film—are co-present in this documentary.

Figure 46. Sir Joshua Reynolds. *Omai (Omiah)*. 1776. Oil on canvas.

The most interesting aspect of the relationship between filmmaker and filmed is Jacob Young’s own status as a West Virginia native. Young’s statements about
searching for West Virginian eccentrics demonstrate his own awareness that difference is to be found in the Mountains of West Virginia and not in its cities. Thus, Jacob Young’s films do not fall within the larger image tradition of hillbilly-baiting by mass media and Hollywood films as they are not the product of an external view of an internally colonial self. Rather his work is the product of an internalized view of these image traditions.

Indeed *Jesco White: The Dancing Outlaw* should be read as a response to external views of Appalachia and the ways in which those views have been unevenly internalized by Appalachians. Therefore these films are the products of a two-folded intercultural performance, a kind of cultural entanglement whereupon each participant complexly responds to external notions of difference. Now let us consider the more overt conditions that create Jesco-as-other as Young’s intercultural performance.

While the film “documents” the life of Jesco White in his own words, this work in fact constructs White’s identity as a cultural other, a character whose embodied difference is a spectacle for the viewer. The film does not offer, however, an unmediated view of Jesco White’s life or his talent as a mountain dancer. Young employs a confessional story-telling approach where Jesco is the narrator of the documentary film rather than a disembodied voice that connects scenes and stories together as a voice from nowhere. Indeed the total subjectivity of the speaking Jesco can be read as a postmodern structure where subjects are imbued with spatial, geographic, and embodied subjectivity. This method sets Jesco White up as an autobiographical subject for us to gaze upon and listen to as he recounts dozens of stories about his life, his family, and experiences as a mountain dancer from Boone County, West Virginia. Interspersed among these scenes of
Jesco-the-storyteller are external shots of his trailer, satellite dish, and trash in the yard. Rather than these images merely punctuating his stories as illustrations, the combination of the speaking Jesco with these scenes problematically disrupt the narrative of his stories, ethnographically situate him in his home and landscape, and encourage the viewer to remain distant from him. Cumulatively these conditions situate the filmmaker as observer, a witness to the subject’s unfolding difference. This is Young’s intercultural performance.

Neither is Young’s filmic strategy overtly documentarian; the absence of a documentary narrator fixes this film’s purpose somewhere between a documentary and entertainment. Indeed, Jacob Young has indicated that this viewer/film ambiguity was intentional as his goal was to entertain and not merely depict. Young told Appalachian Journal author Thomas Douglas that he deliberately blurs the boundaries between subject and viewer by mixing entertainment film strategies, such as dividing shots to enhance the storyline, with documentary methods, such as interviewing subjects in order to construct a narrative. Young specifically set out to entertain and document, straddling both genres of film:

For instance, I slanted Dancing Outlaw toward the positive, to comedy. It could have been a grim story, a story with no hope, a real depressing experience, but who the hell needs that? Try to see the positive! Try to have fun! When I go to hang out with the White family or when Jessico [sic] takes me someplace, I generally have a good time. And so all I was
able to do was try to bring some of that back and put it on tape. (Douglas 309)

Here, we have the century old trope of the comedic hillbilly deliberately sought after and constructed by Young. The entertainment value of White as a subject is had at his expense; we are not laughing with him, but are gawking and laughing at him. This is punctuated by Young’s sequel Jesco Goes to Hollywood where we see White dancing on the walk of fame stars on the sidewalks of L. A. His performance ends at the star of Elvis.

Figure 47. Film Still from The Dancing Outlaw, 1991.

Young further encourages this viewer as voyeur scenario by collapsing the camera with interviewer. We never get to hear Young pose questions to White; all we
hear or see is White the storyteller or performer. Never do we hear the prompts used by
the filmmaker to get his subjects talking. According to Young, hiding the questioner is
his rejection of the attempts by traditional documentary filmmakers to situate the film as
an empirical product, efforts based on documentarian’s beliefs that film captures but does
not influence its subjects. This is also a rejection by Young of the illusion of objectivity
itself since the rhetoric of objectivity, according to Young, has helped news media exploit
Appalachians: “I try not to make my subjects look bad. Instead of charging in there like
60 Minutes, I am as much a friend to my subjects as anything else. These are real people,
and nobody is completely evil” (Douglas 309). Yet by hiding the other interlocutor,
Young becomes guilty of going too far in the other direction by offering us unfettered
access to a talking Jesco, making him appear talkative to the point of excess.

White’s state as an other, as it is constructed through the documentary approach
of the film and the archetypes employed by the filmmaker in shaping its narrative, leads
viewers to anticipate specific attributes and behaviors when viewing images of a “real
hillbilly.” Through this the film plugs into the history of Appalachian stereotypes
circulating in American visual culture. This connection occurs through the invocation of
both geographic and physical signifiers. On the one hand, Appalachia the land is invoked
through the hollow setting and “omni-present” mountains. On the other, Appalachia as a
home for a “Different Drummer” is instantiated through the stories of violence recounted
by White and the obvious poverty around him. Coupled with these physical and spatial
identities is Jesco White’s physical appearance, which changes from a flannel shirt
wearing bearded mountain man to a slick haired, clean-shaven Elvis look-alike. These
eccentric aspects of White’s personality satisfy the expectation of difference that “Appalachian-ness” invokes. Thus, the performances become performative of Appalachian archetypes of exceptional difference. They also invoke some of the stereotypes of mountain life itself which link isolation with eccentricity, mistrust, and so-called deviance as seen in the characters of John Boorman’s film *Deliverance*, whose pseudo-documentary shots of mentally ill children revealed the cost of deviance paid by Appalachian children.

Young expects such these signs of difference when he interviews White and his family.

In so many ways he *is* an outlaw, and he is completely unpredictable. I always got nervous going into a convenience store with him. He had already done three convenience stores and been charged with grand larceny. I left all that out of the documentary, but he does tell the story of when he first got arrested. He has a lengthy record, but he’s been fairly controlled over the last four years. We got threatened several times by him and his brother Dorsey, and we got run off a couple of times too. (Douglas 314)

Clearly the danger that White poses to the film crew is seen by Young is an important source of interest; it is what makes White a good character on film. Young’s own lack of fear when his own crew members quit when threatened by White and his family further testifies to Young’s intercultural performance; he is a brave Appalachian in the face of threats made by an “eccentric” one. This bravery marks Young just as White’s difference
as Appalachian, a hardy stock of people who fear little in the world. Further White as a criminal is also romanticized by Young in much the same way that notorious members of the Hatfield and McCoy family were characterized by the media at the turn of the twentieth century.

The external visual histories of hillbilly, mountain man, and white trash tropes are also connected to the film internally through narrative and filmic strategies employed by the filmmaker. Young’s editing and interviewing techniques, respectively, control the story line while making it appear to be the spontaneous confessions of a man from a hollow. Rhetorically this tension between the “real” and crafted nature of filmmaking situates Jesco White within a continuum of hillbilly characters, a late twentieth-century Devil Anse Hatfield. The centricity of Jesco White’s own narrative to Young’s storytelling technique also implies a kind of ego-centricity in his character. Just as Young’s bravery marks him as special so too does White’s “outlaw” status signify courage. Whether real or not, this egocentricism, like the omni-present mountains, spatially and socially signifies Appalachian-ness. Thus Jesco White as a “real-life stereotype” comes close to becoming representative of West Virginians’ and thus Appalachians’ eccentric difference for a broader American audience. Stephen Hanna writes that:

If representations in media are part of everyday experience—if they shape the social actions and relations that produce space—then […] they are an integral part of the production of space. At least latent in some appropriations of this theorization, however, is the idea that space as the
geographic object of inquiry can still be known and that the contributions of representation to the social production of space are separable from experience, work, and other material processes. […] Space, as known and described, is always already a representation that reveals, conceals, and reworks the social relations and actions—including the production of representations—that constitute it. (Hanna 185)

The particularity of an Appalachian spatial rhetoric in *The Dancing Outlaw* invokes an always-already present stereotype that in turn frames the identity of the people who dwell in that space. Thus images of trash become material connections between person and space as well as visual testimonies of the difference both space and people embody. In other words, images of trash suggest that difference is essential to both the land and its people, formulating a link between trash and the stereotype of “white trash.”

Other aspects of the film also contribute to the othering of the subject. For example, the film’s reputation as an underground sensation lent it the status of a kind of ethnographic authenticity; those who watched bootlegged copies felt they were getting an unfettered view of the “real” Appalachia. White’s appearance on the *Roseanne* show demonstrates the effect of othering. Because of an encounter with a bootlegged copy of the film, actor and writer Tom Arnold brought Jesco White to Hollywood to appear as a character on the show in 1994. After they finish shooting the scene for the show, Arnold and White are filmed by Jacob Young standing and posing for pictures while talking to audience members and show staffers. Here is the dialog Young recorded:

Arnold says: “I was going to talk to you about something.”
White replies: “Thanks for everything.”

Arnold says to White: “I have to talk to you about the swastikas on your arms I heard about.”

Arnold then leans toward the camera held by Jacob Young and says: “I don’t know if he knows what the swastikas mean.”

He then turns back to White to pose for another picture and says while smiling for the camera: “You know we’re Jewish.” (Young)

Figure 48. Film Still from *The Dancing Outlaw II: Jesco Goes to Hollywood*, 1993.

While this is happening, White is attempting to procure a picture of John Goodman and appears oblivious to Arnold’s comments. This suggests that Arnold’s soliloquy is staged for the camera. Arnold’s failure to listen to what White said and his
statements spoken on top of White’s own suggest that this was more of a comedic moment performed for the documentary camera at the expense of White’s ignorance and less a concerned intervention by Arnold. The actor and writer’s “intervention” continues. After leaving the studio, Arnold takes White to a tattoo artist to remove the swastika from his hand during which White communicates that he did not remember receiving the tattoo. Explaining that he does not really understand what they mean, White tells Arnold that he had been sniffing chemical fumes to get high when he received the homemade tattoo and thus has no memory of it.

Combined with Young’s own intention to create a “comedy,” this specularization of White forms another facet of Young’s intercultural performance; this time, he connects to and agrees with the external visual cultural stereotypes that view the hillbilly as a comedic trope. Arnold’s treatment of Jesco satisfies White’s expectation of difference.

As this exchange illustrates, Jesco White’s visit to Hollywood was more of a voyeuristic fantasy of difference for West-coasters and less of an opportunity for Hollywood television folk to meet a bona fide West Virginia celebrity. For Arnold and the rest, White was a side show, yet another hillbilly whose presence merely served as comedic fodder for jokes made at his expense.

While Arnold satisfies Young’s expectations about the reception and perception of White’s difference in Hollywood, other viewers are able to connect with him vis-à-vis Young’s documentarian approach. As Jesco White and his fans demonstrate in the sequel Dancing Outlaw II: Jesco Goes to Hollywood, White’s celebrity is not experienced in the same way by Appalachians and Southerners as it is by Hollywood. On his way through
the Pittsburgh airport during his trip out West, White encounters a fan who effusively expresses his support for White and the documentary. Indeed, White has an extensive cult following generated by the popularity and circulation of illegal copies of the film, a following today that includes fan web pages, web logs, film festivals, concerts and parties to raise money for the White family. After the popularity of the first film and White’s trip to Hollywood, he was hired by people all over Appalachia to perform at parties and concerts, even performing with Hank Williams III at the Monkey Bar in Huntington, WV, in October, 2006.

While enough difference is present to titillate the viewer/voyeur, clearly Young’s films do not collapse White into a one-dimensional hillbilly archetype. Enough of his humanity is evident that Appalachians can relate to him as a character and real person. Difference is rarely the simple product of an imbalanced power relationship, formulated and operating within a vacuum of agency in which the subject is powerless and the viewer/voyeur is empowered. The subject of this film speaks for himself and actively participates in the production of his own story. White sat for hours of filming, established a relationship with the filmmaker, and offered glimpses at the many sides of his personality. Indeed one blogger-fan characterized these facets as the three Jescos: Jesse (the mountain man and dancer); Jesco (the drug addict); and Elvis. Such a thorough portrait could not have been crafted by a filmmaker at the expense of an unwilling participant. Jesco White actively cooperated with the process, helping to determine the film’s final form by providing feedback, asking questions, and, at times, running the film crew off of his property when he felt threatened. Admittedly, these threats, at least
according to Young, were caused by White’s own mental confusion. Regardless of the truth of Jesco White, his identity in these films was wrought by both parties.

White’s identity can be understood as a postmodern construction, interculturally performative since the internal colonial subject clearly knows that there is a range of responses to his talent and personality, from the filmmaker’s interest to fans’ support of him. White foregrounds different aspects of his personality and history depending on the environment and relationships in which he exists at any given moment. These include his contributions to the construction of his own identity. As he shifts from Jesco-the-performer to Jesco-the-Outlaw, White presents aspects of himself that amplify his performances and performative roles. White’s constant dancing and genealogical accounts of his status as inheritor of his father’s legacy and talent—D. Ray White’s status as a “great” mountain dancer—present a character who is, above all, a professional traditional dancer. His many performances on stage, on roads, and on his dog house present a spectrum of performance spaces, ranging from the mundane to the formal, that testify to his continuous status as dancer. This status is also proven “real” or “authentic” by his success as a performer after the films.

White’s presentation of his personal history is also a kind of continuum of criminality; a range of behaviors and events that testify to the equally professional history of White as a criminal. This continuum is best exemplified by lyrics from White’s favorite dancing song “If you want to get to heaven, you gotta raise a little hell.” The greatest sin can become the greatest follower of God in this born-again Christian invocation, for instance, President George W. Bush. This history of illegal behavior is
also invoked by the stories of his first arrest early in the film and of the time he held a
knife to his wife’s throat in anger over undercooked eggs. The introduction of *The Dancing Outlaw* also includes an argument with his wife in which she tells him to stop
hitting her even as White makes physical threats against her. This scene provides
evidence that White is guilty of domestic violence; he does not dispute Norma Jean’s
claims and in fact threatens her with physical assault on camera.

The film transitions from the arguing couple to an introduction to his family.
Finally, after meeting his mother and wife, White begins his first dance of the film.
Young cuts from that performance to White recounting the time he was arrested for
stealing a case of lighter fluid as a teenager, a substance he used for intoxication.
Violence, drug abuse, and theft all map out White’s criminal side as we move from
domestic violence, strange dancing sequences, to the story of his bizarre arrest.

While White tells these stories as important markers of his adult life, filmmaker
Young uses these stories to instantiate the other side of Jesco White, paralleling the
dancer with the criminal. Indeed, White’s wife describes him as having three different
personalities, the worst of which appears when he is abusing substances. And White, as
an interculturally performative subject, is equally proud of these sides; the criminality is
part of his status as a born-again Christian and the dancing is proof of his status as
inheritor of this mountain dancing tradition, a dance practice that bears resemblance to
tap dancing and is referred to as “clogging.” Yet these stories and characters are
constructed by White only in so much as Young includes them in the final cut of the
documentary. His editorial authority is evident in the story White tells about the shootout
that caused his father’s death and wounded Jesco. Young splices shots of White and his wife Norma Jean telling the story at two different times and places—Jesco in his “Elvis room” in the trailer and Norma Jean outside of the trailer—with shots of the yard, satellite dish, and trash outside of their home. This tragedy, through the way the story is told and the way that the film illustrates it, runs the risk of becoming a story of mountain injustice reminiscent of the violence of the Hatfields and McCoys. Reiterated by his mother’s statements about revenge and Young’s shots of White sitting in the doorway of his trailer with a shotgun across his lap, the visual cultural matrix of the hillbilly is hard to escape. Yet his stories stop short of this because White turns the documentary film into a positive experience that, in his words, keeps him sober. Thus White’s own filmic agency nuances the hillbilly stereotype that Young expected to find, challenging the shallow character Young anticipated him to be and providing instead a portrait of a man of contradictions and obsessions who very clearly knows about the “real” world outside of the hollow. Young characterized White’s understanding of the process:

Jessico [sic] is fiercely proud of Dancing Outlaw. He saw it as a real positive thing. He has called me at least six times wanting to do more dancing tapes. I’m not really sure he knew what I was trying to do—though I tried to tell him. I said, “Jessico [sic], I’m not writing a book.” To him, a biography had to be a book. The filming—he thought he was making music videos. I tried to explain it to him, that I was doing his biography. “Jessico [sic] I’m interested in your life, your life story.” He said, “Yeah, well, I don’t mind that. I’ll tell you that. Then we can go and
make the videos.” He didn’t think his life was as important as his dancing.

(Douglas 313)

Just as festival participants in Hillbilly Days in Pikeville, Kentucky, and Mai/Omai are and were willing and aware participants in public masquerades that perform stereotypes for an audience, Jesco White and Jacob Young both engaged in the filmmaking process as a kind of masquerade wherein each man (re)creates himself: White as dancer, Elvis, and former drug addict and Young as innovative documentarian/entertainer, outsider, and home grown voyeur. Young saw White as the quintessential hillbilly other, an eccentric who could tell stories that would translate well to film. White saw Young as a means of creating notoriety, a potential archivist of his musical talent and witness to his redemption. Each man used the other for his own end, playing off of the expectations, assumptions, stereotypes, and hopes each had for his own very different future and thus employed in the crafting of his own identity. Let us take a cursory look at a few more examples of cultural performativity in Appalachia.

Going “Hillbilly,” Going “Redneck”: Intercultural Performativity

Other visual examples of this kind of charge-taking by subjects of oppressive stereotypes are Appalachian and southern-produced phenomena like Pike County Kentucky’s Hillbilly Days, East Dublin Georgia’s Redneck Games, and the Hatfield-McCoy trail system in southern West Virginia. These cultural phenomena all capitalize on the histories, identities, and landscapes associated with Appalachia. Hillbilly Days, which occurs during the third week of April, is a three-day festival (sponsored by corporations like Coca-Cola) that is organized by Shriners as an events fundraiser for
children’s hospitals. *Hillbilly Days*, which includes floats of people dressed as hillbillies and antiquated vehicles—reminiscent of the *Beverly Hillbillies*’ Clampett vehicle in a parade through Pikeville, Ky—has been going on since 1977.\(^\text{42}\)

The Redneck Games began soon after the Olympics were held in Atlanta Georgia in 1996. Featuring redneck and hillbilly themed events like bobbing for pickled pigs feet, toilet-seat horseshoe tosses, belly-flopping in giant mud pits, and tobacco juice-spitting contests, Redneck Games hyperbolizes both the life and physicality of the redneck

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\(^{42}\) Their history, events calendar, and photo archive can be viewed on their website at [www.hillbillydays.com](http://www.hillbillydays.com).
stereotype. The Hatfield-McCoy trails in southern West Virginia are an all-terrain-vehicle and dirt bike sportsmen destination whose winding roads in the back country, according to the trails’ webpage at trailsheaven.com, not only provide challenging terrain for riders but also “connect to West Virginia's ‘ATV friendly towns’ where visitors can grab a bite to eat and experience true Southern hospitality.” While embracing stereotypes and histories that perpetuate myths about Appalachians, each event and destination is promoted by people from the region for the benefit of tourists and visitors.

Figure. 50 “Hillbilly Days” Screen Capture, <www.hillbillydays.com>, 29 December 2007

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43Information about the Games’ short history can be accessed at www.summerredneckgames.com.
Figure 51. “Hillbilly Photographs.” Hillbilly Days, KyHometown.com Photo Gallery. 2007.

Figure 52. “Redneck Games.” Screen Capture, <www.summerredneckgames.com>, 29 December 2007

Figure 54. “Hatfield’s and McCoy’s Trails” Screen Capture, <www.trailsheaven.com>, 29 December 2009
In other words, they perform these identities for people from other parts of the country. This kind of intercultural performance gives visitors what they expect of Appalachians and Southerners (whose stereotypes are linked geographically, historically, and visually) while allowing the people who participate to hyper-occupy these stereotypes, exploding them from the inside out.

For the participants in the Redneck Games, they enact “redneck-ness” as a form of cultural agency, performing it in ways that celebrates their “un-cleanliness,” “uncouthness,” blue-collar, southern ways. Redneck here is a means of celebrating whiteness rather than denigrating it. Hillbilly Days, however, celebrates not difference, but hilarity. The inaccuracy of the hillbilly moniker works handily with Shriners parades’ celebration of circus automobiles. While most Shriners’ parades include small go-carts, Hillbilly Days’ Shriners drive old farm trucks and Model T Fords, playing up the “timelessness” of Appalachia, its “backwardness” in relation to modernity and technology, and its purported isolation. Other features of the festival include photo stalls where subjects place their heads in cutouts of hillbilly scenes. This aspect of the festival, more potently than protests from members of the Appalachian community, contrasts contemporary bodies and cartoon caricatures, thus revealing the disparity between image and reality. Conversely, non-Appalachians visiting the festival are also afforded the opportunity to become a hillbilly through these portrait booths. Both the contrast of “real” Appalachian bodies with their stereotypes and the performance of non-Appalachian bodies as caricatures destabilize the hillbilly identity as an exaggeration of a normative body, an utterance of difference that exposes the hyperbolic nature of the
hillbilly image (see fig. 53). The result, especially for the participants in the Redneck Games and Hillbilly Days, juxtaposes hyperbolic characters with “everyday” Appalachians and southerners and thus revealing the exaggeration and fabrication at work in such archetypes.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Existing Appalachian studies scholarship accomplishes the primary objective of all Appalachian studies: to problematize, expand, and analyze the history of Appalachia. This project adds to those objectives, especially building on the work of Anthony Harkins, by exploring the sexual rhetoric of stereotypes, particularly Appalachian-specific modes of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality. This dissertation also links contemporary art history, feminist theory, and visual studies methodologies with Appalachian studies models by connecting language referents to images, asserting the existence of a visual identificatory system external to Appalachia, and theorizing the grammatical/thematic/iconic nature of stereotypes as they circulate visually and transcend chronology.

_The Hermeneutics of the Hillbilly_

The subject of this study has been the textual and visual rhetorics of stereotypes as tools of identity formation and circulation and products of social and visual taxonomies within the larger American cultural matrix. The physical and visual rhetorics stereotyping images invoke are the real brick and mortar of identity production. They are the means through which specific cultural meanings are instantiated as images and ideas morph into descriptors for and of the body. And while this study has focused on the Appalachian as a stereotype—connecting it to history, geography, and finally image traditions external to Appalachian history and internal to Appalachia itself—it is really within the rhetoric of images that the potency of identity lies. This is especially evident in documentary films and media where Appalachians are pitted against Appalachians.
Identity in this case is experienced internally as subjects use identity to establish agency through masquerade and celebrity identification in the case of Jesco White: The Dancing Outlaw, and internalized by subjects in media in the cases of Lynch and England. Both demonstrate that the “immutable” category of hillbilly persists even though the wealth of caricature-based material has receded. They also reveal that the idea pre-exists the image and is therefore a social perspective of difference and not an empirical, visual uncovering of difference.

As the images of weeping “kin” tell the story of Appalachian grief, visual systemic othering of Appalachians invites the viewer to observe it as an emotional spectacle, an ethnographic display of cultural difference. As the hillbilly archetype is rehashed in popular culture and his/her hegemonic masculinity/femininity is measured and responded to, larger problematics of gender identities remain invisible because for the Appalachian gender is naturalized as a biological and sometimes deviant condition. And as Appalachians themselves humorously or seriously engage with these stereotypes the unchecked continuum of hillbilly visual culture becomes checked. This study also checks these visual etymological trajectories by addressing the grammar of images in visual culture rather than confirming the grammar of identity (with)in Appalachian cultural bodies. Thus by observing these visual cultural phenomena within the visual matrix, the connection between bodies and images is weakened.

Rather than decrying the problems of such representations, many Appalachians themselves have reworked them internally, transforming these images into consumable kitsch, tongue-in-cheek performance, or heroes of the Appalachian past to be celebrated.
However, such reworkings only offer alternatives ways for Appalachians themselves to deal with their relationship to such imagery; they do not address the external social, economic, and racial operations that comprise our larger identity system. Further, this imagery creates meaning in the larger American identity system, affecting not just Appalachians but also the land itself. Therefore, stereotypes are not merely malicious responses to “difference” but also serve a purpose. In this case, stereotypes of Appalachians undermine their political agency.

One effect of this devaluation may be observed in the concomitant increase of large-scale coal extraction operations that use fewer workers while mining coal at faster rates and larger quantities. On the one hand, the agency of Appalachians—residents who can attest to the destruction of the land and the effects of mountain top removal mining on the environment—is greatly diminished by stereotypes. On the other, stereotypes encourage the visual-culturally informed public to see social ills as problems produced by Appalachians themselves. This complicated visual and social history is enhanced by public debate about energy and international politics as energy independence is weighed against environmental stewardship and the humanity of those people whose land may be destroyed.

A recent media story reinforces the problems of agency and the social ills of Appalachia. On February 18, 2009 the ABC television network news program 20/20 aired a show called "A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains." Hosted by Diane Sawyer, this documentary news program examined a series of cases in which poverty and substance abuse intersect. Following the stories of several families and workers, Sawyer
retold the old story of “poor Appalachia.” While such reporting is itself based on truth—real people, real stories—the framing used to tell the story relies on a century of rhetorical myths. Rather than studying individuals from a cross-section of each town, the program looked only at the most disenfranchised children, reminding one of the iconic photography of Andre Stern. Thus Sawyer’s news documentary crafted the same picture about Appalachia that compassionate outsiders throughout the twentieth century have invoked in order to side-step the stereotype of the lazy hillbilly, relying on images of children to avoid blaming all Appalachians for their poverty. Yet, the rhetoric of inevitability persists. Viewers also understand that, if interventions do not succeed in each of these scenarios, then these children will grow up to be like their parents and families: poor, unemployed, drug addicted, sexually deviant, toothless hillbillies.

The new history of the hillbilly icon is a theoretical field in which all the threads of identity, visuality, and time can now be understood as incongruously knotted. Through the employment of feminist, queer, and visual studies theories, whiteness, degeneracy, and low-class status have expanded to incorporate new Appalachian visual icons—the sexual deviant, intercultural performer, and the hillbilly monster alongside the Appalachian represented as the “real” other in contemporary media. This study has read images that relate to identities situated in the body by observing bodies in spaces, bodies of spaces, bodies in the land, and the grammar of bodies in visual culture. Using theories from art history, visual culture studies, and feminist theory and ideas from Western philosophy, this work has resulted in a new, interdisciplinary model for studying the contextual history, rhetoric, and transtextual effects of stereotypes of Appalachians. The
nostalgic mountain man became the isolated hillbilly. The isolated hillbilly became the sexually deviant other. The deviant hillbilly became the backdrop for contextualizing all real Appalachians in the media. And the deviant other evolved into a new icon for identifying Appalachian deviance in the horror film genre. In these etymological trajectories, gender, sexual, class, and race attributes of the Appalachian have been foregrounded according to the social and cultural formations of each moment in history. In the post-modern period, the hillbilly, who has an abundance of whiteness, continues as a placeholder for that which white Americans must police in order to maintain their racial invisibility. And as newer manifestations of the hillbilly in films such as The Descent indicate, the post-modern mountain dweller is no longer human; it is now a monster. The morphology continues.

Stereotypes of Appalachians are painfully and damagingly powerful; they remain relatively untouched by cultural critics in that they are not recognized as products of the same oppressive mechanisms and apparatuses that other in order to prop up majority power. Pausing to analyze the powers at play within these images is a significant and necessary academic contribution to both Appalachian and American visual culture studies. The academy must engage with these powerful stereotypes. Within the constant stream of visual culture, a passive response is tantamount to sanctioning stereotypes and stereotyping, leaving the practice intact because it merely, or so the silence implies, others “white trash”—a practice sanctioned by the economic stratification of the intelligentsia when it fails to cast its contemporary theoretical light onto itself. Disciplinary silence condones the practice, and the subsequent affirming-muteness may
in turn be a sign or condition of internal academic prejudices. We must develop an
envisaging strategy, such as that employed by feminist art historians in redressing the
discriminatory practices of art history and the canon, designed to examine what is visible
as a means of revealing the internal ideologies at work in stereotyping while avoiding
problems of inclusion, assimilation, and un-problematized discourses of power.

Outside of academia, persistent pictorial essentialization of Appalachians and the
continual reinvention of Appalachians as deviant hill folk and sexual (trans)aggressors
prop up liberal communities’ views that rural America is conservative because it is the
other. In turn, conservatives bent on repealing federal aid for healthcare, clothing, and
food find such stereotypes to be effective anecdotes in proving that programs are more
abused than used. Regardless of the political affiliation of Appalachians and non-
Appalachian Americans, this perceived political and cultural distance has the potential for
creating real-world consequences for the people of Appalachia—lax labor and
environmental regulations, economic discrimination, dismissal of sexual assault,
domestic violence, and child abuse, and the internal replication of prejudices and gender
discrimination—especially when such viewpoints are used to dismiss the necessity of
government aid because Appalachians ‘abuse’ it.

Externally, dominant white American culture succeeds in denying its own racial
performatives by expelling from its majority-body those whites who are ‘overtly’ white,
thus allowing the majority to remain an invisible entity that has tidily abjected its
whiteness from its body. If this imagery is not adequately problematized, understanding
Appalachians and Appalachia on their own terms will remain distant goals in an
unimaginable future. Judith Halberstam suggests that we live in a moment “characterized by the tumbling and uneven advent of an era of simultaneity and instantaneous communication” (Halberstam 103). Such a moment makes the problems addressed by this dissertation imperative subjects for academia because the rapidity of media production and deployment makes it more difficult to critically absorb the visual world. In the future, what it means to be “Appalachian” may be even less shaped by cultural traditions enacted by Appalachian bodies and even more framed by visual rhetorics established and circulated by “non-Appalachians.” May this research serve as a beginning for a new interdisciplinary path in Appalachian studies, one informed by visual studies, feminism, art history, and philosophy, and one that takes into consideration these challenges.


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