The Hillbilly Speaks of Rhetoric: Critical Theory, Composition Pedagogy, and the Appalachian Region

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Todd D. Snyder

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This dissertation titled
The Hillbilly Speaks of Rhetoric: Critical Theory, Composition Pedagogy, and the
Appalachian Region

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ABSTRACT

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The Hillbilly Speaks of Rhetoric: Critical Theory, Composition Pedagogy, and the Appalachian Region

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“The Hillbilly Speaks of Rhetoric: Critical Theory, Composition Pedagogy, and Appalachian Identity,” is an exploration of the various ways that social, economic, and cultural factors influence the identities of the rural Appalachian students who enter our first year composition classrooms. College teachers are often unaware of the challenges faced by these students, who often come from an isolated cultural environment, largely invisible in the public domain beyond the derogatory stereotypes, and whose values may conflict with dominant university perspectives. Critical pedagogy has proven useful in increasing the awareness of and addressing issues of diversity in race and class, but it has not yet addressed the particular challenges of an Appalachian student population. My objective is (1) to address pedagogical and theoretical work that can contribute to the intellectual development of such students; and (2) to address the limitations of critical pedagogy in this area. In short, critical pedagogy will be a guideline of the project, but it will also be subjected to critical analysis and revision. My methodology consists of autoethnography; brief qualitative studies; the collection of socioeconomic data; and, perhaps most importantly, the analysis of cultural, visual, filmic, historical, and theoretical texts.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Mara Holt
Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Composition
To Stephanie, my wife and best friend
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CHAPTER 1: APPALACHIA AND THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION

“Appalachia is a creature of the urban imagination. The folk culture, the depressed area, the romantic wilderness, the Appalachia of fiction, journalism, and rediscovered, primarily by the economic opportunism, political creativity, or passing fancy of urban elites.”

- Allen W. Batteau

“Appalachia is a region without a formal history. Beyond the obvious physical reality of its mountains, “Appalachia” is a socially constructed conceptual place.”

- Ronald L. Lewis

“In the American imagination, Appalachia exists as a wholly formed entity, one created by generations of stereotypes and condescension. In the American imagination, Appalachia is no place to go on vacation. Appalachia is a place to avoid, perhaps even a place to fear.”

- Jill M. Fraley

*Between Myth and Reality, (or) The Perverse Narrative*

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

He is the product of a rhetorical tradition that runs deep like the waters of the mighty Ohio River. His histories are many and come in a variety of persuasive forms: a series of oral, written, and visual rhetorics have given us this perverse narrative. The Hillbilly has been well documented, bought, sold, and told for a profit. He is in no position to speak for himself. The Hillbilly has been told his own story from the perspective of others. Thus, at some point in his life, the Hillbilly finds himself Appalachian. He discovers himself just as you discover him. It is a story of backwoods hollers, ripe with clannish violence and rural poverty. It is the description of his buckteeth, bare feet, dusty beard, and dirty suspenders. It is the image of a fly-infested outhouse with a crescent moon engraved on the door. It is a jug of moonshine from the still out back. Hollywood shows us this story. It is this perverse narrative that positions Appalachia as poverty’s prison and the Hillbilly as something of an inmate. With no cold steel bars to file away at, the Hillbilly has grown numb to the fact that only the rivers
have the opportunity to slither away. Bereft of hope, his children only dream when the moon is in the sky. They have been taught to settle, compromise, and - most importantly - work. In a land where inspiration is as scarce as income, the Hillbilly suffers from the cyclical effects of poverty. He is born into a class-based system that encourages its inhabitants to acquiesce to the hallmarks of tradition. Academia tells us this story. However, the Hillbilly remains unproven. He exists somewhere between myth and reality. The American imagination has appropriated his story for selfish purposes. Therefore, the story of the Hillbilly is one of exploitation, a tale of economic, political, and cultural domination.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

The unique set of identity constructs imposed upon the Hillbilly has been done so by his social betters. He has been caricatured. The dust in his beard mimics the darkness of his story. The Hillbilly is a zombie, one who wanders from one trailer to the next as if some omnipresent force shuns him from ever leaving. He is neither dead or alive. We, as a society, have been lulled to sleep by the story of the Hillbilly / Zombie. He is the unnamed rapist on the muddy banks of *Deliverance*. He is Jed Clampett. He struck oil, moved to Hollywood, and America laughed at his social awkwardness. The Hillbilly is the subhuman beast chasing Hollywood starlets across the Appalachian wilderness when they make a *Wrong Turn*. He is both Hatfield and McCoy. Bloody feuds. He is bigot. Racist. The Hillbilly is a sound. A southern twang dialect. A Music. A look. He is the personification of questionable moral hygiene. Time has adopted his likeness forevermore, images frozen in the American imagination by countless portrayals of
Appalachian existence. Thus, the Hillbilly / Zombie is never fully actualized or imagined. He exists in the margins of the American psyche, a socially acceptable stereotype, a brand of social prejudice not unlike other strands of racist discourse. We allow these disparaging characterizations to continue without questioning their socio-political consequences because we, as a nation, have yet to fully come to the conclusion that the rhetorical tradition that has given birth to the Hillbilly is of deceptive or malicious origins. The tradition, itself, lies somewhere between myth and reality.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

He is an inescapable result of life in Appalachia, the persuasive element of Appalachian existence. The Hillbilly reminds us of our social hierarchy. He is somewhere near the bottom. His shabby clothes, broken English, and social demeanor serve as a reminder. His lack of education signals a lack of professionalization, a lack of social mobility. The Hillbilly doesn’t get out much. He is relegated to an unappreciated region. Appalachia is his holme\(^1\). He belongs there. He knows he belongs there. Society knows he belongs there. This is an (un)spoken common knowledge. His work is in the coal mine and lumberyard, extracting the natural resources around him. We forced him to do so then protest against him for doing so. The coal mining Hillbilly does not care about the environment. He is to blame for removing mountaintops, despite the fact that he doesn’t own the company he works for, the machinery he is asked to use, or the land being pillaged. In fact, the Hillbilly doesn’t own land, or a holme for that matter. He lives in a trailer, a trailer park. His backyard is somebody else’s front yard. America names the Hillbilly / Zombie something like white trailer trash, or worse. His existence denotes

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\(^1\) This is an attempt to phonetically spell out a common Appalachian pronunciation of this word.
other. The Yokel, the Red Neck, and the Slack Jawed Mountaineer – are all kin to the Hillbilly, a dysfunctional Appalachian family.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

He is gendered. There are, of course, consequences to this gendering. He is expected to be a man. Expected to work. Work hard. Expected to have a sexual appetite for women. Because he is continually pressured to marry young and have lots of children, these last two prerequisites are a must. The Hillbilly is expected to carry on the family name. He is expected to protect. He damn well better be tough. Emotionless. Emotionless because this is the way things are and the way they are always going to be. The Hillbilly is asked to pick up the dinner bucket and provide for his family. Family is the foundation of Appalachian existence. To be without family is to be incomplete. Why else would the Hillbilly work for such low wages? Why else would he work in such a dangerous environment? Why else would the Hillbilly stay? Holme is a specific place. It is a history. It is a family member. This simple life is all that the Hillbilly has ever wanted, all he has ever needed. A roof over his head. Dinner on the supper table. A wife in his bed. Children to carry on his legacy.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

She is Hillbilly as well. Gendered. Mountain momma. Elly May with her flowing blond curls and dusty bare feet. Grandma Clampett in the rocking chair with her trademark chaw of tobacco. Tough, pragmatic, and always loving. Self-sacrificing. In many ways, the she / Hillbilly / Zombie / white trash / Mountain Momma embodies the disadvantages of being gendered. She is relegated to the household. Domesticated.
Society disapprovingly wags its finger at her for becoming a teenage parent, dropping out of high school, and becoming a statistic. However, from a young age, the Mountain Momma is expected to find herself a good man. She is expected to settle down. Expected to prepare for her eventual duties as a wife and mother. She is expected to give her children a good Christian upbringing. Sometimes expected to find herself a good job—well, at least a good job for a woman. A job that will allow her to supplement her husband’s inadequate income while still being true to her motherly and spousal duties. In Emma Willard’s day it was called “Republican Motherhood.” Today its called being a good Appalachian woman. It is the idea that good mothers have an obligation to turn good young boys into good hardworking American men. The she / Hillbilly / Zombie / white trash / Mountain Momma shoulders the load. She cooks, cleans, and cares for the children. She dies at an earlier rate than the national average. She is at risk for cancer and heart disease. Apparently, she is obese and so are her children. She makes her biscuits with lard and uses bacon grease to add flavor. It’s her mother’s recipe. Her voice has been marginalized within this perverse narrative. Silenced. Distorted. Circumscribed.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

He signals a more pastoral image of American existence. A fantasy. It is the sometimes romanticized notion that Appalachian life is emblematic of a purer or more natural existence. A closeness to nature. A willingness to abandon the American lust for money, status, and power. Something slow and simple. The Waltons. Goodnight John

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2 Emma Willard (1787-1870) founded the first ever women’s school for education: The Troy Female Seminary (1821). Willard used the phrase “Republican Motherhood” to justify her efforts to the New York Legislature in 1819: “Who knows how great and good a race of men may yet arise from the forming hands of mothers, enlightened by the bounty of that beloved country – to defend her liberties, to plan her future improvements and to raise her to unparallel glory” (qtd. in Spring 137).
Boy! A close-knit family. A family that looks out for its own kind. The Hillbilly is from the sort of place where nobody is a stranger. His neighbor will give him the shirt off his back if need be. The Hillbilly would do the same. Everybody helping everybody. Just gettin’ by. It’s almost Heaven. The Hillbilly is also proud mountaineer. He can live off the land and provide for himself. He doesn’t need big government. Doesn’t need health care reform. He can run a trout line. He can shoot a buck, skin it, and his wife can make deer jerky. The Hillbilly doesn’t know the meaning of careerism. He is wild and wonderful. His goals and objectives are simple. He gets Wordsworth’s fascination with nature but hasn’t read Wordsworth. He hasn’t read much of anything. He is illiterate. Therefore, the Hillbilly is not college material. His teachers have told him so. He isn’t going anywhere anytime soon. His family is here, connected to the land. His land. His people.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

Therefore, I am forced to think, speak, and write from the vantage point of the Hillbilly. I would rather not play this role. I do not consider myself as such: society has consistently told me this is what I am to be. The Hillbilly. The West Virginia Hillbilly. From a coalmining family. Graduate of the University of Willoughby Trailer Park. I can wear nice clothes. I can learn proper English. I can write in academic discourse. In other words, I can pass. However, it will just take one slip of the tongue, one mention of my hometown, one gesture of Appalachian culture to give myself away. Ostentatiously rendered Hillbilly. The Hillbilly cannot easily be discarded or put aside. The raise, the
promotion, and even the college degree do little to wash off his moonshine odor. You are still Hillbilly. America is quick to sniff you out.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

He reminds us that growing up on the wrong side of this perverse narrative has its negative consequences. One cannot easily remove the social stain or psychological impact that is the direct result of this othering. I see the world through Appalachian eyes. I write from a position of Appalachian other. As a reader, please erase any doubts that I am attempting to craft a neutral or unbiased ethos – I am not. The theory that informs my work has been influenced by a lifetime of experiences in the Appalachian region. My father grew up in a dingy pink trailer rooted alongside a dirt road that snaked its way through the mountains of Webster County, West Virginia. My mother grew up on a small Appalachian farm where she rode horses, fed chickens, and milked cows. They married young, bought a trailer, and had me. I am what the field of education refers to as a first-generation college student. However, I have no bootstraps narrative to share with the world, a story of overcoming insurmountable obstacles or transgressing cultural roots. I eventually turned my tassel and received the elusive college diploma. I obtained a Masters Degree, married young, and through a collection of chance incidents, and a lot of extremely hard work, came to pursue a PhD. and eventual career in academia, the Ivory Tower. Along the way, I have come to the realization that mainstream American educators have for some time ignored the concerns of Appalachian students and writers. From an early point in my postgraduate career, I decided that my scholarship would aim to provide the field of rhetoric and composition with a comprehensive look into what it
means to be Appalachian in the academy. I wanted to expose the pervasive Hillbilly myth associated with the Appalachian region and explain how these nuanced identity politics influence the material lives of a people. This project, in many ways, is my most comprehensive attempt to do just that.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

Therefore, I would like to maintain rhetorical transparency from the outset. I have no hidden agenda or ulterior motive; my objective is quite simple. My attention is turned to the most visible aspect of Appalachian culture: the legacy of the Hillbilly myth. I do not believe the rhetorical tradition responsible for the Hillbilly is of an innocent or disinterested nature. Things are not merely the way they are as a result of natural design or chance. The Hillbilly, as a rhetorical myth, benefits some and limits others. Never is the Hillbilly simply a stereotype or cliché. In making this argument, I will draw upon the work of postcolonial critic Edward Said. To explain the Hillbilly, as an empty signifier sutured to a variety of dominant political discourses, I will lean heavily on the work of post-Marxist scholars Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. I borrow from this collection of influential thinkers because they continually remind me to consider the relationship between power, knowledge, and discourse. They ask me to consider knowledge as a social construction, a product of dominant power-relations. Their work reminds me that economic, political, and social forces determine one’s position within this discursive struggle.

The Hillbilly Speaks of rhetoric.
Therefore, the Hillbilly is of rhetorical origins. His perverse narrative, to my understanding, serves many purposes, none of which are advantageous to the people of the Appalachian region. These are not whispers. These are not rumors. Instead, these are echoes from a long-standing tradition of Appalachian stereotyping. These caricatures are connected to a shared belief in our country, an acceptable brand of prejudice. My concern, however, is not to explore the validity of this tradition. Proving or disproving the Hillbilly myth is nothing new; both have been attempted with varying degrees of success. My attention is turned to the silenced and often overlooked voices that are influenced by this perverse narrative: the voices of young men and women trapped within the cyclical effects of poverty, parents who inadvertently sabotage the college careers of their children, and, of course, generations of hard working Appalachian families who uncritically position themselves as the working hands of society. It is time that we, as scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition, begin to consider the experiences of our Appalachian students. It is time we expand the multicultural conversation in our field to include student writers from these regions. No longer should we blindly assume the culture is as simple as the ugly stereotypes perpetuated by mass media. Nor should we pretend that Appalachian culture does not exist. To channel the late Paulo Freire, our students do not enter our classrooms as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. If students are to become educated participants in a democratic society, it will benefit them to gain the critical thinking skills necessary for such participation. For Appalachian students, the first step is recognizing the various ways in which they have been painted Appalachian by this long-standing rhetorical tradition. If we can agree that
students tend to become better thinkers when able to recognize how they have been conditioned to subscribe to certain argumentative positions, we can also agree that the rhetorical capabilities of our students hinge upon their ability to critique the habitual and everyday aspects of life: scholars such as Ira Shor, Peter McLaren, and Henry Giroux have long argued this point. As a teacher and scholar, I have yet to give up on the liberatory aspect of education. I believe rhetoric-based learning has the potential to change the material circumstances of student lives. Rhetorical theory mixed with good composition pedagogy. An exercise in critical thinking. Deschooling. An unlearning of Appalachia for Appalachian students.

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

So I begin with his story. It takes place in land rich in natural beauty and natural resources. The main characters are a people historically isolated from the rest of American society, victims of economic, physical, and cultural isolation to be specific. We will have guest appearances by wealthy northern elites who attempt to use their privileged positions to shape and mold a national identity for the people of Appalachia. In doing so, they will establish a market, or audience, for the Hillbilly narrative. Thus, spinning the story of the Hillbilly will gradually become a profitable endeavor. Spoiler alert: politicians, pundits, and publics will seize the opportunity to mold the culture to their own benefit. The story of the Hillbilly is also one of greedy capitalists, absentee owners, who attempt to profit from the region’s natural resources. They buy up the land, force the people to work dangerous and low paying jobs, and, in many ways, control their lives. The Hillbilly myth provides justification for their doing so. Sounds
like colonization to me. The economic and social realities of this exploitation will thus
give way to a culture shaped by the realities of marginalized existence. Distanced from
philosophy, literacy, and true political participation, the Hillbilly finds himself in the
realm of the pragmatic. To work, provide, and survive. The Hillbilly is given his politics.
Given his story. Economically, politically, and socially dominated, he is told what is best
for him. The Hillbilly is passivity in the face of exploitation.

The Hillbilly Speaks of rhetoric.

His story is a story that we, as a society, must read critically. In critiquing the
rhetorical nature of this story, I will, at times, slip in and out of academic discourse. This
is because, as Victor Villanueva points out, academic discourse is, at times, quite
limiting:

Academic discourse is cognitively powerful. It can be strong for logos. It can be
strong for ethos. But is very weak in pathos. Academic discourse tries, after all, to
reach the Aristotelian ideal of being completely logocentric, through it cannot be
freed of the ethical appeal to authority. (12)

The story of the Hillbilly is one of pathos. It is a collection of histories, memories, and
emotions. My discourse will reflect my uneven and constantly shifting negotiations of
these conflicting identities: the Appalachian vs. the academic. Hybrid text. Rhetorical-
Discursive-textuality. Double-voiced. Though I am grateful for the conventions of
academic discourse, I am cannot help but recognize their undeniable relationship to
actual real-life authority and privilege, the same language that rendered the Appalachian
region Hillbilly in the first place. Perhaps I am suspicious. I am suspicious of academic
scholarship that claims to be neutral, bereft of pathos. Suspicious of Appalachian scholars who are reluctant to disclose their investment in the subject at hand. The Hillbilly tugs at our emotions. It tugs at my emotions. It has affected me. Affected students like me. Perhaps affected students in your classrooms. It is not a simple narrative that has a beginning, middle, and end. I cannot erase the Hillbilly by writing my way into the academy. I can only tell you his story and hope to convince you of its underlying rhetorical nature. There is no formula for proving or disproving the Hillbilly. We may only study the consequences of his being. Appalachia is not as it seems.

The Hillbilly speaks not of identifiable, rational, or empirical truth …

The Hillbilly speaks of rhetoric.

Writing the Hillbilly: Rhetorical Histories

Questioning Appalachia

To begin, let us consider what we, as a society, know to be true of 21st century Appalachia. First, Appalachia, as a region, is geographically unique. It is unquestionably distinct from the surrounding coastal plantation country, agro-industrial Midwest, and wealthy east coast metropolitan areas located north of region (Askins, Ewing, and Zimolzak 1). Second, we know that Appalachia is visually characterized by a vast system of mountains that stretch through thirteen different American States: New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Maryland, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the entire state of West Virginia. Third, we know that Appalachia is home to an abundance of natural resources (e.g. anthracite coal, bituminous coal, and timber). Fourth, we know that various regions within Appalachia
have been historically unified by poverty; numerous economic studies demonstrate how this poverty gives way to insufficient educational systems and poor health care within Appalachia. We also know that Appalachia is unified by a dominant cultural characterization regarding the people who live within these impoverished regions. The result of this narrative is the Hillbilly. It is a hurtful and denigrating term, a fitting name for a hurtful and denigrating history. I prefer the term Hillbilly when describing the various social stigmas attached to the region because, more often than not, this term is the dominant buzzword used to signal these collections of insults. The term Hillbilly, therefore, is an appropriate label for the rhetorical myth that has been appropriated and perpetuated by more economically and socially privileged sectors of American society. This is what we know of Appalachia (the Mountains, the Poverty, and the Hillbilly).

Now let us explore the elements of Appalachian identity that are more difficult to agree upon. First, I will remind you that Appalachia has mythological borders. It was originally defined as a region that consisted of 194 counties in 8 different states. Today, Appalachia is seen as consisting of 450 counties in 13 different states. Through the years, administrators such as William Goodell Frost and scholars such as John C. Campbell attempted to dictate the parameters of the region. Governing bodies such as the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) have also played a key role in mapping Appalachia as a region and as a culture. Despite these continuous efforts to define and categorize Appalachia, the region continues to remain an enigma. Where one lives within an Appalachian state often determines his or her willingness to identify as Appalachian. Appalachian cultural membership is unquestionably difficult to ascertain. The region is
not a fixed entity. What counts as Appalachian is constantly in flux. Second, we must not accept the denigrating set of cultural characteristics given to us by the Hillbilly as observable truth regarding the region or its people. The Hillbilly is a term invented by outside oppressive forces and used to denote the status of Appalachian people. The stereotypes given to us by the rhetorical myth of the Hillbilly must be called into question. However, our goal should not be to prove or disprove their validity. Instead, our focus should be on the economic, political, and social consequences of their coming into being. It is imperative that we interrogate the authors of his story. In doing so, we must not assume the Hillbilly is a new concept or recent phenomenon. The story of the Hillbilly does not begin with CBS and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The Hillbilly is not a simple cliché given to us as a product of John Boorman’s *Deliverance*. Nor is the Hillbilly an inside-joke perpetuated by the creative energies of comedians on Comedy Central’s *Blue Color Comedy Tour*. The Hillbilly reared his ugly face to mainstream America long before these pop culture artifacts found their way unto our television screens. Unfortunately, the people of the region have played only a small part in naming and negotiating this identity. For many outsiders, perception becomes reality, a socio-cultural metamorphosis. The American imagination frames the Hillbilly as irrational, savage, and, in many ways, subhuman. We are asked to believe the Hillbilly is to blame for his own social and economic condition. Outside forces are able to justify their exploits in the region by simply pointing to the fact that they are dealing with the Hillbilly. Because of this narrative, those with economic and political power justify their right to decide what was best for him. The Hillbilly has no say in this process. He is, of
course, just a Hillbilly. Any thorough questioning of Appalachian identity must, therefore, begin by focusing on the economic, political, and social forces that shape and promote the dynamics of Hillbilly identity. In doing so, one will find that the Hillbilly, as a rhetorical myth, is neither fixed nor stagnant. Outside forces have crafted competing versions of the Hillbilly to meet the needs of their own selfish purposes.

Recognizing Appalachia as a conceptual place, the Hillbilly as an imposed cultural identity, will bring us back to the question of what counts as Appalachian. Scholars within Appalachian studies have, for some time, positioned the region as a land with no formal history. Perhaps this is because Appalachia, as it exists in the contemporary American imagination, continues to reflect both myth and reality. Defining the Appalachian region can be an extremely daunting task. Its mythical borders are home to a people economically, socially, and geographically isolated from the rest of the country. As a result of this isolation, countless numbers of books, films, and television programs have been able to falsely portray Appalachian cultural values. Thus, we are left with a media-perpetuated tradition of stigmatization that impacts the lives of those born into cultural otherness. However, the Hillbilly predates mass media. The myth of the Hillbilly also predates the term Appalachia. In The Invention of Appalachia, scholar Allen Batteau posits Appalachia as a “literary and a political invention rather than a geographical discovery” (1). For Batteau, the invention of Appalachia was the direct result of a tradition of carefully constructed works by novelists, journalists, and politicians during the late 19th century and early 20th century. Though highly influential, Batteau’s work has received a number of mixed reviews since its publication in 1990.
Scholars such as Herbert Reid, for example, wonder if we, as Appalachian scholars, can “really afford to believe with Allen Batteau that Appalachia is just a metropolitan elite invention” (Reid 178). For scholars on this side of the fence, images of the Appalachian region play a significant role in our historical debates and shifting cultural negotiations in regard to the truths these images dispense to American publics. In other words, unique aspects of Appalachian culture can be located and observed. Therefore, an authentic Appalachian culture must exist. In supporting this line of thinking we begin to move ourselves away from the issues of rhetoric and hegemonic reification. It is rhetoric that gives us the set of characteristics we seek out and observe. It is rhetoric that gives us the hypotheses we attempt to validate or disprove. To fully question Appalachia we must resist the urge to speak of the region or its people as if they fit some monolithic social or cultural set of criteria.

Batteau’s The Invention of Appalachia gives us a starting place for locating the key authors and literary works that serve as the origins of the Hillbilly narrative. I will, however, agree with Batteau’s detractors in that labeling Appalachia as a fictive invention does limit our ability to accurately account for the persistent economic, political, and social problems found in the region. To fully understand Appalachian culture and identity we must explore the rhetorical energy behind this invention. We must come to see histories of Appalachia as intrinsically tied to the rhetorical aims of their authors. To demonstrate the economic, political, and social consequences of rhetorical history, I will turn to the work of literary theorist Edward Said, particularly his concept of Orientalism. Said’s Orientalism, reminds us that rhetorical histories often maintain
connections to actual visual and observable cultural characteristics. Therefore, pairing Said’s Orientalism with Batteau’s theoretical framework does not require us to believe this invention is completely fictitious or pulled out of imaginative thin air. Said’s Orientalism forces us to consider the fact that the novelists, journalists, and politicians who began this tradition held an economic, political, and social advantage over the people they were naming for the rest of the country. Both theorists, Said and Batteau, remind us to pay attention to the discursive power-relations at hand. The Appalachian Hillbilly did not write his way into the American imagination. The Hillbilly was given a collection of histories, each with its own rhetorical agenda.

**Orientalism and Appalachia**

In his highly influential work *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that U.S. and European domination of Asia and the Middle East is historically tied to false and romanticized notions of the peoples, cultures, and countries located within these regions. Perpetuated by the rhetoric of a large body of Western texts, this socially constructed myth of the Orient has, for some time, served as implicit justification for U.S. and European conquests of eastern countries. Borrowing from Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, Said explains how Western writers have constructed a literary narrative regarding the East that has been advantageous to the colonial ambitions of Western powers. The portrayal of the weak and irrational Orient is thus juxtaposed with the image of a powerful and rational version of Western civilization. Most importantly, Said is able to illuminate for readers how this tradition is used to reaffirm Western identity constructs. The binaries created by Orientalism demonstrate how conceptions of *other* serve as a
prerequisite for colonialisms. The Master reaffirms his own identity by forcing the Slave to recognize himself as such. Orientalism, therefore, gives us the Master’s skewed take on a people that have been historically dominated by his own imperialist might. Through written histories (literature, textbooks, travel accounts, etc.) the Master is able to craft an Eden story that explains how contemporary circumstances have came to be. Domination thus becomes a rational phenomenon.

For the purposes of my project, I would like to use Said’s concept of Orientalism as a framework for explaining how dominant social groups other their less socially or economically privileged counterparts; more specifically, how this process leads to (in)formal histories marked by the rhetorical aims of dominant social groups. A self-conscious recognition that both regional and national identity constructs are, of course, concepts invented and influenced by the physical and mental needs of social groups is perhaps the proper starting place for such a discussion. In outlining this Western tradition of Orientalism, Said begins by reminding us that the Orient is not an “inert fact of nature” (71). Here Said gives serious consideration to Giambattista Vico’s famous argument regarding the limitations of written or oral history: “men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities” (qtd. in Said 71). As opposed to a region that has a formal history, Said positions the Orient as an “idea that has a history” (72). The Orient, for Said, is a tradition of thoughts, images, and words that give way to a socio-cultural reality that positions the region as Other to the West and thereby defines the West itself. Caricatured and dehumanized, the people of the Orient are often relegated to a lower
status in an imagined social hierarchy, thus becoming easier targets for the self-righteous ambitions of imperialist powers. Identity, be it regional or national, does not dwell in the realm of capital T truth. Both Orient and Occident have no natural origin. Said reminds us that we have invited these concepts and have perpetuated their being.

Said’s Orientalism does, however, come with some careful qualifications. First, Said argues that “it would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was essentially an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality” (72). Characterizations of the Orient are often rooted in the perceptions of those who have experienced actual observable characteristics of the region. Therefore, Orientalism is not the result of imagination alone. However, to borrow a term from Immanuel Kant’s *The Critique of Judgment*, this tradition, as a rhetorical history, is never completely “disinterested.” This ongoing characterization of the Orient, Islam, and Arab peoples directly serves the purposes of the imperial powers Said aims to critique. This leads us to Said’s second, and perhaps most important, qualification: “ideas, cultures, and histories can not seriously be understood or studied without their force, more precisely their configuration of power, also being studied (72). Drawing on the social theories of Michele Foucault, Said reminds readers that any study of the Orient that ignores issues of power and domination will essentially underscore the rhetorical nature of this socially constructed truth. Formal history, if such a thing exists, is written by dominant social groups as opposed to those being conquered these voices are often pushed to the margins of history. This is not to say that Said views Orientalism as a simple faux-history. Said’s third qualification, “never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were
the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away,” reminds us of how rhetorical histories become deeply engrained in the psyche of both dominant and exploited social groups (72). In other words, exposing this rhetorical tradition does not cause it to disappear. Nor does this process of uncovering necessarily liberate the people being marginalized by the dominant social group. A rhetorical history, such as the narrative constructed by Orientalism, is essentially a shared history that falsely attempts to justify the domination of a marginalized people. Such a history is not easily deconstructed or proven false. Actual social, political, and economic forces give the dominant narrative its permanence.

For Said, the Orient is the product of a Western rhetoric. It is a rhetorical myth, a myth that “has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it” (Said 89). The same can be said for Appalachia, as it continues to be understood by the majority of Americans today. However, comparing Orientalism to Appalachia, as I plan to do, requires several careful qualifications on my part as well. First, Appalachia, like the Orient, is not a country. It is not even a land with identifiable boarders. Appalachia was never formally discovered or conquered. It was created. Conceptualized. Named. Though historically dominated by outside forces, Appalachians share the same national identity as those who aim to reinforce this domination. Also, the physical distance between the Occident and the Orient cannot easily be compared to the insider/outsider dichotomy created by the physical isolation that characterizes the Appalachian region. This is not colonialism with a capital C. There is no pervasive military history of the U.S. Government using lethal force against the
people of Appalachia, though incidents of such violence have taken place (e.g. The Matewan Massacre\textsuperscript{3}). I do not wish to underscore the real life brutality of colonialism, actual colonies being overtaken by foreign powers. Framing the people of Appalachia as victims of colonization is an analogical move. Appalachians have not been forcefully cast out of their homeland as a result of colonial domination. With this being said, clear parallels do exist between Orientalism and the socially constructed myth of Appalachia. Said’s theoretical framework has the potential to aid our understanding of Appalachia as an invention, a product of the American imagination. More importantly, it demonstrates how the idea of Appalachia is connected to forms of economic, social, and political domination, forms of domination that contain both overt and subversive rhetorical structures.

In his 1989 article “Appalachianism and Orientalism: Reflections on Reading Edward Said,” scholar Roger Cunningham uses the term Appalachianism to compare the socially constructed myth of Appalachia to the Western views of the Orient described in Said’s work. Cunningham argues that both Appalachianism and Orientalism are traditions of thought maintained by an underlying discourse of power, “a way of seeing and talking about things which is conditioned by domination and which tends both to perpetuate itself and to perpetuate that domination” (261). Appalachianism is therefore self-referential. Like Orientalism, it is a closed system that shapes and organizes the perceptions of American publics (Cunningham 261). Those who uncritically subscribe to these dominant characterizations often do so without recognizing their implicit

\footnote{\textsuperscript{3}In 1920, a shootout between local union coalminers and members of a government agency occurred in Matewan, West Virginia.}
participation in the oppression of actual human lives. Appalachianism is the history of a people subversively marked by the rhetorical agenda of dominant social groups, marginalized publics dominated by outside interests. This brings us to the argument that Appalachians, as a people, have suffered the consequences of American colonialist ambition. Dominant histories of Appalachia are, therefore, suspect and must be called into question.

**Appalachianism and the Colonial Model**

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, numerous scholars within the field of Appalachian Studies attempted to use the colonialism model to discuss exploitation in the Appalachian region. For example, *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, a collection of essays edited by Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins, demonstrates the depth of such scholarship. However, framing the people of Appalachia as a colonized people was hardly a new idea at the time of this particular book’s publication. Richard Drake, for example, traces the use of the colonialism interpretation of Appalachian poverty to writers in the labor movement in the 1890s: during the 1930s writers such as Theodore Dreiser and Malcom Ross explicitly attempted to connect the issue of absentee ownership to the exploitation of Appalachian people (qtd. in Lewis 2). This long-standing argument, one that posits the people of Appalachia as colonized and the forces behind the extract industries as colonizers, deserves consideration. Before doing so, however, we must first think critically about how we define and explain the processes of colonization.
Most will agree that colonization begins with economic privilege. The process begins when an outside group of economically privileged peoples attempt to maintain a colony outside the boundaries of their home territory. The colonizing force establishes the colony in an attempt to profit from its control over a region and people who do not have the means to resist this imposition. In most instances, this imposition is justified rhetorically. Perhaps the most popular narrative is that of civilization or modernization. The colonizing force disguises its imposition as a charitable attempt to offer a disadvantaged people a better way of life. Thus, the story of the colonized people becomes the narrative of the colonizing force as long as the power dynamics remain intact. As a result of this imposition, the colonizing force influences the material circumstances of life within the colony. The culture, the ideology, and the day-to-day comings and goings of life in the colony are the results of colonizer’s privilege.

Therefore, the process of colonization is tied to subversion, hidden economic agendas. In successful colonization, the colonized people gradually begin to accept their own inferiority. The narrative of the colonizer becomes socially constructed truth – the history of how the existing social order came to be.

If we are to compare the people of Appalachia to a colonized people, we must begin by locating similarities among Appalachian poverty and exploitation and commonly held notions of colonization. American scholars have long recognized the Appalachian region as one marked by isolation and poverty, a region economically dominated by outside forces. The Appalachian Mountains are, of course, geographically responsible for such isolation. Scholars Helen Matthews Lewis and Edward Knipe
remind us that because of its mountainous landscape, Appalachia was a land “late being settled”: “Until the Revolution it was an area to pass through or skirt around” (10). One can argue that Appalachia was late being Americanized as well; the region underwent a “period of virtual isolation (80 – 100 years) in the 19th century” because of its mountainous terrain (Lewis and Knipe 10). The social circumstances of Appalachia would, of course, change when coal mining companies, lumber organizations, and the railroad industry officials eventually plundered their way to the region during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. The rise of the extract industries would mark the beginning of Appalachia’s exploitation. The arrival of the extract industries would also mark the golden era of the Hillbilly narrative, a time where America’s fascination with the Appalachian region showed itself in a variety of forms. The arrival of the extract industries and the birth of the Hillbilly narrative occur almost simultaneously. These occurrences should not be taken for mere coincidence.

As populations increased in Appalachia, the region gradually became a profitable economic opportunity for outside interest groups. In an age of increasing industrialization and mechanized worked, the natural resources found within the region opened up new possibilities for what would later become the extract industries. The rapid population increases found in Appalachian coal mining counties would also lead to the formation of new mountain settlements and towns, social systems less dependent on farming and less characterized by rugged individualism. In these small coal mining towns, often referred to as coal camps, workers were unable to escape the influenced of industrial forces, a point eloquently made by Lewis and Knipe:
To house and serve these workers and their families, the mining companies, lumbering interests, and railroads built *encampments* for the newcomers. These *camps or colliery towns* [were] complete with company owned houses, stores, theaters, clinics, hospitals, churches, and schools (11).

The citizens of these socially segregated communities were economically dependant upon the extract industries. In some cases, workers were paid in company script that could only be spent at company owned stores. Although the coal and lumber industries quickly began to thrive in Appalachia, workers and residents of the region did not explicitly reap the benefits of this progress. The extract industries did not provide the people of Appalachia with upward mobility, rather social stigmatization. Workers earned just enough to sustain a meager way of life. As a result of this uneven distribution of income, opportunities for social/economic mobility or class ascension became few.

After establishing their claim to the land, the extract industries, though not a monolithic force, drastically influenced the material circumstances of day-to-day life in Appalachia. First, companies bought up the land, legally claiming ownership over vast portions of the region. Because of the region’s vast isolation, these businesses became the only way to sustain a modern way of life, a lifestyle influenced by consumer capitalist identity. Due to a clear lack of employment opportunities, Appalachian women, like many American women during this era, were relegated to the household. Deep mines, saw mills, and railroad tracks called for traditionally masculine work. There were, of course, few, if any, dual-income families in Appalachia’s early days. It was the father’s duty to provide for his family by any means necessary. The mother was to bare children;
the extract industries needed her to do so because their enterprise called for new
generations of hard working Appalachians. Over the years, Appalachian communities
began to take on a similar shape. Despite the economic boom created by the extract
industries, poor health care, meager education, and insufficient access to transportation
continued to define the region. Even today, Appalachia continues to lag behind the rest of
the nation in regard to education, health care, and economic opportunity. Some suggest
this lack of improvement is the result of corrupt Appalachian political systems that are
undeniably tied to the extract industries. History shows us that the careers of many
Appalachian politicians have been defined by siding with the interests of the extract
industries as opposed to the interests of Appalachian workers. Regardless of whether or
not one considers its people historically colonized, the argument that the people of
Appalachia have been exploited remains exceedingly difficult to refute.

In defining the Appalachian region and naming its poverty, writers, scholars, and
cultural critics have taken a variety of persuasive routes. Some have argued cultural
connections to Appalachian poverty. These critics place the blame squarely on the people
and their culture. Others point the region’s dependency on the extract industries. In other
words, outside economic powers have dominated the social structure of Appalachian
communities, thus leaving the people at the mercy of capitalist exploitation. My concern,
however, is not to explain why much of Appalachia continues to suffer from a
disadvantaged economic and social climate. I am interested in demonstrating how the
story of the people affected by this poverty others the region in a rhetorical style similar
to that of Said’s Orientalism. I am also interested in the consequences of this othering. I
am interested in demonstrating how Appalachia functions as a rhetorical myth that we, as a society, have taken for granted. So let us momentarily put aside any arguments regarding whether or not the people of Appalachia have been colonized by outside industrial forces; this is a complex argument that will be considered further in Chapter 3. Perhaps we can settle on the recognition that coal, lumber, and railroad industries have played a huge part in the systematizing of Appalachia. Perhaps we can also agree that this process has greatly impacted the lives of Appalachian workers and their families. Therefore, let us examine the various competing histories of the Appalachian region. Critiquing the rhetorical nature of these narratives will perhaps provide us the opportunity to think critically about their origins and thus their cultural staying power. Doing so will also allow us to see Appalachia as more than a monolithic culture that maintains a set number of social characteristics. Exploring Appalachia as a rhetorical history that maintains a variety of articulated meanings will give us a clearer insight into the political discourses that have shaped contemporary notions of Appalachian existence.

**Appalachia as Informal Literary Tradition**

Regardless of whether or not one subscribes to Allen Batteau’s suggestion that Appalachia is an invention of late nineteenth and early twentieth century northern elites, it is impossible to ignore the popularity of the Hillbilly narrative established during this period. Travel accounts, one of the most popular literary genres of the day, gave those outside the region a chance to know the Hillbilly like never before. Perpetuated by an abundance of northern-based publications, Appalachian travel accounts quickly grabbed the American imagination:
As early as the 1870’s, writers for the new monthly magazines which flourished after the Civil War had begun to develop and exploit a literary image of the region. Initially drawn to the mountains in search of the interesting and the picturesque, local color writers such as Mary Noailles Murfree, James Lane Allen, John Fox, Jr., and others were quick to turn the quaint and simple lives of the mountaineers into grist for the literary mill. (Eller 35)

When considering the speed of communication in pre-digitized America, the sheer popularity and rapidity in which these narratives were published and disseminated is simply astonishing. Scholar Ronald D. Eller points out that between 1870 and 1890, over two hundred Appalachian travel accounts and short fictions were published regarding the people of the region, most of which painted the Appalachian as a “rude, backward, romantic, and sometimes violent race who quietly lived for generations in isolation from the mainstream American life” (35). This body of work does, of course, reflect the capitalist philosophy of supply and demand. Northern middle and upper class publics established a market for the Hillbilly narrative. To stay afloat in this competitive market, Northern publishing companies were inadvertently forced to meet the demands of a readership clearly drawn to the story of the rugged Hillbilly. This pressure to stay competitive, to tell the next great Appalachian story, undoubtedly fueled the need for writers to frame the Hillbilly as an exotic and sometimes romanticized other for Northern readerships. In doing so, early Appalachian color writers, as they are often called, were able to reaffirm their own identities as well as the identities of their readers. The civilized and rational North was thus juxtaposed with the savage and irrational South.
Said’s work reminds us of the key role travel narratives played in shaping Western views of the Orient. Perhaps this is because the genre is expository in nature. Audiences expect these works to report observable truths - this was especially true for pre-digitized societies. Said’s work also reminds us of how these literary trends established a connected and somewhat shared understanding among cultures. In *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, Anthony Harkins marks the beginnings of the Hillbilly, as an informal literary movement, from 1865 to 1900 (29). However, Harkins does not suggest this caricature was a completely new phenomenon at the time during the publications of travel accounts. Instead, Harkins argues that travel accounts simply fueled the flames of America’s curiosity:

By the time the Arkansas Traveler was becoming iconicized in the decades immediately following the Civil War, descriptions and images of rustic rubes, impoverished southern whites, and frontier inhabitants had developed for well over 100 years and were well established in American culture. These separate depictions not only would continue to appear in various cultural formats throughout the twentieth century, but they also began to coalesce into a new self-contained image linked to a specific geographic locale – the dualistic icon of the hillbilly-mountaineer. The new creation was largely the result of the emergence of the “local color” writing in the 1870s and 1880s, a literary genre that grew out of the new, popular nineteenth-century magazines (such as *Lippincott’s, The Century, Scribner’s, The Living Age*, and above all, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*) that catered to a newly expansive urban middle-class readership. (29)
These new literary venues, as Harkins eloquently points out, were often backed by northern money. Monthly magazines, such as *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, specifically marketed their product to a readership outside the Appalachian region. This new brand of Appalachian travel narrative was also quite dissimilar from those written by “early-nineteenth-century naturalists and scholars who wrote their travel accounts for a specialized scientific community and who viewed their work as objective analyses of natural, geological, and climactic conditions” (Harkins 29). Local color writers were specifically interested in selling magazines and entertaining their readership. Immensely popular, many of these monthly magazines were in high demand among northern publics: *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, for example, established a circulation of over 50,000 just six months into its existence (“History”). Accessibility was, in many ways, the key to the success of these narratives. Monthly magazines, such as *Harpers*, often contained a reader-friendly and sometimes conversational writing style. Readers were also drawn to monthly magazines because of the wide range of vivid illustrations that often graced the pages. One could now see the Hillbilly without having to make his or her way through the rough and dangerous Appalachian terrain. This cultural phenomenon undoubtedly catered to an American audience already enamored with the fictionalized and media-fabricated image of backwoods figures such as Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone during the 1840s and the 1850s (Harkins 23). Northern publics could recognize the Hillbilly and they were unquestionably fascinated by him.

Many of the Appalachian travel narratives being proliferated by monthly magazines during the late 19th century aimed to position the Hillbilly as a moonshine
drinking, high tempered simpleton completely out of touch with modern society. The images found in monthly magazines, such as Harpers, presented what many scholars believe to be a disingenuous caricature of the Appalachian people. The men, tall, lanky, suspender-wearing zombies, were characterized by blank stares and poor posture. Women, such as the “Mountaineer Dame” illustrated with James Lane Allen’s “Through Cumberland Gap on Horseback,” were often painted as stern, de-feminized, rocking chair grandmas with cob pipes full of tobacco (Harkins 33). The coonskin hat was replaced with the moonshine bottle, the heroics of Crocket and Boone replaced by the clannish violence and constant feuding of an imagined Appalachia. This disempowering served a number of socio-cultural and political functions. First, it positioned Appalachia as a problem, an American problem. Newspapers such as Courier-Journal and the Times explicitly framed the Hillbilly as a threat to “national economic prosperity and social stability” (Harkins 35). The image of the dangerous and uncivilized Hillbilly gave those in power the justification, and perhaps the obligation, to intervene. The Appalachian, therefore, joined the Native American and the African Slave as opposition to America’s imperialist ambitions. The solution, in the minds of many northern elites, was to northernize Appalachia. Railroads, coalmines, and lumber companies would justify their actions by arguing they were bringing civilization, not exploitation, to the region. The modernizing of Appalachia would bring cities, towns, and prosperity to a region of bloody feuds and lawless aggression. It was quite a promise.

Perhaps the most famous Hillbilly narrative proliferated during this first wave of Appalachian travel accounts was that of the Hatfield and McCoy feud in the 1880s. The
story of the Hatfields and McCoys of the Kentucky / West Virginia border became so deeply engrained in the imaginations of northern readers that it eventually became synonymous with Appalachian life. Countless numbers of travel accounts and journalistic books aimed to tell the true-life story of these wild and clannish Appalachian families, the most famous of which was New York World journalist T.C. Crawford’s *An American Vendetta: A Story of Barbarism in the United States*, published in 1889. Crawford’s text presented readers with a portrait of “Devil Anse” (William Anderson) Hatfield and “Old Ranel” (Randolph) McCoy and their families as savage and isolated Hillbillies living in a “Murderland” where family loyalty ruled above all else (Harkins 36). However, it is important to note that several inconsistencies emerged during the publications of these works. Some argued the Hatfield and McCoy feud was a direct result of tensions unresolved from the Civil War. Other accounts portrayed the feud as the product of a love affair between members of the two families/clans. Some even attempted to trace the beginnings of the feud back to the killing of a pig. Regardless of the cause, the story of the Hatfield and McCoys was one of violence. Bloody massacres. Retaliatory violence. No regard for the law. With the popularity of the Hatfield and McCoy narrative, the legend of Appalachia quickly began to grow. In the minds of many well-to-do northerners, something had to be done about these Hillbillies. Many writers attempted to blame this violent cycle on economic depravity. Therefore, to fix the Hillbilly would be to fix his environment. The Hillbilly needed to become industrialized. He needed to be put to work.
Before the social ills of Appalachia could be solved by northern elites, the Hillbilly had to be named. The emergence of the term Hillbilly would mark the end of the informal literary tradition scholars, such as Harkins, outline from the mid 1800s to the early 1900s. The first known appearance of the term Hillbilly, in print, came from correspondent Julian Hawthorne in a 1900 *New York Journal* article (Harkins 49). Though Harkins recognizes the term’s connection to Scottish terms such as “Hill-folk” and “Billie,” he argues that the term Hillbilly did not become a part of mainstream America’s vocabulary until the 1900s (48). In the before mentioned *New York Journal* article, Julian Hawthorne defines the Hill-billie as a “free and untrammeled white citizen of Alabama, who lives in the hills, has no means to speak of, dresses as he can, talks as he pleases, drinks whiskey when he gets it, and fires off his revolver as the fancy takes him” (qtd. in Harkins 49). Harkins suggests this particular description was directly tied to the Appalachian travel narratives and short fictions that gained popularity during the previous thirty-five years. Though the general caricature of the Hillbilly had firmly been established, the term, itself, gradually worked its way into the American vocabulary. Over the years it would become synonymous with all of Appalachia. It was a term that could easily be applied to any poor white community located with the region, an ambiguous term that could be used in a variety of denigrating contexts.

The popularity of Appalachian travel accounts and short fictions not only fueled the monthly magazine industry but also made the literary careers of many novelists and journalists during this time period. During the last two decades, numerous Appalachian scholars have attempted to canonize a list of writers responsible for the pre-Hillbilly era.
More often than not, Mary Noailles Murfree, John Fox, Jr. and James Lane Allen are cited for their contributions to this tradition. Scholars within Appalachian Studies have also pointed out that each of these participants shared a similar background. In fact, all three writers were Appalachian-born, economically-privileged, and northern-educated. Because of their cultural roots in the region, these writers were able to establish a credible ethos in writing about the Hillbilly. Theirs was an insider perspective that appealed to northern audiences. This mask of authenticity would allow each of these Appalachian born writers to convince audiences of the Hillbilly’s existence.

Writing under the penname Charles Egbert Craddock, Mary Murfree would have a tremendous impact on America’s literary fascination with the Hillbilly. A native of Tennessee, Murfree attended finishing school in Philadelphia and would eventually make her way to St. Louis with her well-to-do family. With the publications of short stories such as *In the Tennessee Mountains* (1884) and *The Prophet of the Great Smokey Mountains* (1885) Murfree established an image of the Hillbilly that differed slightly from its clannish and violent predecessors. Though many contemporary Appalachian scholars question the “accuracy of her human portrayals” in these works, Murfree’s audience undoubtedly took them at face value (Harkins 30). Murfree’s Hillbilly was noticeably of a more pastoral and natural existence. Her Appalachian protagonists often signified an “illiterate but moral and proud people living in total isolation from modern America” (Harkins 30). The innocent but uneducated Hillbilly of Murfree’s work framed the Appalachian as more of a historic relic as opposed to a social danger / problem that
needed to be solved. Either way, the rhetorical message given to readers was indeed quite clear. The Appalachians were a people on the fringes of modern bourgeoisie society.

Like Murfree, John Fox, Jr. used his cultural connection to Appalachia to bolster his literary career. A Harvard educated novelist and journalist who built his literary reputation by writing about life in Appalachia, Fox undoubtedly capitalized on his connection to his hometown of Stony Point Kentucky. Fox, like Murfree, lived in Appalachia for only a short period in his life; he eventually made his way north, received an Ivy League education, and worked for publications such as the *New York Times* and *New York Sun*. Despite the fact that he was more a product of the northern educational system than a son of Appalachia, Fox continually positioned himself as a champion for the region. However, many contemporary Appalachian Studies scholars, such as Don Askins, argue that Fox was essentially an outsider capitalizing on the popularity of Appalachian travel narratives:

> In spite of much that has been written to the contrary, John Fox, Jr., who achieved a degree of fame and fortune through the literary exploitation of the Appalachian mountaineer, reveals in his fiction little love for either the mountain people or the mountain milieu. His view was always that of an outsider who was examining a quaintly curious but inferior breed with whom he could scarcely sympathize, much less empathize. (256)

Though known for his vivid journalistic style, Fox’s biggest successes would come in the genre of fiction. With the release of *The Kentuckians* (1898), *A Mountain Europa* (1899), and *Blue-grass and Rhododendron: Outdoors in Old Kentucky* (1901), Fox quickly
cemented his place in northern literary circles. However, Fox’s biggest success would come after the publication of his first best selling novel *The Little Shepard’s Kingdom* in 1903. In this story, Fox attempts to outline the social hierarchy of life in Appalachia. Like Murfree, Fox depicts the Hillbilly as innocently ignorant of the ways of modern society. Despite several clear attempts to romanticize the region, Fox continually depicts its people “as incapable of developing a state of civilization (Askins 255). In critiquing the rhetorical message of the story, scholar Donald Askins reminds us that “when civilization comes to the mountains, it is imposed forcibly upon the native populace, as was the case of the Big Stone Gap Guard, a group of Harvard and Yale graduates self-appointed to bring “law and order to rude savages in their mountain fastness” (255). Thus *The Little Shepard’s Kingdom* can be read as a call for northern elites to rescue the homeland of the author. Fox’s work suggested to audiences that Appalachia was unable to speak for itself. It was a land bereft of a proper social structure. It was a land in need of assistance, northern assistance.

Because of their immense popularity, Appalachian travel accounts became a career opportunity, a literary blueprint, for aspiring Appalachian-born authors. James Lane Allen, like Fox, was born in Kentucky, came from an economically privileged family, migrated north (New York), and became well known as a result of his ability to write about life his home state. Often credited as one of Kentucky’s first great novelists, Allen was a key contributor to the color writing era responsible for the Appalachian literary craze. Though Allen began his career working for the same monthly magazines made popular in the pre-Hillbilly era, his biggest success would come as an author of
Appalachian fiction. The author of several novels concerning Appalachian Allen, like Fox, made a name for himself as a literary champion of the region. Following this literary blueprint became a profitable endeavor. The concept of the educated Appalachian who could serve as a translator or mediator for the rest of America became literary gold. These rhetorics of insider perspective contributed greatly to the ever-growing notion that Appalachia was in great need of industrial development. In establishing this tradition, authors such as Murfree, Fox, and Allen were able to advance the literary tradition responsible for the Hillbilly. Many contemporary Appalachian Studies scholars are, of course, skeptical of the rhetorical message promoted by this tradition. For instance, Ronald L. Lewis accuses writers such as John Fox, Jr. of perpetrating and then perpetuating “a myth of Appalachian otherness to facilitate absentee corporate control of the region’s natural resources by marginalizing indigenous residents’” (1). Regardless of their true intentions or connections to industrial greed, each of these authors undeniably played a significant part in convincing America of the helplessness of an Appalachia other. Thus, the Hillbilly became a socially constructed truth, a truth with an identifiable history.

**Appalachia as Institutional Identity**

Academic institutions have also played a large part in shaping Appalachia’s national identity. From this standpoint, Berea College, located in the southern mountains of Kentucky, is a good place to begin. Founded by abolitionists during the 1850s, Berea College, from the outset, positioned itself as an institution mindful of the social and economic problems of the region. Though often cited as the first coeducational and
A racially integrated college in the United States, Berea College is also unique in that its original goal was “to provide education to Appalachia’s bright but poor students” (Knight 13). Because of the school’s no-tuition policy, many local Kentuckians were given their first chance at a formal college education. In exchange for tuition, future Berea students were enrolled in what would later come to be known as student work programs: during the early days, “most of the work the college offered was unskilled” (Knight 13). The dynamics of Berea’s work-for-your-education policy would change drastically when the college’s third president, William Goodell Frost, took office in 1892. Under Frost’s tenure at Berea the student work program quickly became a mandatory component of enrollment. Consequently, Frost would also increase the hours students were to work during the school week and would expand the variety of jobs available to students.

Although Frost’s role in shaping contemporary notions the work school or cooperative education deserves serious consideration, it was his ability to romanticize the Appalachian region and its people that cemented his place in American history. More so than any public figure of his time, Frost was able to connect the social and economic plight of Appalachian people to an idealized construct of American patriotism and virtue. In doing so, Frost was able to firmly establish an idea of Appalachia in the minds of many who had never made their way through the mountainous region.

According to Berea College’s official website, Frost became inspired to “do his part to uplift the people of Appalachia in 1893, after a summer tour of the nearby counties of Jackson, Estill, and Rockcastle.” Accompanied by “Frank Hayes, a Union veteran who had served in the Seventh Kentucky Volunteers,” Frost made his way
through what can only be described as a wild and untamed Kentucky wilderness bereft of economic or social prosperity ("William"). During this pseudo-safari, Frost apparently discovered the intricacies of Appalachian culture: the language, music, crafts, and customs of a people. The quaintness of Appalachian life, more about survival than prosperity, struck a cord with Frost. The mountaineers of southern Kentucky, in Frost’s imagination, were “the descendants of Revolutionary War heroes” who had remained loyal to the Union during the ravages of the Civil War ("William"). Though in need of uplift, the people of Appalachia, for Frost, were symbolic of a hardworking, honest, and patriotic version of real America. They were the pioneers who embodied a spirit of survival, marked by an against-all-odds never-give-up American attitude. For the college’s opportunistic president, “here was a population that could lead the way in uniting the country and demonstrate the practicality of Berea’s ideals” ("William"). When considering the political and racial climate of America during the 1890s, Frost’s rhetorical aim becomes a little clearer. Frost was, of course, in a difficult position. He was the president of a rural Kentucky college that catered to a poor rural student population by offering a tuition-free environment. In an age of rapid industrial development and newfound economic prosperity, Frost’s particular institution would need outside financial assistance to aid its approach to cooperative education. For Frost to be successful in doing so, he would have to frame the people of Appalachia in a way that would appeal to the value systems of those outside the region. As admirably noted by Berea College’s website, the Appalachian of Frost’s writing displayed a set of characteristics that “found a ready audience among New England donors and
philanthropists” (“William”). Frost painted the Appalachian people as a colony in need of being saved; saving Appalachia became Frost’s missionary work.

As president of Berea College, Frost took it upon himself to sound the alarm for the rest of America. For example, in 1899, Frost would publish his most famous article “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains.” In outlining the rhetorical message of Frost’s article, scholar Ronald L. Lewis highlights some of the specific phrases Frost uses in describing the Appalachian people for his potential northern donors: “our contemporary ancestors,” “eighteenth century neighbors,” awaken from a “Rip Van Winkle Sleep” (qtd. in Lewis 2). Each of these descriptions explicitly sets the people of the region apart from proper northern society. The Hillbilly is thus positioned as a second-class citizen, a fringe or non-member of the existing social order. This is not to call into question Frost’s true intent or to argue against his apparent admiration for the people of Appalachia, although many contemporary scholars have done so. My objective is to highlight the socially-constructed nature of Frost’s Appalachia. Regardless of Frost’s intent, one cannot deny the fact that his portrayal of Appalachia is firmly connected to a romanticized version of the Appalachian mountaineer. Frost was successful in constructing a version of Appalachia that directly benefited the purposes of his institution. Frost’s rhetorical strategy was to historicize the Hillbilly. In doing so, he was able to advance a long-standing narrative regarding the Appalachian region. The Hillbilly, for Frost, was a relic, a ghost from the past.

Frost’s impact on the American psyche has been well documented in Appalachian scholarship. Historian John Alexander Williams depicts Frost’s tenure as president of
Berea College as the “first major attempt to map Appalachia as a distinctive cultural region” (11-12). More specifically, Allen Batteau views Frost’s highly publicized efforts at Berea as the first documented attempt to link Appalachia, as a culture and as a region, “with a sense of America’s mission,” – a patriotic conquest of the frontier: for Batteau, Frost “made the salvation of ‘mountain whites’ into a national calling” (5). Frost’s work at Berea was a reflection of an ever-growing societal urge to save people of the wild and untamed Appalachian Mountains. Couched in this rhetoric, however, was the disempowerment of the Appalachian people. Appalachians were not being aided in regulating and organizing their communities or truly being given the chance to speak for themselves. If we subscribe to the patriotic rhetoric being promoted by Frost, we see the Appalachian people as a natural artifact worth saving. If we question it, this narrative begins to sound like a subversive call for the north to aid in civilizing the south. Some might even suggest it sounds like a call for capitalism. Regardless of how we interrogate this rhetoric, the Appalachian people were being posited as a weaker version of humanity, a lesser member of society. Frost undoubtedly crafted an image of the Appalachian that was advantageous to his duties as President of Berea College.

Berea College was, of course, not the only Appalachian institution that participated in the advancement of Hillbilly stereotypes. Appalachian State University, located in Boone North, Carolina, has, for decades, promoted a Hillbilly mascot named YoSef (slang for “your self”) as a symbolic representation of the school. Opened during the early 20th century, Appalachian State was, like Berea, originally a training institution for Appalachian students, “offering a kind of workfare education with tough rules”
(Williamson 28). The school has since gained full-fledged university status and has shed its work school curriculum and rural Appalachian student base. However, in 1942 when the school introduced its new comic Hillbilly mascot, “the majority of the university’s 874 students did grow up in the mountains and foothills of North Carolina, on farms and in small towns” (Williamson 28-29). The legend of Yosef began when the upperclassmen students who produced *The Rhododendron*, the school’s yearbook, placed a comic portrait of a Hillbilly in the last mug shot of the freshman page (Williamson 29). The cartoon, with a caption that read “Daniel Boone Yoseff,” was a stereotypical representation of the Hillbilly. With this seemingly harmless prank a regional Hillbilly icon was born.

Some four years after the original appearance of Yosef, *The Appalachian*, a weekly campus newspaper, began running a feature editorial written by the comic character Yosef. Each installment featured Yosef delivering sports commentary in broken-English and written Appalachian dialect. With the popularity of these comic editorials, Yosef would eventually become a mainstay in both the campus paper and the yearbook. This lead to Yoseff becoming an actual sports mascot who roamed the sidelines of Appalachian State University events: a shoeless male student dressed in suspenders, a tattered hat, and fake beard typically played Yosef. In 1957, an actual statue of Yosef was created and installed on Appalachian State’s campus (a bronze Yosef with moonshine jug in hand). Today, a foam-headed Yosef mascot, though less stereotypically Hillbilly, continues to make appearances at Appalachian State sporting events and functions.
What are we to make of Yosef? One can easily write him off as a social phenomenon that created solidarity among students by allowing the local student population to feel free to laugh at itself. One can also see the mascot as a harmless jab at the societal perceptions given to the region by outside forces. I feel more inclined to argue that Yosef is a product of Appalachia’s informal literary tradition. He is the visual representation of the hegemonic construction of an Appalachia that was pinned by local color writers some time ago. The yearbook staff students who crafted the first image of Yosef did not create the set of traits that define the character; these stereotypes had already been firmly established. Yosef demonstrates the eventual acceptance of this Hillbilly caricature by the people of the region and by institutions located within the region. Yosef, for me, signals the social acceptance of an othering given to Appalachian people by outside forces. Instances like this demonstrate the Appalachian people’s eventual willingness to accept this othering. Yosef demonstrates how the original rhetorical aims of colonizing forces have become subverted by those within the region who willingly claim the Hillbilly as their own.

*Appalachia as Scholarly Inquiry*

Appalachia, as an academic conversation, is hardly a new phenomenon. In fact, one can argue that the Hillbilly has long maintained a place in Burke’s metaphorical parlor conversation. Countless numbers of scholars have taken it upon themselves to explain Appalachian culture to the rest of the world. More often than not, these scholars take it upon themselves to define a real Appalachia that is in opposition to the socially constructed version promoted by countless “twentieth-century reporters, scholars, and
policy makers” (Ronald Lewis 2). In his highly influential book *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870 – 1920*, scholar Henry Shapiro refers to this tradition as the “Myth of Appalachia.” Shapiro, unlike many Appalachian scholars of his day, resists the notion of a traditional history of Appalachia. Rather, his concern is tracing the history of the idea of Appalachia. Shapiro argues that the work of late eighteen and nineteenth century color writers, coupled with the influence of Appalachian missionaries, such as Frost, eventually lead to the formation of a shared understanding of the region and its people. Though Shapiro does not explicitly make this connection, the mythologization of the region would take place in a manner that was indeed quite similar to the process of Said’s Orientalism. The influence of figures such as Murfree, Fox, Allen, and Frost helped establish a national standpoint regarding Appalachia. Unfortunately, this standpoint would do more harm than good for the people of the region. Though scholars such as Shapiro and Batteau (*The Invention of Appalachia*) have eloquently argued the case for Appalachia as a concept as opposed to an empirical truth, their contributions to Appalachia, as an academic conversation, are the exception. While scholars such as Shapiro and Batteau are concerned with defining the myth of Appalachia, most Appalachian scholars are concerned with defining the region and marking its boundaries.

As narratives of the Hillbilly continued through the 19th century, the concept of Appalachia, as a region, began to take shape. Initially, Frost’s Appalachia constituted 184 counties in eight different states (Williams 11-12). This original design would eventually change as a result of constantly shifting economic and political realities of the region. For
example, in John C. Campbell’s *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (1921), the Appalachian borders were expanded from Frost’s original version to include 254 counties in 9 states (Abramson and Haskell xix - xxv). In 1984, Karl Raitz and Richard Ulack, heads of the Appalachian Regional Coalition, would expand the geographical borders of the region to include 445 counties in 13 states (Abramson and Haskell xix - xxv). These struggles to define the region demonstrate the mythological aspect of Appalachia. With no clear boarders, and no clear political voice, the region has long been defined and named by outsiders. However, more so than the actual charting of Appalachia, the industrialization of Appalachian states did, however, alter the political and economic realities of life in the region. The emergence of the extract industries unquestionably changed the day-to-day realities of Appalachian life. Despite these so-called advances, mainstream perceptions of the Appalachian people remained relatively the same. Some have argued this is because the myth itself provided justification for the exploitation of this marginalized and dominated group of people. Today, scholars continue to redefine the borders of the Appalachian region. In fact, Youngstown, Ohio was recently added to the Appalachian region by the ARC due to the declining economic opportunities in the region.

During the past twenty years, academic conversations regarding Appalachia have often centered on the issues of exploitation and the environmental damage that is the byproduct of this exploitation. For example, in *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*, scholar Ronald L. Lewis explores the environmental and social aftermath of the extract industries arrival in West Virginia, particularly the issue of deforestation.
Lewis argues that early 20th calls to industrialize Appalachia were linked to the Hillbilly narrative promoted by influential writers such as Fox and Frost. This misguided understanding of Appalachian existence lead to a “culture of poverty” explanation for the region’s problems. Grounded in modernization theory, which suggests a society’s development hinges on its eventual progression to a capitalist mode of production, this argument posited industrial economic development as the key to solving the problem of Appalachia. Lewis, like many Appalachian scholars, finds fault in this line of thinking:

Modernization theory ignores the transformations of indigenous social and political institutions and relations imposed on local people by the process itself. Instead, local people are seen merely as passive receivers and, to the extent that they fail to participate in or benefit from a system that provides unequal access to capital and power designed to ensure that capital migrates to those elites who control the process, the victims themselves are at fault. (2-3)

History shows us that the coal mining, lumber, and railroad industries did not save Appalachia. Despite the various economic successes of extract industries within the region, the people of Appalachia have continued to lag behind the rest of the nation in regard to economic prosperity, access to education, and social mobility. The newly formed industrial economy of Appalachia during the early 1900s was unquestionably tied to outside corporations who funded the modernizing of the region: scholar John Alexander Williams refers to this system as “colonial political economy,” a system where business and politics were controlled by industrialists who used the resources of the region for the purposes of outside interest groups (1). Though the circumstances of
Appalachian life have changed over the years, the narrative of the Hillbilly has largely remained the same. With each passing century, the extract industries gained a stronger political and economic foothold in the region. Local politics thus became tied to industrial development. As this process unfolded, the story of the Hillbilly continued without being called into question by mainstream America. New champions of the region would emerge on the scene, often promoting a regurgitation of the same caricature that existed during the color writing days of the late nineteenth century.

Published in 1924, James Watt Raine’s *The Land of Saddle-Bags* reintroduced mainstream America to the story of the Hillbilly. Like the works of color writers before him, Raine’s book of eye-witness accounts made an enormous impact on societal interpretations of Appalachia. Dwight Billings, for example, suggests that Raine’s book “ranks second in importance only to the earlier local color fiction of popular writers such as John Fox, Jr. and Mary Noailles Murfree in constructing enduring images of the southern mountaineer that still flourish in popular thought (ix). Born in England, Raine migrated to America at the age of twelve. After spending time in both Arkansas and West Virginia, Raine graduated from Oberlin College in 1893, and eventually began a thirty-three year teaching career at Berea College (xi). A close friend of Berea president William Goddell Frost, Raine’s attempts to redefine the Appalachian region were, in many ways, in congruence with the mission statement of his institution. Like Frost, Raine aimed to convince his readership of an idealized form of Appalachian existence. Rallying against contemporary notions of the Appalachian as violent and temperamental, Raine sought to explain the complexities of life in the region. Throughout the book, Raine
systematically describes day-to-day aspects of mountain life (i.e. quilting, crafting, hunting, mountain speech, and mountain music). Raine also aims to outline the difficulties of life in Appalachia. His book vividly details the hardships brought about by physical isolation, limited access to education, and dangerous working conditions.

Though Raine does not explicitly attempt to denigrate the people of Appalachia, many contemporary scholars have argued that we, as readers, should not confuse these accounts with identifiable empirical truth:

> While James Watt Raine undoubtedly viewed himself as a literary champion of the Appalachian population and certainly not as one of its oppressors, his writing nonetheless must be viewed through the lens of power relations and cultural politics. (Billings xvii)

Raine, like those who came before him, writes from a privileged position. He was no more a product of the culture than Murfree, Fox, or Allen. He was the ethnographer, an observer – an outsider seeking to define the truth about Appalachia. From a historical standpoint, Raine’s work undoubtedly helped usher in the second wave of Appalachia’s informal literary tradition. The core descriptions of Appalachian existence outlined in Raine’s book were eventually meshed and reaffirmed in the sociological writings of scholars such as Thomas Ford during the 1950s (Ronald Lewis 2). Raine’s work, like the works of many outsiders who had a material investment in describing the region, provided written evidence for an Appalachia that had long existed in the minds of many Americans. In this second wave of Appalachia’s written history, the story of the region was no longer meant to entertain. Appalachia became a political conversation.
Appalachia as Political Platform

On February 7th 1960, Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy arrived in Charleston, West Virginia to announce his candidacy for the upcoming democratic primary. A victory in West Virginia would be crucial for Kennedy’s presidential aspirations. Many in the national media questioned whether a northern Catholic from a prominent and wealthy family could get votes in a southern, blue color, and predominately Protestant state. During the six weeks after his arrival, Kennedy would tour various sections of the region with the Council of Appalachian Governors. These highly publicized visits to schools, coalmines, and impoverished neighborhoods would have a profound effect on Kennedy’s view of the region and rhetorical strategy in speaking to the people of West Virginia. Kennedy’s promise to the state was an abundance of federal assistance. His was a rhetoric of understanding – of friendship and compassion. When Kennedy eventually won the primary in May, he would refer to his victory in West Virginia as “the most important step” in the road to the White House (“West Virginia”). Unlike any politicians before him, Kennedy was able to discuss the poverty of Appalachia without stripping the people of their dignity. Unlike any politician before him, Kennedy was also able to back up his promises to the region. After his eventual election, Kennedy appointed Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., to head what would later become the Appalachian Regional Commission, or ARC in 1965 (Whisnant 127). Kennedy promptly ordered the Commission to prepare a “comprehensive action program” (Whisnant 128). The result was a series of federal aid programs that brought resources, federal funding, and two major highways in the state of West Virginia. On
June 20th 1963, Kennedy would return to West Virginia as President of the United States. At the state’s Annual Centennial Celebration, amid a downpour of June rain, Kennedy spoke the famous words “the sun does not always shine in West Virginia but it’s people always do” (“West Virginia”). However, these eloquent words would once again reaffirm the concept of Appalachia outlined by earlier authors. In this narrative Appalachia was equated to poverty. The people equated to an idealized or romanticized notion of patriotic America, a helpless but “shining” population worth saving. Kennedy’s election did not mark a happy ending to Appalachian poverty. Kennedy’s words did, however, signal the beginnings of Appalachia as a political agenda.

In the same election that sparked Kennedy’s presidential victory, West Virginia would elect slick talking-politician William “Wally” Barron to the governorship. Leaning on many of the same promises promoted by Kennedy, Barron would initially win over the people of West Virginia. Unfortunately, his tenure would mark one of the most controversial and corrupt terms in the history of West Virginia politics. Over the next few years, over thirteen members of Barron’s administration were convicted of crimes such as bribery and tax evasion (“West Virginia”). Eventually, Barron, himself, was convicted of jury tampering and sent to prison (“West Virginia”). Barron’s fall from grace reminds us that not every politician claiming to stamp out Appalachian poverty was actually aiming to do so. The “save Appalachia narrative” that propelled Kennedy to the White House became a rhetorical tool for future politicians. Appalachia became a political talking-point, a way to reach a particular demographic of blue color voters. The politicizing of Appalachia during the 1960s would undoubtedly reenergize both scholarly and popular
interest in the lives of disadvantaged Appalachians. For example, 1963 would also mark
the publication of Harry Caudill’s *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. Caudill, an eventual
member of the ARC, would place the blame of Appalachian poverty on the region’s
dependency on the extract industries. Widely read, Caudill’s book asked America to
consider the fact that the absentee owners in control of the extract industries had failed to
reinvest in the actual communities in which they were pillaging. However, in the 1970s,
Jack Weller’s highly popular *Yesterday’s People* put forth a contrary notion of
Appalachia’s problems. Unlike Caudill, Weller argued that the material circumstances of
Appalachian life “had produced a degenerate culture that inhibited economic “progress”
in the region” (Ronald Lewis 2). Both Caudill and Weller were able to restart the
scholarly conversation regarding Appalachia’s poverty: industrial explanations vs.
cultural explanations. The popularity of these works would also maintain Appalachia’s
place in the American political conversation. The influence of their work would force
future politicians to take a stance on Appalachia. Choice number one, side with the
industrial forces in control of the region and convince voters that Appalachian’s simply
need tax breaks and better education. Choice number two, infringe upon the practices of
the wealthy corporations that exploit the Appalachian people. No one likes being told
they are being exploited.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson would announce his “War on Poverty.”
Appalachia would, of course, serve as a major battleground. The rhetoric of this “War on
Poverty” would also usher in a renewed fashion of Appalachian life to American
television audiences. The CBS television special *Christmas in Appalachia* would rekindle
America’s fascination with Appalachian poverty. Major American publications, such as *Newsweek*, would plaster the sad faces of Appalachian children across their front covers. As television became a major aspect of social life in America, the story of the Hillbilly would manifest itself in a variety of new ways. Television shows such as *Green Acres, Hee-Haw, The Hatfield’s and McCoy’s*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies* became a national phenomenon; this history will be explicitly outlined in the next chapter. In short, the literary tradition established long before the invention of radio or television would now have a new avenue to spread the message of Appalachian otherness. These performances of identity have contributed greatly to America’s contemporary understanding of Appalachian culture.

The history of the Hillbilly is one of cultural denigration and dehumanization. Said’s theory of Orientalism, in my opinion, maintains several clear parallels to the ongoing caricature established by Appalachian writers during the late eighteen and early nineteenth centuries. In both instances, travel accounts gives us what, on the surface, appears to be a unified collection of cultural truths. These truths eventually become a euphemism for a socially dominated and marginalized set of peoples. Over the years this story moved from fiction, to non-fiction, to academia, to the political arena, and eventually to our television sets and movie screens. Said’s work reminds us that such narratives are not easily shaken off. Shapiro calls it the “Myth of Appalachia.” Batteau calls it the “Invention of Appalachia.” I call it “the Hillbilly.” Regardless of semantics, this narrative has greatly affected and influenced my life. It has influenced the lives of my family members and the people who live in my hometown community. If your particular
institution is located somewhere in or on the fringes of Appalachia, it has likely affected
the lives of your students. The Hillbilly, as a rhetorical tradition, others and positions
Appalachian people in a way that is disadvantageous to their development as critical
thinkers and participants in a democratic society. Appalachian students should be given
the chance to think critically about their connection to this tradition. Non-Appalachian
students should be given the opportunity to think critically about their willingness to
subscribe to this social construction. As educators, it is time that we question
contemporary notions of Appalachian truth. It is time that we teach our students to
reevaluate their connection to this history. It is time we begin to see the Hillbilly as a
lived experience, consequences of a collection of long-standing narratives.

Appalachia as Lived Experience

My History.

My father was a West Virginia coal miner. His father was a West Virginia coal miner. His father was a West Virginia coal miner. My family tree resides somewhere miles underneath the hardened West Virginia soil on which I was raised. For the Snyder family, work is synonymous with coal mining. We have been conditioned to believe our fates are unchangeable. When high school is over it is time to pick up your dinner bucket. This socially constructed Appalachian Truth becomes ingrained into our consciousness at a very young age. As children, we watch our fathers slowly march into the darkness of the coal mines. Each evening they return as blackened heroes. This grueling process allows our families to evade the humiliation of having to survive off of food stamps. Our ability to avoid government assistance creates the illusion of our escape from poverty. Though we often become content with our heightened position in this false hierarchy, there is no true elevation in our status. As the years go by, our fathers slowly come to realize their less-than-enviable existence. Quite often, they are forced to confront this harsh reality in the dingy waiting rooms of local hospitals. As the children of these men, we are asked to become silent spectators of the gradual decline of their physical condition. We watch as our fathers begrudgingly lower their social status by resorting to worker’s compensation. They are no longer workers; therefore, they are no longer men. As we witness this cycle unfold we are reminded that one day we are going to be asked to provide for
our own families. We impatiently wait for the day we can assume our own tragic duties. The coal mining industry helped pay for my college education but it robbed my father of his. Although offered an opportunity to play college football after high school, he was encouraged to continue the cycle. Workin’...that’s what people from around here do.

My Story.

For the first 11 years of my life Willoughby Trailer Park was home. Growing up in such an environment taught me much about confinement. Embarrassed of my living conditions, I would often avoid bringing friends home from school. I now laugh at this gesture because I realize they were hardly of blueblood upbringing. In fact, we all felt the burden when the National Enquirer rolled into town proclaiming us “America’s poorest town”. Though our parents informed us of the newspaper’s less than scholarly reputation, it was impossible to shake the prickling resonance of truth left behind. I couldn’t help but feel contempt for those who embraced our town’s newfound status. This was a fate that I refused to accept. In my heart, I rejected the stereotypes perpetuated by the National Enquirer. I rejected the toothless grins and slack-jawed gazes which found their way onto the pages of the magazine. There had to be more to us than poverty. We, of course, bought the issue just like everyone else. It was, after all, our big début. West Virginia had no major sports team. No major American city to call our own. We had no Hollywood star to celebrate or positive imagines a connection to. This was all we had. This was our story.

My Memory.

During my 8th grade trip to Washington D.C a young African American man in his mid-twenties approached me and two of my friends. “Where ya from?” he bellowed in-between puffs of his Newport. “West Virginia” I quickly answered. “Man, I heard ya be fuckin’ ya sisters” he chuckled. His smirk suggested that his comments were made in jest. As blood of embarrassment rushed to my face, I began to deny these allegations. For the first time, I consciously realized that being from Appalachia fostered a certain amount of shame. Appalachians often learn they are Appalachian by leaving the region.

My Conversation.

My first academic conversation at my first academic conference. Upon noticing my accent, the moderator of the panel asks the following question. Where are you

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1 In 1994 the National Enquirer published a story about Erbacon, a town in Webster County. The title of the story was “West Virginia Town with No hope; America’s Poorest Town”. The National Enquirer subsequently brought truckloads of supplies to the residents of Erbacon for Christmas.
from? I reply. “I’m from West Virginia.” His reply. “You didn’t bring any moonshine did you?”

The history of the Hillbilly casts a shadow on the lives of Appalachian men and women. It profoundly affects the way Appalachians view themselves and their connection to the outside world. The story of the Hillbilly tells us what is good about ourselves. It also tells us what we are to be ashamed of, what we are to hide, deny, and refute. This narrative also shapes how those outside the region view us as individuals.

The Hillbilly, as a rhetorical tradition, has given way to an ideological insider / outsider mentality – and identity construct that limits the people of Appalachia. As a young man, my grandfather would often tell people he was from Ohio when traveling outside the region. “You can’t tell people you’re a coal miner from West Virginia, they will think you’re some kind of Hillbilly dumb ass,” he would say. I understand my grandfather’s shame. To be West Virginian is to be Appalachian, which is to be othered. Please do not take these statements to be hyperbolic. I have met grown adults, men and women in their late 40s, who have only spent a few nights of their lives outside the state of West Virginia. I have met 18-year-old high school students who have never left the state. I have met uncompromisingly patriotic senior citizens who have never had the chance to see the Statue of Liberty or the Nation’s Capital. They love America but have seen very little of it. Many of the most well traveled citizens of my hometown are those who make their way around the world in camouflaged garb. This socio-cultural isolation is directly tied to the Hillbilly myth. The Hillbilly myth is directly tied to the extract industries. The extract industries are directly tied to capitalism and exploitation. The story of the Hillbilly tells us how to live, think, and experience the world.
In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Paulo Freire argues that we, as humans, are not determined beings, though Freire recognizes our conditioned state:

I like being human because in my unfinishedness I know that I am conditioned.

Yet conscious of such conditioning, I know that I can go beyond it, which is the essential difference between conditioned and determined existence. (54)

Growing up in rural Appalachia, one often feels determined. Travel is typically out of the question. An Ivy League education is a far-fetched dream. Few of us even dream of becoming famous actors, celebrities, or sports stars. Most of us have never seen a celebrity in person. Few of us have attended a professional sporting event. We do not grow up wanting to be Wall Street bankers or CEO’s of major corporations. From a young age, we are taught about the positives of our culture. We are hard workers. We are a people connected to the land. Family, community, and religion shape our values. As a result of this narrative, we grow closer to the Hillbilly model society dictated by mainstream society. We are taught that fancy city folk think we are stupid Hillbillies. Society looks down on us, so we are taught a defensive posture. In many ways, it feels like a determined existence. However, Freire is correct. We are conditioned but not determined. Rhetoric-based learning, a curriculum aimed at training students in the persuasive elements of written, oral, or visual discourse, has the potential to aid those from even the most ardently marginalized cultures in obtaining forms of critical-consciousness: Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* once convinced the field of rhetoric and composition that this was true. I propose that we return to this notion. Rhetoric-based learning has changed the material circumstances of my life. This is not to suggest that
rhetoric-based learning necessarily leads to economic prosperity. This is not a get-rich-quick scheme. My aim is not to turn rhetoric and composition classrooms into breeding-grounds for capitalist participation. Rhetoric-based learning does not teach students a pragmatic skill such as how to hammer a nail or install an air conditioner. Instead, rhetoric-based learning is an exercise in critical thinking, a curriculum that asks its students to explore the rhetorics of their everyday lives. It pushes students to think critically about their connections to a shared history or formation of identity. For those who have been conditioned to believe they have no true political voice within mainstream society, this can be an extremely liberating experience. It is time for critical educators, especially those who teach within the Appalachian region, to address the rhetorical prevalence of the Hillbilly myth.

**The Hillbilly and the Field of Rhetoric and Composition**

In the field of rhetoric and composition, discussions of Appalachian experience have been few. Katherine Keller Sohn’s “Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College,” published in the fall 2003 edition of *CCC*, may indeed be the first article to contain the word “Appalachia” in the history of the journal. Likewise, Jennifer Beech’s “Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom: Classifying Critical Pedagogies of Whiteness,” published in the fall 2004 edition of *College English*, may also be the first scholarly piece concerning Appalachian identity to find its way into our field’s oldest journal. Therefore, one can safely assume that we, as a field, have yet to stop and fully theorize about the experiences of our Appalachian students. Although Appalachian culture has for some time occupied the attention of
sociologists, economists, pop culture critics, and members of the field of education, discussions concerning the rhetoric of Appalachian culture have just recently begun to surface in scholarly books and articles in our field. Long overdue, these studies demonstrate the cultural complexities of a region that continues to be the target of acceptable prejudice. The work of scholars such as Victor Villanueva, Katherine Sohn, Jennifer Beech, and Amy Winans demonstrate the Appalachian region’s rightful place in contemporary conversations regarding culture, ideology, and the writing classroom. For example, in the forward to Katherine Sohn’s study *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia* Victor Villanueva argues that Appalachian is a color, “even if not recognized as such” (xi). For Villanueva, Appalachian people are a “color without a name (cause they’re not white, surely not the whites of whiteness studies)” (xi). Villanueva argues that the distinctly portrayed Appalachian look and behavioral characteristics are not unlike other forms of racism – prejudices “based on stereotypes, bigotries that cannot be readily discarded through class ascension” (xi). Villanueva also reminds us that rhetoric and composition, as a growing field of study, has scarcely stopped to consider the experiences of Appalachian people.

Contemporary scholars interested in issues of Appalachian identity do, of course, owe Katherine Keller Sohn a great deal of gratitude. The success of her book has reintroduced the topic of Appalachia to our field. The brilliance of Sohn’s ethnographic study is its ability to highlight the various ways that Appalachian culture influences the educational lives of its inhabitants. For example, according to Sohn, some Appalachian churches actually preach against the dangers of education (439). More poignantly than
any scholar I have encountered, Sohn captures the essence of Appalachian attitudes toward educated non-residents:

Because outsiders have caricatured Appalachian speech and culture and implied religious and cultural superiority, mountain people have adopted defensive attitudes about formal education and social mobility. Men especially are often wrapped in a world that is not always of their choice, especially if they are the primary breadwinners. Many did not have the choice of higher education. (439)

Sohn’s exceptional study explores the gender roles and career expectations created by Appalachia’s traditional set of cultural values. Her study examines how these feelings of resentment, which are passed down through generations, blatantly discourage the pursuit of higher education. This is a key concept that I wish to explore in my project.

Defining and explaining Appalachian culture can be just as difficult as tracing the mythical borders of the region. More often than not, scholars are able to obtain only a small fraction of Appalachia’s cultural mindset. This is not the case with Katherine Kelleher Sohn’s work. Sohn paints a vivid portrait of the Appalachian region and its people. If not for her autobiographical accounts, one might suspect Sohn was a born-and-raised Appalachian native. Through well-planned case studies of eight women from eastern Kentucky, Sohn is able to demonstrate how critical literacy has the potential to aid Appalachian women in gaining agency and voice within their own day-to-day lives – even for those who do not desire traditional post-college career paths. Sohn’s book, the first of its kind in the field of rhetoric and composition, opened the doors for the scholarly
conversation of Appalachian identity in the contemporary rhetoric and composition classroom.

In 2004, Jennifer Beech’s “Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom: Classifying Critical Pedagogies of Whiteness,” published in *College English*, continued this conversation. Beech, more so than Sohn, is interested in developing a pedagogical framework that serves the needs of students from traditional Appalachian backgrounds. Beech’s particular brand of critical pedagogy asks students to consider and often position themselves within a cultural identity. By bringing pop culture artifacts, such as material from comedian Jeff Foxworthy, into the classroom Beech is able to give her students the opportunity to critically evaluate the implications and origins of cultural stereotypes. Her assignments also “offer students opportunities to learn and even use strategies for civic engagement” (Beech 148). Beech fires back at critics who suggest critical pedagogy ignores the responsibility of instructors to teach academic standards by pointing out the fact that students have lives outside the walls of academia. If her students choose to return to their working-class background after college they will at least be armed with “rhetorical strategies for addressing those within positions of power within their community” (Beech 148). Beech’s article is unique in that it is the first scholarly essay to argue for the value of critical pedagogy for Appalachian students. This pedagogical leap has greatly influenced the work I am interesting in promoting in this project.

In recent years, many composition and rhetoric scholars have begun to discuss how cultural identity complicates personal academic writing. For instance, in “Local
Pedagogies and Race: Integrating White Safety in the Rural Composition Classroom” scholar Amy Winans urges composition instructors to consider the cultural location of both their students and the institution in which they learn. Winans refers to this method of teaching as local pedagogy: “This pedagogy entails considering the roles that the campus location, the campus demographics, the demographics of students home towns, and students experiences with their families and communities play in shaping what is happening in the classroom” (476). Winans employs local pedagogy in an attempt to help students recognize that all ideas and writing emerge from a specific subject position, a position or point of view shaped and reshaped by ones lived experiences of race, class, sexual orientation, gender religion, region, and ability (473). In fact, Winans’s composition classroom is crafted around the personal writing of her rural college students. She wants her students to see that cultural identities are both learned and socially created. Therefore, students are constantly being asked to consider how their adverse reactions to topics, such as racism, are a product of their cultural upbringings. For Winans, it is simply not enough to ask students to write about their lives. Instead, she asks students to think critically about how their cultural backgrounds influence their writing and thinking.

Like Sohn, Beech, and Winans, I want to highlight how critical education has the potential to counter the poverty, isolation, and culturally constructed truths often discussed in Appalachian research. Although Appalachian poverty and isolation have been explored at great length, very little research has been done in order to determine the rhetoric of Appalachian culture. Therefore, my purpose for this dissertation project is
twofold. First, I hope to determine the factors, be they cultural, economic, or otherwise, that influence the critical literacy and day-to-day critical thinking practices of the Appalachian college student. And second, my goal will be to demonstrate how critical theory and pedagogy meet these needs. When considering the various strides our field has made in discussing the experiences and pedagogical needs of ESL students, working-class students, and members of the LGBT community, it becomes apparent that our discipline has the potential to carry on lasting, meaningful, and evocative scholarly conversations concerning the needs of students who have been culturally othered by mainstream society. It is time we examine the various ways students from this particular demographic struggle to grasp academic discourse, the language of the academy. Let us explore the ideological influences behind the rhetoric(s) these students present to us in our composition classrooms. And finally, let us theorize about how we may shape the composition classroom to meet their pedagogical needs.

Based on my experience as a first-generation college student from rural Appalachia, I understand what it means to be ill-prepared for college-level thinking and writing. I firmly believe the unique struggle of the Appalachian college student must become part of the scholarly conversation in our field. My project is an exploration of the various ways that social, economic, and cultural factors influence the identities of the Appalachian students who enter our composition classrooms. However, I must acknowledge the gendered aspect of this project. Many of these chapters focus on my experiences as a young man growing up in a family of coalminers. Therefore, I often focus my attention on issues connected to masculinity and workplace rhetorics. In many
ways, I am writing this dissertation for the young man who has been pressured into believing his familial duty is to work in the coalmines or lumber yards. My underlying argument is that critical pedagogy has the potential to address the pedagogical needs of these students. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 will focus on the rhetoric and ideology of Appalachian culture. These sections will demonstrate the various socio-cultural factors that influence Appalachian identity and serve as barriers to critical thought. Therefore, my objective will be to discuss the problems of the Appalachian college student before he or she enters college. Chapters 4 and 5 will highlight the difficulties Appalachian students face in the college classroom. It should be noted, however, that critical pedagogy is the connecting thread for this project. I will extend the research on critical pedagogy by applying its focus on critical/argumentative thinking to a very specific student population. I am doing so because I believe critical pedagogy has the potential to address some of the cultural disadvantages many Appalachian students face when attempting to write for an academic audience.

Critical pedagogy has the potential to change the lives of Appalachian students. Applying critical pedagogy to Appalachian student populations will also change the way we look at critical theory. Without this student population, critical pedagogy looks different. This is because the material environment in which critical pedagogy is theorized and practices has a tremendous influence on the theory itself. One cannot fully understand Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* without, at some point, examining the cultural circumstances of the impoverished Brazilian peasants Freire aims to liberate through problem-posing education. Nor can one fully grasp Ira Shor’s pedagogical goals
without first understanding the socio-cultural factors that influence the critical thinking practices of his working-class New York students. I argue that by pairing critical pedagogy with Appalachian student populations I will establish a reciprocal relationship between the two. The theory will change the students; the students will change the theory. I believe this project, as a whole, will benefit the field of rhetoric and composition because it will allow scholars to examine the pedagogical needs of college students from rural Appalachian areas, while at the same time contributing qualitatively to the literature on critical pedagogy. Just as Ira Shor’s critical pedagogy is a product of his life and work with northeastern working class students, critical pedagogy grounded in Appalachia will influence the way critical pedagogy is understood by scholars and teachers. These students are from a unique cultural background: a cultural background that is often woefully ignored by instructors from outside regions. However, my goal is not to simply paint a vivid picture of Appalachia and suggest those who reside within the area are the only ones that may benefit from an expanded and carefully considered approach to critical pedagogy. This study will also aim to demonstrate the complexity and educational benefits of critical pedagogy for all students, even those from traditionally privileged backgrounds.
CHAPTER 2: DEVIL IN THE MOUNTAINS: DEHUMANIZATION AND MASS MEDIA

“Many hillbillies in the mass media are there to make the normative middle-class urban spectator feel better about the system of money and power that has him or her in its grasp. Someone is always beneath us, lending proof that the twig on which we stand is really a rung of a ladder leading upward to something we must defend with our lives”

- J.W. Williamson

“In an era when television’s vast reach and the three networks’ near total control of the airwaves created a national common culture to a degree unmatched before or since, televised images played a central role in shaping public perceptions of American society and values, in general, and of the southern mountain people, in particular”

- Anthony Harkins

Channel Surfing (or), In Search of the Digital Hillbilly

The Elephant Man comes to Willoughby Trailer Park.

Have you ever listened to the rain beat itself along the tin sides of a trailer? It’s a violent act. The kind of sound that foreshadows danger. 1986. A younger me. Legs crossed. Sitting in front of the television. A little too close to the television perhaps. The Elephant Man across the screen. Black and white. A little too young to be watching this movie perhaps. The monster wants its humanity. He is denied his humanity because he is marked as “other.”

Enter: the monster

The door opens amid the thunder and rain. Tall and skinny. Probably 60 years old. Drenched in soaking wet clothes. He staggers into our trailer. Disoriented. Walks back to my bedroom and attempts to lie down on my bed. “Hey there buddy, what are you doing?” my father shouts. “I got to get to bed.” The monster wants to sleep in my bed.

After a few minutes of tension, the monster is convinced that he has entered the wrong trailer and is ushered outside by my father.

Hollywood rhetoric.

In early February of 2008, Nala Films, a Hollywood based Production Company, began work on a new horror film near the West Virginia/Pennsylvania border. The movie, which stars Oscar-nominated actress Julianne Moore, instantly caused a stir among local residents after an offensive casting call was released
prior to the crew’s arrival. The casting ad stated that filmmakers were looking for deformed characters, including an albino girl, to depict West Virginia mountain people. The casting director’s ad even went as far as to suggest “regular-looking children need not apply.”

Hollywood rhetoric, disguised as humor.

Three months later, late night talk-show host Jay Leno would deliver an opening monologue with a similar rhetorical aim. While discussing the results of West Virginia’s democratic primary, Leno joked that Hillary Clinton’s landslide victory over Barack Obama was due to the fact that she had lobbied “to lower taxes for people with no teeth.”

A Political Conversation.

One month later, United States Vice President Dick Cheney would make an equally offensive remark while speaking to the National Press Club in Washington D.C. While attempting to explain his family history, the Vice President stated that he had always known about the Cheney family line on his father’s side of the family but later learned that his great grandmother was from a family of the same last name. After making this remark Cheney stated “So I had Cheneys on both sides of the family – and we don’t even live in West Virginia.” Among a sea of laughter, the Vice President chuckled “You can say those things when you’re not running for re-election.”

Channel surfing.

I found the celluloid Hillbilly. He looked the part. His bib-overalls were in need of a good wash. His blackened bare feet were callused and sore. Missing a front tooth, he grinned at me as tobacco juice dripped slowly down his bearded chin. Bubby and sissy were playing in the yard near the tire swing. I suppose his wife was in the kitchen. The digital Hillbilly appeared to be brighter and more vivid than ever before. Perhaps it was the digital Hillbilly in HD. He told me to get off his property. He had a shotgun (propped up beside two moonshine jugs), so I listened. I told him that my mother’s maiden name

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5 Reported by David Brown for the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.
6 Comedian Jay Leno often promotes the “toothless hillbilly” stereotype regarding the people of Appalachia, see The Herald Dispatch news brief “Leno Jokes about West Virginia Again.”
7 See MSNBC report: “Cheney Apologizes after West Virginia Joke”
was McCoy. Maybe I am one of the real McCoys? He didn’t give a damn. He wanted me off his property. He didn’t like my big city thinking and new fangled ideas.

I changed the channel and found Diane Sawyer in Kentucky. She was telling the real story of her home state. She said that rural Kentuckians drink a lot of Mountain Dew and take a lot of OxyContin (not in that particular order). I listened. She said that Kentucky families discourage the pursuit of education. Higher education. They live off the land, toil away in the coalmines, and steal coal from the hillside when nobody is looking. Just when I was getting interested she had to go to a commercial break. Time to sell some Mountain Dew.

I found my way to *The History Channel*. Billy Ray Cyrus was talking about the history of mountain folk – Hillbillies. He’s from West Virginia so I took his word for it. Billy Ray said we should be proud of the mountaineer. He has a pioneering spirit and can live off the land. He’ll kick your ass if you mess with him. We talked about ol’ Devil Anse. I wanted to know if the Devil was still in the mountains. Billy Ray had to go to commercial. It broke my achy breaky heart.

Don’t touch that dial. I found Elly May. She batted her long eyelashes at me. She was with Daisy Duke. She was wearing her daisy dukes. Curly flowing hair. Beautiful white teeth. Bodies of pinup girls. Flirty. Ditsy. With thick Hillbilly accents. We struck up a conversation. I’m not good at this sort of thing. They didn’t have much to say. They weren’t really from Appalachia either. Just stopping by. Trying to attract men age 18 – 40. Paid well for their efforts. They found me a bit naïve.
I changed the channel and found celebrity chef Jamie Oliver in my adopted hometown of Huntington, West Virginia. He was leading a food revolution in what the Associated Press called “the fattest city in America.” The people didn’t want him there. They had never heard of a food activist. They didn’t trust the machine. The camera. It has never been kind to the state or the region. A long-standing distrust. Skepticism. Gil Scott-Heron said the revolution will not be televised. ABC said different.

So I turned the television off. Sat with my thoughts. Paid attention to the man behind the curtain. The celluloid Hillbilly is a business. He doesn’t reflect reality. He is reality, a socially-constructed reality. He reflects the power and influence of the culture industries. His legacy is that of greed, exploitation, and capitalistic gain. In the culture industries nothing is really as it seems. Everything is rhetorical. Everything for a profit.

The printing presses of *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* bled Hillbilly across the northern landscape. The Hillbilly, as a rhetorical myth, as a dispenser of caricatures and stereotypes, was the product of this hemorrhaging. The skilled hands of local artists designed his frame and shaded in the dark parts. Like Dr. Frankenstein, they were playing God. Those with the power to do so invented an Appalachia that suited their purposes. However, it would be the digital age that would breathe life into the monster. A machine. A digital machine that rotates on the same spot. Promoting sameness. Blurring the lines between realities. Influencing a culture. As it grew in power, so did the image of its creation. To the point that the monster was no longer called into question. It gradually became socially acceptable to call the monster by his ugly name. It remained politically correct to laugh at his foolishness. And in the process of establishing this tradition, it
became quite difficult to see his problems or even the material circumstances of his existence. False Consciousness. We see the puppet but have lost sight of the puppeteer.

Channel surfing, I found the celluloid Hillbilly. And he looked the part.

**The Culture Industries: Hillbilly as Mass Deception**

American culture is, for many, a spectator culture. Americans spend much of their lives sitting and watching social phenomenon. Spectatorism, as Ira Shor points out in *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, has its social and political consequences (e.g. de-politicized identity). In describing how alienated work leads to a certain brand of working-class consciousness, Shor paints a picture of America in which “demobilized masses are channeled into spectatorism: sports, TV, movies, following the glamorous lives of film stars and jet setters” (57). Spectatorism is the result of de-skilled work; it is the product of Fordism. For Shor, this is the process by which “life teaches you to settle into a small corner of existence, which amounts to the full-time preoccupation of making ends meet” (57). Spectatorism is therefore Novocain for the working American individual. It is a temporary relief from the drudgery of everyday work, a reward for that work. Because the average American spends most of his or her life working, it can be assumed that the vast majority of these individuals spend their free time engaging in spectatorism. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, the contemporary American worker has a variety of choices at his or her disposal.

Professional sports pacify American workers. The NBA, NFL, MLB, NHL, and NASCAR have in the last 30 years made sport a multi-billion dollar American business. The growth and visibility of these organizations are rivaled only by the explosion of
NCAA athletics, particularly college football and college basketball. Each year, millions of Americans fill sports arenas and stadiums, buy team merchandise, and invest much of their time, energy, and money in becoming passionate spectators. In 2008, golfer Tiger Woods became America’s first billion-dollar athlete. His financial success signals the impact and popularity of American spectatorism. His financial success, largely due to his vast endorsements, also signals the way in which professional sports are intrinsically tied to corporate America. For example, the vast majority of sports stadiums and arenas are sponsored by corporate interests. In America, there is money to be made in the setting and watching business. When American workers are off the clock, they want to be entertained.

Network television has, for some time, firmly stamped its influence on American culture. It is how most Americans get their news – magazines and newspapers are an apparently dying breed. Network television also gives many Americans their political perspective: Rupert Murdock’s Fox News has, in the past decade, become the model for ideologically laden news coverage. From the days of I Love Lucy to the swift rise of MTV during the 1980s, television has influenced the way we talk, dress, think, and laugh. For the contemporary viewer, television is more accessible and convenient than ever before. During the past decade, the box set has provided viewers the chance to relive their favorite television moments at their own leisure - millions are made from the DVD releases of shows such as ABC’s Desperate Housewives. This is not to suggest that Americans are not keeping up with the network’s latest trends. Today, television shows such as Fox’s American Idol and ABC’s Dancing with the Stars often pull in over 30
million viewers per week. The rise of reality television during the past decade has made household names out of reality stars such as Kristin Cavallari and Heidi Montag. The contemporary network creates its own stars via the so-called reality television genre. The successes of these reality stars is testament to the fact that Americans watch their television sets religiously; they care about the lives of the people who are on them. Whether we like to admit it or not, network television shapes the way most Americans view themselves and the various ways in which they view the world.

Despite our country’s recent economic woes, American viewers continue to pack movie theatres. This past year, James Cameron’s Avatar challenged box office records. The movie will certainly generate millions more in DVD sales. Avatar’s success, like the overwhelming successes of recent films such as The Dark Knight and the Twilight series, demonstrates American’s love of film – it’s need to escape into a world of fantasy. The 2010 issue of Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in America is littered with entertainers, sports figures, movie stars and television personalities (e.g. Sandra Bullock and Lady GaGa). In America, it means something if Jessica Simpson carries a Louis Vuitton bag. In America, we look to movie stars like Brad Pitt and Sean Penn for political discourse. Sometimes we even elect our movie stars to public office (e.g. Ronald Reagan, Jessie “the Body” Ventura, Arnold Schwarzenegger). Hollywood film influences societal perceptions; this is one of the undeniable truths of American existence.

The bottom line is that Americans spend a great deal of time performing the role of spectator: viewing concerts, sports, television, and movies. But how does all of this setting and watching actually influence the way we think, feel, and perceive the world
around us? How does all of this setting and watching impact our social or political identities? What are the consequences of participatory membership to a culture that promotes the setting and watching of social phenomenon so fervently? And most importantly, how does all of this setting and watching impact the way we, as a society, view traditionally marginalized groups – those who have little social or economic privilege within our country? I suggest this is the most important question to ask precisely because the culture industries are maintained by those that hold social and economic privilege over those paying for entertainment.

In this chapter I argue that mass media has for the past 60 plus years caricatured and, in many ways, dehumanized the Appalachian people. Its inhabitants have been portrayed as anything from dimwitted hillbillies to sexually perverse subhuman beasts. Countless numbers of books, films, and television programs have been able to falsely portray Appalachian cultural values. These blatant misrepresentations have fueled America’s long-standing fascination with the Hillbilly stereotype associated with Appalachian people. For those outside of the region, it has become difficult to discern cultural truths from stereotypes. Mass culture would have the American public believe the Hillbilly is a shiftless, ignorant, and incestuous individual. In this sense, the Appalachian has become an enigma. America has come to know the Hillbilly only as a “slouch-hatted, bib-overalled, bare-footed” caricature (Ballard 146). Unfortunately, these perverse cultural representations are often met with little opposition. Mass culture is able to disseminate any identity it chooses for citizens of this voiceless region. The Digital Hillbilly does not, however, present original portrayals of Appalachian culture – it is the
process of regurgitating a caricature that has existed long before the invention of television or radio. These caricatures are connected to a shared belief in our country, an acceptable brand of prejudice. This prejudice shows itself in a variety of cultural media: newspapers, magazines, television shows, movies, and advertisements. I find this especially problematic when considering American culture’s tendency to promote spectatorism among its working populations. If we, as working Americans, spend much of our time sitting and watching, then it is important that we learn how to do so in an educated manner. Many of us have far too little experience in questioning the rhetorical aims of those providing our entertainment.

The informal literary tradition that sparked the invention of Appalachia during the late 1800s and early 1900s shaped the way northern readerships viewed Appalachian peoples and their culture. As stated in the previous chapter, these narratives were and continue to be tied to rhetoric. To understand Appalachian culture, one must first take into consideration the various rhetorical agendas that underscore the carefully plotted invention of Appalachian identity by outside forces. Appalachia became Appalachia through a process of articulation. Writers, scholars, politicians, and industry officials named it such. These same forces diagnosed its problems and potentialities. For example, Berea President William Goodell Frost’s Appalachia signified a rugged mountaineer / pioneer spirit. His Appalachia was one in need of saving. For many of the local color writers, Appalachia signified lawless rural anarchy (brought about by poverty and lack of opportunity) – thus, Appalachia was in need of industrialization. Because the people of the region had little social or economic privilege, they were, in many ways, voiceless in
this conversation. My concern, in this chapter, is to explain how the various floating
signifiers (elements of Appalachian identity) created by the local color writing era of the
late 1800s and early 1900s have been appropriated for the rhetorical uses of mass culture
in America. In doing so, I will use Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno’s theoretical
construct of *The Culture Industry* to help make this argument. My aim will be to
demonstrate how the Appalachian region and its people have been historically
dehumanized by the messages promoted by mass culture. Dehumanization, being a key
element of any colonial undertaking, is, of course, the process by which the ruling class
attempts to prove or demonstrate their superiority to the marginalized group in question.
This process devalues the lives of the oppressed group by refusing to acknowledge their
full humanity. Thus, dehumanization provides justification for the actions of the ruling
class and consequently forces the exploited group to acknowledge their lower status
within the existing social hierarchy. I borrow from Horkheimer and Adorno’s framework
because their description of the culture industry provides a theoretical basis for
explaining how this process takes place and the consequences of its demystifying
capabilities.

Any critical discussion of mass culture and its potential to demystify publics into
social or political passivity should, in my opinion, begin with Horkheimer and Adorno’s
*The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*. Some might, however, suggest
that returning to Horkheimer and Adorno’s text is a somewhat outdated move. In their
1964 preface to the new addition of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and
Adorno, in some ways, make this same argument. In the preface Horkheimer and Adorno
situate their work within the historical movements in which it was written: “we would not now maintain without qualification every statement in the book: that would be irreconcilable with a theory which holds that the core of truth is historical, rather than unchanging constant to be set against the movement of history” (ix). To fully consider Horkheimer and Adorno’s definition of the culture industry, one must first come to understand the set of historical circumstances that influenced these two Frankfurt school thinkers. Born of Jewish descent, both Horkheimer and Adorno were forced to flee pre-World War II Germany during the early 1930s. Because Adorno had “witnessed first-hand what the Nazis were able to accomplish through the manipulation of mass culture,” he was keenly aware of mass culture’s ability to distort the minds of its citizens (McGee 3). When Adorno arrived in America during the late 1930s, he was shocked by the extent to which mass culture had already become the dominant ideology of American culture (McGee 3). In the coming years Adorno reunited with Horkheimer and the two would begin developing their now famous critique of mass culture. Their work, which has since become a cornerstone text in the field of cultural studies, served as something of a warning to the uncritical viewer: their work also signaled the need for training in critical thinking and rhetorical techniques. This is why I find their work to be an appropriate starting place for any critique of mass culture. I do, of course, acknowledge the texts’ limitations for discussing contemporary issues. I am less concerned with Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of Jazz. Nor am I interested in their relentless insistence on presenting art as in opposition to mass culture. I am, however, interested in using some of their key theoretical concepts to demonstrate mass culture’s influence over uncritical and passive
American audiences. Doing so will first require a brief overview of Horkheimer and Adorno’s position in regard to mass culture.

Horkheimer and Adorno describe the culture industry (radio, film, print books, and magazines) as a uniform system/machine. Its power stems from its ability to dilute the minds of the public and thus give way to mass deception. In the end, capitalism is the beneficiary of this prescribed confusion. The working class pays their hard-earned money to become indoctrinated. Because this mindless form of entertainment is designed to help the working-class escape their unpleasant conditions, it impedes the worker’s ability to think critically about his or her place in society. The public’s addiction to mass culture serves capitalism by prolonging work and stymieing the possibility of revolution or change. For Horkheimer and Adorno, this is a key feature of the culture industry. The products of the culture industry instantly relegate members of the public into the role of viewer, listener, and reader. In the culture industry, the public no longer becomes the authority. Instead, publics become empty vessels waiting to be filled with propaganda. This same criticism can be applied to contemporary American audiences. Rather than engage in rational debate, the movie-goer gradually begins to accept these harmful Appalachian stereotypes for unquestionable truth. There is no process of active participation. Viewers are simply asked to do no more than sit back and enjoy the show.

Horkheimer and Adorno’s work provides a theoretical framework for discussing the persistence of Appalachian stereotypes. This is because the manufactured needs produced by the culture industry are designed to both promote and produce sameness. Target-audience sitcoms, comedic variety shows, and blockbuster movies are essentially
the “cyclically recurrent and rigidly invariable types,” Horkhiemer and Adorno outline in their critique (125). The cultural messages promoted by mass media only “appear to change” (Horkhiemer and Adorno 125). This is not to say that the sameness of the culture industry is coincidental. For Horkhiemer and Adorno, executive authorities refuse “to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all themselves” (Horkhiemer and Adorno 122). Therefore, publics are given these same formulaic plots again and again. The images slightly change but the message stays the same. As soon a film begins, “it is quite clear how it will end, who will be rewarded, punished or forgotten” (Horkhiemer and Adorno 125). These recursive images, patterns, and cultural messages become the norm for American audiences. As viewers, we anticipate these expectations to be met. The culture industry thus “rotates on the same spot” (Horkhiemer and Adorno 133). Films such as Deliverance and Wrong Turn appear new but are indeed clones. If the culture industry recycles the same message enough times, viewers will undoubtedly begin to accept these messages in blind faith.

Horkhiemer and Adorno argue that the culture industry is dangerous because it attempts to blur the lines of reality. From their experience in pre-World War II Germany, both philosophers understood the seductive powers of mass culture. They were aware that movie producers could create onscreen realities that publics would accept: “the more intensely and flawlessly these techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen” (Horkhiemer and Adorno126). One cannot help but wonder
what Horkhiemer and Adorno would think of how real Hollywood movies have become today. More so than ever before, Hollywood producers are able to craft realities. Multi-million dollar budgets assure that the images presented on the screen look and sound as authentic as possible. Audiences sitting in darkened theaters forget they are watching a construction. Soon, the movie-goer begins to see “the world outside as an extension of the film” (Horkhiemer and Adorno 126). Therefore, the ultimate goal of the culture industry is to make “real life…indistinguishable from the movies” (Horkhiemer and Adorno126). To a certain degree, the culture industry has achieved this goal. The image of the subhuman Appalachian has been firmly planted in the minds of millions of American citizens.

Though 60 years have passed since the initial publication of The Dialectic of Enlightenment, much of Horkhiemer and Adorno’s criticism of mass culture remains applicable to contemporary film. Many researchers have continued to study the culture industry’s delusive effect on audiences. For instance, in 1999, researchers Stephen Smith, William McIntosh, and Doris Bazzini conducted a massive study in hopes of demonstrating the culture industry’s “influences on the beauty-and-goodness stereotype” (Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini 70). For this study, the research team screened 100 films released between 1940-1989 (Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini 70). A team of raters were then asked to evaluate the physical attractiveness of the main characters as well as a variety of other attributes (e.g., their goodness, intelligence, friendliness, aggressiveness, romantic activity, socioeconomic status) (Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini 70). In the second part of the study the researchers asked participants to view films they had selected
based on their beauty-goodness stereotyping (Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini 70). Participants were then subjected to a task in which they “evaluated an application submitted by either an attractive or unattractive candidate” (Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini 70). The results of the study indicated that “Hollywood filmmakers have been portraying physically attractive individuals more favorably than their less attractive film counterparts in regard to moral goodness, romantic activity, and life outcomes” (Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini 75). Hollywood teaches us what is beautiful and, in doing so, they teach us who is good and who is bad.

Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini’s study echoes the work of Horkheimer and Adorno. Their results clearly demonstrate how “the messages of the mass media are widely accepted in the population” (Smith, McIntosh, and Bazzini 75). American audiences believe what they see. The notion that good people look good and bad people look bad has become engrained in the culture. This socially constructed American viewpoint is unquestionably tied to the culture industry: feminist scholars have been doing work on mass culture’s influence on constructions of beauty for some time. Unfortunately, this body of research has done little to slow down the machine. The culture industries have the power to disseminate culture identity. Unfortunately, the culture industry chooses to continue to portray the people of Appalachia as slack-jawed Hillbillies.

In this chapter I provide several examples of the construction of a dehumanizing Appalachian identity through mass media. The two dominant narratives from this tradition are the constructs of the Hillbilly as fool and the Hillbilly as monster. In
providing these examples, I demonstrate the various ways in which the culture industries promote sameness. I also discuss how this sameness has been passed along through various print and digital media. My objective is to question the rhetorical objectives of these rhetorics and bring their material circumstances into the conversation. At times, I demonstrate how these rhetorics are tied to Appalachia’s informal literary tradition, the myth of Appalachia discussed in Chapter 1. Examining these rhetorical artifacts allows for me to demonstrate how these particular rhetorics craft an imagined Appalachia in the minds of American viewers. This tradition should be called into question because it gives way to an acceptable brand of prejudice that further diminishes the self-worth of a people who live in a geographic region bereft of social, economic, and political privilege.

The Hillbilly as Television Fool

In 1943, cartoonist Al Capp introduced the world to Mammy, Pappy, and Abner Yokum in his famous comic strip *Li’l Abner*. Set in rural Kentucky, *Li’l Abner* became the first major comic strip to use “hillbillies” as its principal characters (Billings et al. 145). Though Capp’s comic strip was indeed the first of its kind, both the characters and plot were predictable. Each episode found “city folk” confronted with the otherness of the dimwitted Yokum family (Ballard 145). More often than not, Capp’s “city folk” would attempt to take advantage of the Yokum family’s child-like innocence and dimwitted tendencies (Ballard 145). The message these comic strips sent to readers was clear: Appalachians were intellectually inferior.

In the coming years, this notion was then expanded upon with the emergence of silent film. Appalachian scholar J.W. Williamson reminds us that “in its early days the
film industry made more than four hundred silent movies exploiting the nation’s fascination with Appalachian feuds and moonshine making”(130). Because the popularity of these films was unmistakable, Hollywood producers became eager to give the public more of what they wanted. As was the case during the color writing days of Appalachian travel narratives, othering Appalachian culture continued to be a profitable endeavor as the culture industries developed and expanded their technological capabilities. Capp’s *Li’l Abner* was eventually made into a Broadway play and later adapted into a film. Viewers were clearly drawn to these cultural depictions. With the emergence of cable television, these deprecating cultural messages would soon be distributed to households all over the country. The Hillbilly, as comedic fool, became an easily recognizable type.

From the mid-1950s to early-1970s, American television audiences were subjected to several competing characterizations of the Appalachian people. As television sets became more affordable for American families, the rapidly increasing popularity of the sitcom genre would give the Hillbilly a nationwide primetime audience. These carefully constructed performances of identity carried a variety of rhetorical messages. First, we learned that the Hillbilly is a simpleton. He and his family are comedic fools. Second, we learned that the Hillbilly could not function outside of the protective mountains of Appalachia. Third, it is repeatedly suggested that it would be quite a spectacle to watch him and his family attempt to do so. Perhaps the most often cited example of such discourse is CBS’ hit show *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Not the first of its kind, *The Beverly Hillbillies* signaled the apex of this tradition in regard to mainstream popularity. The recursive narrative promoted by this program was hardly new or
innovative: its depictions of Appalachian life were straight out of the color writing era described in Chapter 1.

During this first wave of digital characterization, Appalachians were consistently depicted as lazy, stupid, and socially awkward (completely unable to exist outside of Appalachia). CBS’ Tuesday evening lineup taught American audiences this lesson by consistently juxtaposing depictions of normal (proper) society with examples of the Hillbilly comedic fool. Examples of such programs will be explored the following subsections. I remind readers of the fact that these programs were produced and marketed by outside economic forces. I also remind readers of the fact that the money generated by these particular media was not reinvested in the actual communities being exploited. Appalachia’s history in the culture industries is that of outside forces profiting from an already established caricature of the region. Money from outside the region funds these projects. People from outside the region create them. People from within suffer the social consequences of their carefully crafted realities. People from outside the region get rich off of the success of these programs.


**Overview**

In 1957, ABC debuted *The Real McCoys*, a fish-out-of-water sitcom that centered on the social awkwardness of a backwoods West Virginia family recently moved to California to become dirt farmers. The family consisted of Ole’ Grandpappy Amos, a suspender wearing “by-gors” Hillbilly with a high temper and soft heart, his clean shaven grandson Luke, Luke’s attractive young bride Kate, teenage sister Hassie, and
their 11-year-old brother “little Luke” (the double-naming of the brothers was part of a Hillbilly back story designed to poke fun at Appalachian family dynamics). As noted by scholar Anthony Harkins, the show provided viewers with an updated and somewhat romanticized story of southern agrarian migrants such as the one found in *The Grapes of Wrath* (178). The underlying premise of the show was Appalachian poverty transposed to California’s San Fernando Valley, a comedic mismatch. Originally from the fictional town of Smokey Corners, West Virginia, the McCoys found themselves in beautiful California when Grandpappy Amos’s Uncle Ben died and left the West Coast ranch to his family. Harkins notes that like the famous scenes from *The Grapes of Wrath* (and later, *The Beverly Hillbillies*), the show’s pilot episode (“Californy Here We Come”) begins with this multigenerational family making their way along a dusty California roadway in an beat-up old jalopy, an easily recognizable image for American audiences (178). Like the Joads of Steinbeck’s novel, the McCoys are pulled over by a local policeman. Though not greeted with hostility, as was the case with the Joads, the real McCoys are instantly pinned as West Virginians by the local officer – despite the fact that they are thousands of miles away from their home state. Despite the show’s slapstick comedy, we, as an audience, are to quickly able to recognize the fact that the McCoys are a long way from where they belong.

Later in the pilot episode, the McCoys arrive at the broken down ranch they just inherited. The family hops out of their rusty, packed-down, hillbilly-mobile and surveys the scene. Before entering the house, the family stops for a moment of prayer lead by Grandpappy Amos: “lord we want to thank you for getting us here in one piece, the house
is a mite fancy maybe but we can fix that.” We, as an audience, are lead to believe
California’s trash is indeed a dream-come-true for this Appalachian family. Thus, we are
left wondering just how bad things actually are in Smokey Corners. Later in the episode,
Luke, speaking to his grandfather about his new bride Kate, says “she was brought up in
a house with curtains, it ain’t her fault.” This line was funny to mainstream American
audiences because it once again mocked the idea of an Appalachian social hierarchy. The
dilapidated ranch was “a mite fancy” for this Appalachian family. This notion that
Hillbillies would struggle to exist within the mainstream American social order – struggle
to conform to societal standards – was a recurring theme on the show. It was funny to
imagine West Virginia hillbillies in California because we, as an audience, realize they
could never really live there. Even the simplest of American social standards were
difficult for the McCoys to grasp. For instance, upon discovering the fact that each family
member was to have his or her own bedroom in their new ranch house, little Luke goes
into full-fledged temper tantrum: “separate bedrooms – ain’t we a family no more?”
Fifteen minutes into this original episode, it became clear that television’s newest
Appalachian family was simply out of touch with modern society. These portrayals of
Appalachian existence would, of course, reinforce an already understood image of
Appalachian existence – the Hillbilly.

Characters

Each episode of The Real McCoys would begin with the ringing of a triangular
dinner bell followed by each family member’s on-screen appearance as the following
theme song played:
Want you to meet the family that's known as the real McCoys / That’s 
Grandpappy Amos, the head of the clan, he roars like a lion but he's gentle as a 
lamb / And now here’s Luke a beamin' with joy since he made Miss Kate Missus 
Luke McCoy / From West Vir-gi-nee they came to stay in sunny Cal-i-for-ni-ay / 
'Ole Grandpappy Amos and the girls and boys of the family known as The Real 
McCoys /

As the song indicates, Grandpappy Amos symbolizes the cantankerous old Appalachian 
grandfather who is simply out of touch with modern times or forward thinking: in many 
ways his character was an allusion to Percy Kilbride’s Pa character from the famous Ma 
and Pa Kettle movies of the late 1940s. A reoccurring joke was that Grandpappy Amos 
was opposed to “pipe water” and daily ritual of bathing (Hawkins 179). His odd 
phrasings and cranky temper were designed to keep the comedic mood light.

Luke is next in the McCoy family hierarchy. From an aesthetic standpoint, Luke 
represents the handsome young mountaineer. His character, that of the doting simple-
minded husband, is clearly tied to his marital status. Luke is pragmatic, thoughtful, and 
often the voice of reason in the family. However, Luke can also be read as a younger 
example of the ignorant-of-modern-societal-standards Hillbilly caricature that 
Grandpappy Amos more explicitly represents. This toning down of Luke’s Appalachian 
ignorance allows Grandpappy Amos to be the true comedic star of the show.

Luke’s wife, the beautiful Kate (played by Kathleen Nolan), served as 
Appalachian eye candy for American audiences. The stereotypical nature of Kate’s 
character is further explained in the extended version of the show’s theme song:
What a housekeeper Kate is, she's doin' what she enjoys / No gal can beat her when it come to looks and the same can be said 'bout the way she cooks for / Grandpappy Amos and the girls and boys of the family known as The Real McCoys /

From these lyrics, one can clearly see Kate’s character was designed to represent the subservient, innocent, beautiful image of the Appalachian wife – one who stays home with the kids, takes care of her husband, and enjoys cleaning the house. A pseudo-mother to the entire family, Kate plays the role of simple but strong Appalachian belle. Her soft accent and bright smile were designed to portray an ideal version of Appalachian femininity. Hassie and Little Luke are also included in the mix because audiences were already conditioned to expect the Appalachian family to have a few youngins running around the house. These youngins are, of course, not their children – Luke and Kate are de-sexed in this regard; this plotline was apparently a popular sitcom motif during the 1950s. Kate’s adherence to traditional constructs of femininity is also a product of the era in which the show was created.

**Influence**

The historical significance of this program is that it was clearly the first sitcom to explicitly advance many of the same stereotypes born out of the color writing days of Appalachia’s informal literary tradition. Even the family’s name, McCoy, was chosen in an obvious attempt to invoke the Hatfield and McCoy feud that took place during this same time period (Grandpappy Amos claims to be the last real McCoy). Thus, ABC’s
The Real McCoys asks us to imagine a family of historic relics transposed into the current social climate of California during the 1950s.

Not only did ABC’s The Real McCoys assist in advancing Appalachian stereotypes, the show also maintained racist undertones. For example, on the show’s first episode we learn that the McCoys have not only inherited a broken-down California ranch but also the services of Pepino, a Hispanic ranch hand who works on the property and eventually becomes a pseudo-family member. Upon seeing Pepino on their new property for the first time, Granpappy Amos shouts “I left the gun in the car, but I got my hand on my knife.” As a smiling Pepino greets the family with a mixture of Spanish and English, teenage Hassie asks “what is it, Luke?” Slightly bewildered, he replies “I believe it’s a foreigner.” As Pepino explains that Uncle Ben has willed his services to the family, Grandpappy Amos turns to Luke and says “I think it’s a Rooshin (Russian) judging from the language.” The juxtaposition of an out-of-their-element Appalachian family with a poor Hispanic ranch hand was, of course, the perfect comic pairing for the 1950s; a weekly chance to laugh at two marginalized groups of people whom it was still socially acceptable to mock and stereotype. For five years the show would serve as a weekly reminder of just how different these two social groups were from proper (white) Californian society.

The success of The Real McCoys marked the beginning of a new era in network television. It was more than a program that sought to advance stereotypes with a mixture of light-hearted comedy and the occasional tug at the heartstrings of its viewers. The show signaled the popularity of the Hillbilly fool. Networks had essentially struck
comedic gold: “The Real McCoys’s dramatic success (eighth highest-rated show of the 1958 season, the fifth highest of the 1960 season, and never out of the top twenty from 1958 through 1961) illustrated the vast potential for the rural-based programming” (Harkins 181). After the initial success of The Real McCoys, two of the show’s key contributors, writers Jim Fritzell and Everett Greenbaum, would take notice and begin crafting their next Appalachian-based sitcom The Andy Griffith Show. This time it would be CBS that would capitalize on marketability of the Hillbilly fool. From our contemporary standpoint, we can view The Real McCoys as the starting place for a full-fledged comedic tradition funded and marketed by CBS.

The Andy Griffith Show (CBS 1960 – 1968; Local Syndication 1969 – Present)

Overview

In 1962, after three successful seasons, ABC sold the television rights to The Real McCoys to CBS. More so than any major network at the time, CBS was clearly interested in cashing in on the popularity of Appalachian-themed comedy. However, The Real McCoys was not CBS’ first Appalachian sitcom. By the time the network purchased the rights to The Real McCoys, it had already established its own highly popular Appalachian sitcom The Andy Griffith Show – a show that centered on the day-to-day life of Sheriff Andy Taylor (played by Andy Griffith) in his fictional hometown of Mayberry, North Carolina. Crafted by some of the very same pens that inked The Real McCoys, The Andy Griffith Show was a program that reintroduced American audiences to the comedic elements of small town life.
As scholar Anthony Harkins points out, Sheriff Andy Griffith and his cast of Mayberry townsfolk were perceived as “bumpkins in the eyes of most urban outsiders”: the country bumpkin symbolizing a “stubbornness, ignorance, and distrust of modern science and technology” (181). This particular brand of Hillbilly character was unable to improve his life or solve his social and economic problems as a result of this stubbornness. American audiences had, of course, already heard this story. The idea of the rural mountaineer in need of rationalization and modernization fueled the literary works of local color writers such as John Fox Jr. some 100 years before American audiences were introduced to Sheriff Griffith’s hometown.

The Andy Griffith Show was more than a weekly reminder of the hilarity of Appalachian ignorance or stubbornness. The show incorporated many of the already-established Appalachian tropes found during the local color writing days; tropes such as feuding (a 1960 episode titled A Feud is a Feud placed Taylor in the middle of a Hatfield and McCoy love affair that took on a Romeo and Juliet-like quality) and moonshining continually found their way into plotlines. Therefore, The Andy Griffith Show was able to bring audiences to a place The Real McCoys didn’t – Appalachia. The show demonstrated the hilarity that could possibly ensue if only urban audiences were given the chance to witness the buffoonery of Appalachian backwardness on a daily basis.

Characters

The show’s undeniable star was Andy Taylor, a widowed small town sheriff who lived with his son and stern but loving Aunt Bee, developed gradually with each passing season. In the first season, Taylor’s character personified the grinning country bumpkin
persona audiences had come to expect. Played by Andy Griffith, Andy Taylor was indeed a caricature crafted and made popular by Griffith himself. At this point in his career, Griffith’s claim to fame was his ability to play up his Yokel persona for urban audiences. For example, in 1953 Griffith recorded a standup comedy routine for Capital Records titled “What It Was Was Football” in which he took on the persona of a naïve backwoods preacher who accidentally finds himself watching a college football game for the first time: the backwoods preacher mistakes the referees as convicts and the football field as a cow pasture. The success of Griffith’s comedy routine landed him an on-camera appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show the following year. Griffith then found success playing “hick private Will Stockdale in No Time for Sergeants on Broadway, television, and film between 1955 and 1958”: so adept at playing the stereotypical role, Griffith’s first agent described him as “a real Li’l Abner” (Harkins 181). Griffith’s major breakthrough, however, would come in the form of Sheriff Andy Taylor. As the series progressed, Taylor’s character developed into a pragmatic father figure – the common sense voice of reason to all of the Appalachian goons he encountered on a daily basis. Though Taylor’s character gradually became less of a Hillbilly stereotype, he was consistently given a cast of stereotypically Hillbillies to interact with on a daily basis.

The most famous of these Appalachian fools was Deputy Barney Fife (played by Don Knotts, an actual West Virginia native). A babbling sidekick to Sheriff Taylor, Barney personified the hillbilly fool with a badge - his inability to use his own firearm was his signature trait. Other examples of the Hillbilly fool are Gomer and Goober Pyle – two service station attendees who clearly played the role of village idiots. There was also
Otis Campbell, the town drunk who works by day and drinks by weekend – he often locks himself in the town jail until he gets sober. The show revolves around Taylor’s attempts to teach his son life lessons, ward off moonshiners, and help maintain order in the sleepy town of Mayberry with his common-sense approach. Recurring characters such as Ernest T. Bass, a malevolent mountain man with a habit of throwing rocks and stirring up trouble, and the Darlings, a family of banjo picking ridge runners, consistently reminds audiences they are watching Appalachian backwardness, as opposed to rural backwardness of an ambiguous nature.

Few would argue that Andy Griffith is a cultural icon. His show, among his other body of work, attracts much more than a cult following. During the shows near-decade run, it never placed lower than seventh in the Nielsen ratings (*TV Ratings*). The popularity of the show produced a number of spin-off shows, a telemovie, and an enumerable amount of series-related merchandise. Simply put, *The Andy Griffith Show* is one of the most famous sitcoms in the history of television. Even among the shifting social climate of contemporary 2010 American culture, the show continues in local syndication. It has yet to disappear from the cultural landscape.

*The Beverly Hillbillies* (*CBS 1962–1971*)

**Overview**

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the culture industries rotate in the same spot and that their parts are interchangeable. It becomes difficult to argue against this point when taking a brief glance at CBS’ programming lineups from the 1960s. The success of *The Real McCoys* gave way to the creation of *The Andy Griffith Show*, the success of *The
Andy Griffith Show lead to CBS’ third and most successful attempt at crafting the ultimate Hillbilly sitcom. In 1962, American audiences were introduced to The Beverly Hillbillies – Appalachia’s most famous television family. In many ways, this program was simply The Real McCoys refashioned and retooled. Both families hailed from Appalachia and through a series of chance happenings found their way to California.

Both programs promoted the same brand of Appalachian humor, a collection of already-recognizable stereotypes. Both television families displayed social habits and backwoods tendencies that were in opposition to modern constructions of societal normalcy. Perhaps this is because the same social and economic forces crafted each program. For example, Paul Henning, a major figure in the history of television production, was the creative mind behind The Beverly Hillbillies. Henning, an occasional writer for The Real McCoys and The Andy Griffith Show was the creator, writer, and producer of The Beverly Hillbillies (as well as Petticoat Junction and Green Acres). Each of these programs was funded and televised by CBS. A native of Missouri, Henning made his professional name in radio and eventually moved on to produce Hollywood films as well as television programs. Henning’s understanding of Appalachian culture, so it seems, was highly influenced by several already existing Appalachian motifs.

Not only do the opening scenes to The Real McCoys and The Beverly Hillbillies clearly borrow from The Grapes of Wrath, his writing style also mimicked much of the discourse found in the Ma and Pa Kettle films of the 1940s. Scholar Anthony Harkins also reminds us that that Henning likely read his Lil’ Abner comics: “not only were Jethro, Elly May, and Granny clearly drawn from Abner, Daisy Mae, and Mammy
Yokum (a connection made by several reviewers when the show first aired), Henning also featured scenes directly based on episodes in Capp’s comic strip, including Jethro with his twin sister Jethrine, and Jethro attending elementary school in a ridiculously undersized school boy’s uniform)” (188). Therefore, it appears that this key figure in creating this next wave of Appalachian stereotyping was himself influenced the already-established image of Appalachian existence. Henning’s legacy is that of stereotypes begetting stereotypes. Even the name The Beverly Hillbillies was not original at the time when Henning’s film debuted; the name originally belonged to a mildly popular Los Angeles string band during the 1930s. Henning’s talent was making this sameness look new, a key feature in Horkhimer and Adorno’s conception of the culture industries.

**Characters**

The story of The Beverly Hillbillies begins when Jed Clampett, a grizzled Hillbilly with a heart of gold, accidentally strikes oil on his Ozark swampland. His story was made famous by the now legendary television anthem:

Come and listen to a story about a man named Jed / A poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed / Then one day he was shootin at some food / And up through the ground came a bubblin crude / Oil that is, black gold, Texas tea / Well the first thing you know ol Jed’s a millionaire / Kinfolk said “Jed move away from there” / Said “Californy is the place you ought to be” / So they loaded up the truck and moved to Beverly / Hills, that is, Swimming pools, movie stars / The plot of The Beverly Hillbillies clearly borrows from that of The Real McCoys. In both instances, we are given a rags-to-riches story of Appalachian upward mobility. In both
instances, we are asked to laugh at the juxtaposition of California life and Appalachian existence. In both instances, we see the awkward and clannish nature of the fractured Appalachian family. These are comedic stories of social boundaries. We, as an audience, are being asked to laugh at the thought of an Appalachian family transposed into a state their kind apparently has trouble pronouncing correctly (Californy).

Each of the characters on CBS’ *The Beverly Hillbillies* fit an already-established stereotype in regard to Appalachia. Jed Clampett, the head of the family, was a good-natured widower who survived off of his rural brand of common sense. Therefore, we can read Jed as a mixture of Grandpappy Amos and Andy Taylor. Granny Clampett, on the other hand, was the high tempered Appalachian grandma that audiences had come to expect. She resented big city living, was handy with a shot gun, chewed tobacco, drank moonshine, and feared “injuns (Indians)” - a clever way to portray Appalachian racism (another reoccurring joke was that Granny believed the South won the Civil War). There was also Elly May, Jed’s daughter, the beautiful blond Appalachian eye candy. With her flowing curls and large breasts, Elly May was an enigma. In some ways, her character was to represent the epitome of physical desire. She matched American conceptions of beauty, while at the same time displaying obvious Tomboyish ways. She could out-wrestle a bear and could beat up any of the male characters. Elly May could not simply represent feminine beauty – she was Appalachian. Her femininity was marked by Appalachian otherness. And finally, there was Jethro Bodine – Jed’s inept grandson. His role was clearly that of the Hillbilly fool. The day-to-day happenings of the Clampetts were also marked by their occasional run-ins with the Drysdales, their wealthy next door
neighbors who apparently resented the fact that a group of Tennessee Hillbillies had moved to town.

**Influence**

Spanning from 1962 – 1971, *The Beverly Hillbillies* was perhaps the most popular Appalachian-themed sitcom of all time. During the show’s first two seasons, it was the most watched television program in America, according to Nielsen ratings (*TV Ratings*). The second season premier “The Giant Jackrabbit” was one of the most watched telecasts in television history at the time of its airing. *The Beverly Hillbillies* ranked in the top 12 most watched series on television in seven of its nine year run (*TV Ratings*). The show’s success spawned innumerable amounts of tie-in merchandise and eventually lead to a 1981 telemovie.

The success of *The Beverly Hillbillies* also marked a new era in marketing and cross promotion in television: “CBS launched a $500,000 merchandizing campaign and the Clampetts appeared in television and print advertising for Kellogg’s corn flakes and Winston cigarettes and even in federal government public service announcements for the IRS” (Harkins 199). Soon thereafter a variety of companies jumped on the Hillbilly marketing craze established by CBS. For example, Pepsi launched an advertising campaign for Mountain Dew, a new soft drink that was being championed as being high in caffeine and sugar – hence the name Mountain Dew, a slang term for moonshine. The soft drink’s mascot was a cartoon Hillbilly named *Willy the Hillbilly*. With his tattered clothes, long beard, and bare feet, Willy would deliver the all-important message that Mountain Dew will “tickle yore innards.” Advertisements would also feature the
following tag line: “Fresh outten the lil ol’ dewstillery in the hills.” With these advertisements, Pepsi was essentially marketing their new soda as the soft drink equivalent of moonshine. In doing so, they were cashing in and perpetuating several of the long-standing stereotypes of the region.


*Overview*

During the 1960s, CBS continually attempted to refashion and redistribute rural-themed comedies for audiences. As already noted, many of these programs explicitly aimed to mock Appalachian life. Others simply poked fun at rural life. *Petticoat Junction*, another Paul Henning sitcom, was set in the fictional town Hooterville. The show centered on the daily lives of Kate Bradley, the owner of The Shady Rest Hotel (located along the tracks of the C. & F.W. Railroad) and her three daughters Bobbie Jo, Betty Jo, and Billie Jo (once again, double-naming is used as a trope to mock rural family dynamics). Bradley’s lazy and apparently inept uncle Carson was also a regular on the show – his character, in many ways, is a nod to the lethargic Hillbilly stereotype. *Petticoat Junction*, for the most part, was simply another Henning regurgitation. The three young and attractive Hillbilly daughters (seen skinny dipping in the town’s water tower at the beginning of each episode) were the same brand of Appalachian eye candy found on other CBS programs (e.g. Kate *The Real McCoys*, Elly Mae *The Beverly Hillbillies*). These women were aesthetically beautiful – according to modern conventions of beauty – but were essentially othered by rural Appalachian identity markers (Appalachian accents, masculine behavior, apparent stupidity etc.). *Petticoat*
"Junction" was unique, however, in that it was the first Appalachian-themed sitcom to serve as a go-between for Henning’s other Appalachian-themed sitcoms. For example, on a later episode, the characters of *The Beverly Hillbillies* came to Hooterville and stayed at The Shady Rest Hotel. Hooterville later served as the backdrop for another rural CBS sitcom, *Green Acres*. At this point, it became clear that Henning and CBS were attempting to craft a pseudo-reality by mixing and matching the characters from each of these three sitcoms. The recursive nature of CBS’ programming was boldly on display for all to see.

*Green Acres*, Henning’s last rural-themed sitcom for CBS, borrowed from this cookie-cutter formula. This time, however, CBS would slightly alter their Hillbilly script. *Green Acres* would feature a wealthy New York couple, Oliver Wendell Douglas (Eddie Albert) and his wife Lisa (played by Eva Gabor), who would move to Hooterville, the town made famous by *Petticoat Junction*. Though the show often centered on the difficulty city slickers might face in an Appalachian landscape, the comedic relief continually comes from the awkward social habits of rural characters (e.g. The Douglass’ childless neighbors who adopt a pig and treat it as their own). The success of *Petticoat Junction* and *Green Acres*, with their occasional spin-off scenes, demonstrated a clearly defined target audience for CBS’ evening programming. The network had found something that worked and relentlessly attempted to craft the same recursive product anew. Appalachian humor attracted audiences and CBS aimed to make money off of this attraction. However, in doing so, the network became a hotbed for Appalachian
stereotyping. The longevity of this tradition firmly implanted many of these stereotypes within the minds of American viewers.


**Overview**

Amid growing national interest in country music, a genre rapidly being labeled as Hillbilly music, CBS’ next foray into the myth of Appalachia was *Hee Haw*, a variety show that mixed country music with sketch comedy. The fictional backdrop of Kornfield Kounty (an ambiguously Appalachian space) provided audiences with the same comedic setting made popular by *The Andy Griffith Show*. Shot in Nashville, Tennessee, *Hee Haw* marketed itself as an authentic brand of Appalachian humor. With its original hosts country music stars Buck Owens and Roy Clark, the show attempted to capitalize on the popularity of country music as well as the already-established set of stereotypes given to the region by outside forces. Guest appearances by music stars such as Johnny Cash, June Carter-Cash, and Waylan Jennings gave the show a certain amount of credibility among Appalachian audiences. However, few viewers stopped to consider the fact that the program was developed by Canadians Frank Peppiatt, John Aylesworth, and their New York counterpart Bernie Brillstein. Nor did 1960s audiences view *Hee Haw* as just another wheel in the CBS machine. *Hee Haw* has, for some time, continued to be viewed as a for-us-by-us brand of rural Appalachian comedy.

**Characters**

The often sexually suggestive humor found on *Hee Haw* aimed to reinforce several already existing Appalachian stereotypes (e.g. the shotgun wedding and crude
incest jokes). Each episode featured The Hee Haw Honeys, a collection of big busted women dressed in the traditional farmer’s daughter outfit – another misogynistic representation of Appalachian femininity. Another reoccurring character was Colonel Daddy’s Daughter, a spoiled southern belle who sat on a swing outside of her father’s plantation and spoke graciously of her rich father. Other reoccurring characters were The Moonshiners, two lazy hillbillies who would tell jokes while propped up by an assortment of moonshine jugs. Later in the shows progression came a sketch titled “Goober’s Garage” that featured the famous dimwitted character from *The Andy Griffith Show*. To put it plainly, during the shows 23 year run there was a lot of banjo picking, suspender wearing, Appalachian stereotyping taking place. The show’s mascot, a bucktoothed, suspender-wearing Donkey with a straw hat, was the proper personification for the stereotypes the show aimed to perpetuate. The comedy found on this variety show put a face, that of the Hillbilly fool, with a music that was rapidly becoming popular among mainstream American audiences.

**Influence**

*Hee Haw* experienced an historic run within the culture industries. For 23 years the show produced new material for its vast audience – reruns of the show continue on networks such as CMT. The show’s draw came from its ability to pander to the country music crowd as well as those interested in Hillbilly humor, we should not insinuate these crowds are always the same. In many ways, the show laid the groundwork for the future success of comedians such as Jeff Foxworthy and CMT’s *Blue Color Comedy Tour*. Largely due to the success and influence of *Hee Haw*, Hillbilly humor became an easily
recognizable genre for American audiences. During the past 10 years, comedians such as Larry the Cable Guy (Daniel Whitney) have become exceedingly rich off of the popularity of redneck / blue collar comedy – much of which is tied to the brand of humor promoted by *Hee Haw*.

**The Hillbilly as Television Fool: End Notes**

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, a number of television programs sought to caricature the Appalachian family. In 1970, for example, CBS premiered a Tuesday-evening lineup that consisted of *The Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres*, and *Hee-Haw* (Billings et al. 5). These programs provided American audiences with an easily-recognizable stereotype. Finally, audiences were able to tune in each week to witness the social awkwardness of an Appalachian family out of their economic, social, and cultural element. Each program in the lineup was designed to demonstrate just how different Appalachians were from the rest of the country. Though all three television shows gained enormous popularity with audiences, this would not occur without harsh criticism from a number of Appalachian scholars. For instance, James Brandscome once referred to CBS’ Tuesday lineup as “the most intensive effort ever exerted by a nation to belittle, demean, and otherwise destroy a minority people within its boundaries” (qtd. in Billings 25). I do not, however, wish to align myself with this particular brand of hyperbole. One does not need to be a history buff to prove Brandscome wrong. Native American genocide, African American slavery, and Japanese interment camps each serve as far greater examples of America’s most intensive efforts to destroy minority peoples in this country. His criticism of CBS does mark the passionate resistance some Appalachian advocates
felt in response to these socially demoralizing depictions. Despite such staunch criticism, mass culture continued to produce more of these same offensive depictions. Television programs such as *The Dukes of Hazard* (CBS 1975 – 1985) serve as evidence of this tradition. Located in fictional Hazard County Georgia, *The Dukes of Hazard* would advance many of the same caricatures found during the earlier CBS-Henning era: moonshiners, clueless local police, and, of course, more Appalachian eye candy – Daisy Duke. Through the years, CBS would sometimes deviate from the Hillbilly as television fool archetype. In 1971, the network would debut *The Waltons* a more serious television drama set in the wilderness of Charlottesville, Virginia. However, the Hillbilly as television fool remained the dominant narrative in popular culture.

In fall of 2002, CBS announced plans to film a reality show titled *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*. During the coming months the network scoured numerous rural areas in West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Their aim was to find a real-life Hillbilly family, move them into a mansion in California, and record their social awkwardness for an extended period of time. The concept of this program was met with real opposition from Appalachian activists, local politicians, and angry fans. As a result of controversy caused by the initial casting advertisement, CBS pulled the plug on the show and it never made its way into the following year’s lineup. Although the cancellation of this program demonstrates a growing awareness of this problem among American viewers, it does not signal the end of the digital Hillbilly. The digital Hillbilly remains alive and well today. His home is now on the big screen, his narrative and disposition have changed. He no longer aims to make you laugh. His image is that of
something dark and sinister. The second wave of the digital Hillbilly marks something dark and ominous. The Hillbilly serves as a warning to outsiders.

_The Hillbilly as Cinematic Monster_

*Deliverance (Warner Brothers, 1972)*

One hardly needs to be a movie aficionado in order to recognize the film industry’s long-standing tradition of dehumanizing the people of Appalachia. Instead, one might need only to view director John Boorman’s classic film *Deliverance*. Released in theatres during the summer of 1972, the film adaptation of James Dickey’s novel contributed greatly to America’s fear of the Hillbilly. The movie’s influence and impact are without question. *Deliverance* serves as the *Old Testament* to modern day Hillbilly horror movies. It is the cinematic foundation to everything contemporary American audiences have been taught to fear about the dark and ominous Appalachian Mountains. Most of us born in rural Appalachia have a *Deliverance* story: tell someone where you are from and they instantly reference a line from the movie or make an allusion to one of its popular scenes. Though Boorman’s film was shot nowhere near West Virginia, I have had various friends, acquaintances, strangers, and even students swear to me that this was the case. *Deliverance* is clearly Appalachian and ambiguously so at the very same time. For many viewers, the dark and dangerous backwoods of the film are to represent all of Appalachia as opposed the film’s actual Georgia backdrop. On only a few small instances do the characters actually mention the region or state they are in. However, audiences are given consistent linguistic and visual reminders that our backwoods villains are “mountain men,” “crackers,” and “hillbillies.” Therefore, *Deliverance*, as a piece of
visual rhetoric, has the potential to imply all of Appalachia in its disparaging characterizations. More so than any movie in the history of Hollywood cinema, *Deliverance* was able to engrain a set of horrific images regarding Appalachian existence firmly into the minds of American audiences. The film’s surface-level message can be summed up by the Aintry County Sheriff’s famous warning to Ed, the movie’s lead character: “Don’t come back up here.” For many American viewers, *Deliverance* was read as a cautionary tale. It exemplified the dangers of passing through an uncivilized Appalachian region. It is a story of social, economic, and cultural boundaries.

The film opens with four Atlanta businessmen forging their way into the untamed Appalachian wilderness. From the start, viewers are made aware of the fact that this film centers on issues of social, economic and class-based divisions. Despite its subversive attempts to comment on the American desire to discover / conquer nature (made clear by a set of sexually suggestive metaphors) *Deliverance* is, essentially, a story of cultures clashing. Young and attractive leading men such as Bert Reynolds and John Voight represent urban / civilized America. Toothless, one-eyed, suspender-wearing, goons found in the movie serve as visual representations of the people of the Appalachian wilderness. It is indeed a cinematic technique as old as Hollywood itself – the good guys look good and the bad guys look bad. Despite the shortcomings of our protagonists, which are clearly written into the script, the visual dynamics of the movie create a cultural dichotomy that is undeniable: urban development v. rural poverty. This is, of course, hardly a fair portrayal. All humanity is stripped from the Appalachian people. Even though your Atlanta urbanites are at times rude and insensitive, the disgusting
visual representations of rural Appalachian life leave audiences with no choice but to associate the Appalachian people with a savage and filthy existence. For example, in the movie’s first scene, our four ambitious Appalachian explorers stop at a dilapidated, barely functioning gas station that happens to be run by an elderly, possibly senile, toothless Hillbilly. Our out-of-towners do, of course, poke fun at the gas station attendant and make a number of disparaging comments about their surroundings. They observe the harsh surroundings with a mix of awe and contempt. One traveler eventually strikes up an impromptu banjo jam session with a frail little mountain boy that appears to suffer from some form of genetic deficiency: his deformed face and lack of communication are to indicate that he is the product of inbreeding. The scene escalates into a full-fledged caricature as the gas station attendee dances a barefoot jig in the dusty road. The back-and-forth dueling banjo session typifies the tension and constant negotiating between the outsiders and natives. The musical composition from this scene, “Dueling Banjos,” is, of course, designed to foreshadow the danger ahead. The out-of-towners have it coming to them. They are playing with fire. They have entered an area in which they do not belong. Our Atlanta businessmen are essentially trespassing. They are violating nature by attempting to forge their way into a place they simply do not belong.

Deliverance is, of course, more than a simple film about humankind’s pioneer spirit. More so than any of its predecessors, Boorman’s film sought to depict the Appalachian as a sexually perverse threat to the outside world. What makes Deliverance unique is the extent to which the movie perpetuates these sexual stereotypes. The

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8 “Dueling Banjos” was a number one record. Sold over 50,000 copies and connected Bluegrass music to this imagined version of Appalachia.
deformed children, mentioned above, were placed into the film to signal incest. American audiences clearly picked up on this not-so-subtle message. Appalachian sexuality is also called into question in the film’s most famous / infamous scene. Briefly separated from their two counterparts due to harsh rapids, Bobby (Ned Beatty) and Ed (John Voight) park their canoe along the side of the riverbank. Upon doing so, they encounter two violent and uncompromising Hillbillies, one of whom is wielding a shotgun. As the two Hillbillies emerge from the woods, we, as members of the audience, are to see them as monsters. From their disgusting hygiene to their heartless gazes and broken English, it becomes clear that our Hillbilly monsters have no human emotion, no regard for human life. Initially, Bobby and Ed believe they have accidentally stumbled upon two simple minded Hillbillies working on their moonshine still (another stereotype) however they quickly learn that their attempts to bargain their way out of the situation are useless. The Hillbillies do not want their money or their possessions. After Ed is tied to a tree by the one-eyed shotgun-wielding Hillbilly, Bobby is forced to remove all of his clothes and stand in nothing but his underwear. The leader of the two monstrous Hillbillies begins slapping Bobby on his naked ass, pulling at his flabby chest, and as tugging at his white underwear. Bobby incessantly screams “No,” and attempts to resist, but is battered around the leafy forest. Looming above his frightened captive, the Hillbilly shouts “Boy, you look like a hog.” The Hillbilly then forces Bobby down on all fours and attempts to ride him like a pig. After this brief charade, the Hillbilly pulls down Bobby’s underwear, bends him over a log, and brutally rapes our lost male traveler on the side of a muddy Appalachian riverbank. His demand that Bobby “squeal like a pig” during the rape is, of
course, meant to insinuate a taste for bestiality. American audiences were stunned. This scene, and the movie as a whole, served as a distorted window into Appalachian sexuality for many viewers. Uncritical of the director’s cinematic choices, or the accuracy of the film's depictions, audiences were left wondering what sorts of sexual acts do indeed take place in the isolated and lawless Appalachian Mountains. Thanks to this scene, Appalachia soon became the perfect cinematic backdrop for Hollywood horror.

Over the years, various filmmakers have paid homage to *Deliverance*’s riverbank rape scene (e.g. *Say it Ain’t So* and *Pulp Fiction*). The concept of the backwoods Hillbilly with a sexual appetite for out-of-towners and farm animals became a movie cliché. Based on my personal experiences with fans of this movie, I can assure you that very few contemporary viewers call the filmmakers depictions of Appalachian people into question or view the riverbank rape scene as metaphorical – Horkhiemer and Adorno outline this blurring of reality produced by *The Culture Industries*. The people I have met are frightened by *Deliverance* and hold on to the belief that there might be more than an inkling of truth to its story and depictions of Appalachian culture. I have yet to encounter anyone who views the movie as a displaced critique of industrial America’s raping of the Appalachian wilderness, a gothic critique of the city, as some critics have suggested. Most *Deliverance* fans, especially those in the 1970s, came away from the film with a sense of terror regarding the Appalachian people and their cultural makeup. Therefore, it is appropriate to stop and consider the material circumstances of *Deliverance* and its commercial and critical success.
First, I will argue that the formulaic plot found in Boorman’s film is rarely called into question. In his brilliant critique of the Hollywood Hillbilly, Scholar J.W. Williamson reminds readers that *Deliverance’s* plot is anything but unique:

This basic plot has been imitated many times over: a group of urban invaders push arrogantly into a mountain landscape and find they must take the dread with the exhilaration. Nature is taboo, and they have crossed the boundary into electric possibility. They encounter alien creatures, the symbolic spawn of mountain chaos, but the real story and the central irony is that they themselves are also the aliens, and the heart of darkness is their own secret, too. (149-150)

*Deliverance* clearly draws its inspiration from the same frontier spirit found in the early 19th century travel narratives of local color writers such as Murfree, Allen, and Fox Jr. This model was no doubt employed because American readers/audiences have for some time been fascinated with this same pioneering narrative. Westerns, for example, draw from this same fascination with savages in the wilderness. Aside from the explicit images regarding Appalachian sexuality, the movie truly offers us nothing new. Despite its cookie-cutter plotline, *Deliverance* went on to win numerous Golden Globes and Academy Awards; the film continues to be found on the American Film Institute’s Top Films of All Time lists. However, I will remind you of the fact that the same governing bodies that solidified the film as “art” exist and operate outside the Appalachian region. The studio (Warner Brothers, Inc.) that has profited over 40 million dollars due the movie’s success also exists and operates outside the Appalachian region. Audiences rarely stop to consider the fact that the film’s hillbilly rapist was, in all actuality, a
method actor trained at Lee Strasberg’s Actors Studio in Manhattan. Few *Deliverance* fans stop to consider the fact that the story was based off a novel by a former professor at Rice University in Houston (then Rice Institute), a respected poet and literary critic. Even fewer discuss the fact that the film was directed by a British filmmaker who, it appears, could not care less how the people of Appalachia are portrayed to mainstream American audiences. Nor do we, as viewers, stop and discuss the exploitation of real-life Appalachian people in the film.

Upon arriving in Ruban County, Georgia, where much of the filming took place, locals such as Frank Rickman were hired to help the director find rural locations and the “mountain types” needed for the film (Williamson 164). As pointed out in Williamson’s book, it was Rickman who helped filmmakers locate Mrs. Andy Webb and her broken down shack for the film’s opening gas station scene (164). Rickman, among others, would assist in the Appalachian-izing of Mrs. Webb’s residence (e.g. hauling broken down cars into her driveway). When the circumstances were less-than perfect, Boorman’s crew, backed by an abundance of Warner Brothers money, was able to construct a model of Appalachian existence that better suited the script. Rickman also helped Boorman by locating local impoverished Georgians that could play extras in the movie, one of which was Edward Ramey – the man who played the gas station attendee (Williamson 164). In what many viewers see as a culturally insensitive and distasteful move, Mrs. Webb and her mentally retarded granddaughter make a brief cameo in the movie. Webb’s granddaughter is placed on her lap as she sits in a rocking chair while staring off into nothingness (the film implies the little girl is indeed her own). It should also be noted that
Billy Redden, who played the inbred banjo-playing prodigy, did in fact also suffer from mental retardation (the banjo playing is the result of Hollywood magic). Boorman and his movie crew were essentially using their social and economic privilege to find and exploit the poorest and most socially-disadvantaged Appalachian people they could find. After the release of the money, many locals were outraged by the film’s portrayal of Appalachian existence. Simply put, the movie scared the Hell out of American audiences. The film’s critical and commercial success speaks to this fear and its socially constructed believability. More so than any of his predecessors, Boorman was able to bottle America’s fear of the Hillbilly -- the same set of fears and fascinations that drew American readers to the story of the Hatfield and McCoy feud some 80 years before the release of *Deliverance*. Viewing the movie in an uncritical light is a disservice to those exploited by the making, marketing, and distribution of this product. The film has brought and continues to bring shame to all of Appalachia. The film brought and continues to bring in revenue for Warner Brothers.

*The Evil Dead (Renaissance Pictures Ltd., 1981) & The Evil Dead II (1986)*

Although *Deliverance* was not specifically marketed as a horror movie, its depictions of the dangers of Appalachia undoubtedly set the stage for the region’s longstanding place in the horror movie industry. The story of five Michigan State University college students who arrogantly vacation in an isolated cabin in the Tennessee mountains, *The Evil Dead* draws from this already established dark image of Appalachian isolation. As was the case in *Deliverance*, the urban invaders in *The Evil Dead* forge their way into an Appalachian abyss that audiences have been trained to see as off-limits. This
time, however, it is the mountains, the surrounding forest, and Appalachian wilderness that terrorize our out-of-towners. Possessed by demonic forces, the shadowy forest is ripe with evil and malicious intent – it will be an unforgiving host. In the film’s most famous scene, Cheryl (played by Ellen Sandweiss) is lured into the forest by demonic influence. It is here that the forest comes to life and abruptly attacks the young intruder: the winding snake-like branches of the trees violently wrap themselves around her arms and legs. She is battered, whipped, and beaten before her eventual rape. The phallic limbs that commit this gruesome act somehow infect Cheryl with the demonic spirit that controls the shadowy wilderness surrounding the cabin. This brutal rape scene leads to Cheryl’s demonic infection, her eventual transformation into a zombie-like ghoul, and thus begins the mayhem that will lead to each of our five Michigan State students infecting each other and consequently tearing each other from limb to limb.

Despite the obvious plot and genre differences, there are several similarities among Deliverance and The Evil Dead. Shot on location in East Tennessee, The Evil Dead, like Deliverance, attempts to portray the aesthetics of Appalachian wilderness in a realistic fashion. In both instances, the Appalachian backdrop is an important character in the story. Scholar J.W. Williamson also connects the trespassing metaphor found in both films when describing the transgressions of The Evil Dead’s out-of-town guests:

Their sin is the sin of Burt Reynolds’s group in Deliverance: they have touched raw Nature without respect or caution, have arrogantly gone where they shouldn’t go, and have heedlessly done what they shouldn’t. (150)
Both movies reinforce the same insider / outsider dichotomy. These young Michiganites have crossed the ultimate boundary and they will eventually pay for their sins.

*Deliverance* and *The Evil Dead* are also connected in that each movie’s plot hinges upon a horrific rape scene that takes place in the isolated Appalachian wilderness. In both instances, the rhetorical intent is to shock and horrify audiences in regard to the brutality that could possibly take place in the dark woods of Appalachia.

Perhaps this is where the surface-level comparisons stop. *The Evil Dead* is much less concerned with caricaturing the Appalachian people. The film, however, did help reinforce an ominous image of the region. The commercial and critical success of *The Evil Dead* pales in comparison to that of *Deliverance*. However, the film did establish a cult following and eventually spawned a series of sequels and spin-off projects. In 1986, Renaissance Pictures released *Evil Dead II* in theatres across the nation. With a larger budget and wider audience, filmmakers were able to capitalize on the horror movie craze of the 1980s. As is to be expected, the plot was only marginally dissimilar to that of the original film, a group of out-of-towners find their way into the haunted Tennessee wilderness and pay the ultimate price for doing so. Over the years various *The Evil Dead* products (DVDs, t-shirts, comic books etc.) have helped the film establish a solid cult following.

*Pumpkinhead* (Lion Films/United Artists, 1988).

Released a few weeks before Halloween 1988, Stan Winston’s *Pumpkinhead* emerged during an era of renewed interest in American horror films. Filmed in rural Kentucky, the movie follows a few of the familiar Hollywood horror plotlines. A group
of out-of-town teenagers, camping in the wild, come to a place they shouldn’t and stir up more trouble than they can handle. After one of the out-of-town invaders accidentally kills a local boy in a dirt bike accident, the father of the deceased boy goes to a local witch asking for revenge. After some initial hesitation, the witch resurrects a demonic creature named Pumpkinhead – a creature that she apparently controls through supernatural powers. One by one, Pumpkinhead hunts down the teenage invaders and enacts violent justice. As was the case in *The Evil Dead*, the dark and shadowy Appalachian wilderness is used as a tense and foreboding backdrop to gruesome violent acts. From the log cabin to the steady mist that wraps itself around the looming branches in the wilderness, the setting for both movies is indeed quite similar. Appalachian isolation is once again used as a plot device. This isolation asks viewers to consider all of the horrific and monstrous things that just might take place in a region where nobody can hear your screams. However, *Pumpkinhead*, unlike *The Evil Dead*, was explicitly marketed as an Appalachian horror movie. The opening line to the original trailer is as follows: “Deep in the Appalachian Mountains they say that an act of evil shall never go unpunished.”

The film’s success would, of course, lead to a series of sequels. *Pumpkinhead II: Blood Wings* was released in 1994. *Pumpkinhead: Ashes to Ashes* and *Pumpkinhead: Blood Feud* were made into television movies for the SCI FI channel in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Like *Evil Dead*, *Pumpkinhead* also inspired a comic book series and has generated millions of dollars from DVD sales and merchandise profits. Together, the *Evil
Dead and Pumpkinhead franchises helped establish Appalachia as a cinematic backdrop for American horror films.

*Cape Fear (Amblin Entertainment/Universal, 1991)*

Horror movies were not the only genre of film interested in promoting a dangerous image of the Appalachian people and their region during the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this time period various dramas, crime thrillers, and action movies promoted this same rhetorical message. For example, in Martin Scorsese’s 1991 remake of L. Lee Thompson’s classic film *Cape Fear*, audiences were introduced to the ultimate revenge-seeking Hillbilly – Max Cady (played by Robert De Niro). The plot centers on the past transgressions of ex-Atlanta public defender Sam Bowden (Nick Nolte). Some 14 years before the story begins, Bowden defended Cady, who was accused of battering and raping a young girl. Confident that his client was indeed guilty, Bowden buries a report about the victim’s sexually “promiscuous” lifestyle that could have possibly lessened Cady’s sentence or perhaps even changed the outcome of the case. An illiterate Hillbilly from the backwoods of Georgia, Cady had no clue at the time that his public appointed defender was not truly fulfilling his judicial obligation. Cady is convicted and serves 14 years in a state penitentiary – where he learns to read, covers his body in revenge tattoos, and vastly improves his physique. After being released from prison, Cady hunts down Bowden, who has now settled down in the quiet town of New Essex, North Carolina. On the surface, the plot is indeed quite simple. The civilized urban male has committed an ethical violation against a product of the raw and untamed Appalachian
wilderness. He will pay for these crimes. Revenge will be enacted. He will learn his
lesson – the Appalachian *other* will serve as a mirror to his own ugliness.

Both characters, Bowden and Cady, can be read symbolically. Bowden, with his
tailored suit, beautiful small town family, maid, trusty dog, and expensive home, serves
as a visual representation of civilized American society. Cady, on the other hand, is
meant to signify the backwoods, “Pentecostal cracker” lifestyle that Bowden and others
continually mock throughout the movie. De Niro’s blatant and sometimes desperate
attempt at portraying a southern Appalachian accent is designed to constantly remind
viewers that Bowden is dealing with a product of the Deep South. Throughout the movie,
several characters inquire about where Cady has emerged from – Bowden’s wife asks
“Where is he from?,” to which Bowden replies “his family was a bunch of Pentecostal
 crackers, in the hills, a bunch of nut jobs.” Cady is, in every way, the tourist to this small
town backdrop. In almost every scene he is wearing the odd clothes that essentially make
him look like a tourist (button up Hawaiian shirts) he is only missing the camera.

Cady is not your average Hillbilly, not even your average Hillbilly villain. As a
result of Cady’s constant subversive harassment, Bowden hires a set of goons to beat
Cady into submission. Cady, however, survives the attack, trashes the goons and delivers
the following monologue as Bowden cowers behind a local dumpster:

I ain’t no white trash piece of shit. I better than you alllllll. I can out learn you. I
can out read you. I can out think you. And I can out philosophize you. And I’m
gonna outlast you. You think a few whacks to my good ol’ boy guts are gonna get
me down. Its gonna take a Hell of a lot more than that counselor to prove your
better than me.

Cady then moves on to quote a line from the poetry of 17th century mystic / poet Angelus
Silesius: “I am like God and God like me. I am his lord / God / he is as small as I / he can
not above me nor I beneath him be.” Judging from this monologue, one can see that Cady
is more than a simple Hillbilly. He is the personification of the angry Hillbilly, educated
and improved, looking for his revenge. In the movie’s final scene, Cady plans to rape
Bowden’s daughter and wife while Bowden watches (handcuffed to the boat). Just as was
the case in Deliverance and The Evil Dead this personification of Appalachian anger
looks to settle the score through the violent act of rape. Cady is killed before he can carry
out his plan. With Cady’s death, order is restored to Cape Fear.

Silence of the Lambs (Orion Pictures, 1991)

Based on the novel by Thomas Harris, director Jonathan Demme’s Silence of the
Lambs was both a box-office and critical success. Anthony Hopkins’s performance as the
cannibalistic Dr. Hannibal Lector earned him an Oscar – Jodie Foster and Demme would
also win Academy Awards for their contributions to the movie. The outpouring of critical
praise for the movie coincided with huge box-office returns; this is not always the case.
Though not overtly centered on the issue of Appalachian monsters or inherent
Appalachian danger, Silence of the Lambs does focus on issues of Appalachian identity.
The film also suggests that Appalachia is a good place for serial killers to do their work,
thus, once again painting the Appalachian region as a dangerous other to mainstream
America.
Clarice Starling (played by Jodie Foster), a young and promising student at the FBI academy, is the focal point of the film. We, as viewers, eventually learn that she is from a small town in rural West Virginia. Clarice’s back-story revolves around the death of her father, a small town sheriff who is killed during an attempted robbery. His death, we are lead to believe, has somehow inspired Clarice to transgress her small town Appalachian roots and make it all the way to the FBI, perhaps so that her father’s death was not in vain. Clarice’s inability to completely escape her past, or transgress her cultural roots, is a reoccurring theme in both the film and the novel. For instance, upon meeting the Dr. Lector for the first time, our Cannibalistic pseudo-villain is able to see clearly through Clarice’s professional FBI facade:

[Dr. Lector speaking to Clarice upon meeting her for the first time] You know what you look like to me, with your good bag and your cheap shoes? You look like a rube, a well-scrubbed, hustling rube with a little taste. Good nutrition has given you some length of bone, but you’re not more than one generation from poor white trash, are you? And that accent you’ve tried so desperately to shed – pure West Virginia. What does your father do? Is he a coal miner, does he stink of the land? You know how quickly the boys found you, all those tedious, sticky fumblings in the back seats of cars, while you could only dream of getting out, getting anywhere, getting all the way to the FBI.

Lector, something of a psychological profiler, clearly detects Clarice’s Appalachian dilemma. He is aware that her Appalachian identity is in opposition to her attempts to present herself as a professional. Although Starling is our hero, her status as Appalachian
constantly limits her ability to enact this role and reach her full potential. This becomes a reoccurring theme in the movie’s sequel *Hannibal*.

Appalachia also plays a large part in the storyline of *Silence of the Lambs* because “Buffalo Bill,” the film’s actual villain, is a native of Appalachia. Unfortunately, it appears that Buffalo Bill does his best work regionally. A truly sick and twisted individual, Buffalo Bill hunts down young women, brutally rapes and kills them, and eventually removes large portions of their skin (apparently in an attempt to fashion a female suit made of real flesh). Upon the film’s release, some critics suggested that this character’s gender-bending, psychopathic version of cross-dressing provided yet another horrific example of homosexuality in an industry that rarely promotes the image of a positive member of the LGBT community. Few critics, however, mentioned the fact that Buffalo Bill is a resident of Belvedere Ohio (a fictitious town located along the Licking River in central Ohio). His victims in the movie come from areas such as Clay County, West Virginia. Bill was indeed misread by many viewers as homosexual. This, in my opinion, is a false interpretation. However, it cannot be denied that Bill is Appalachian. He lives in southwest Ohio; he kills in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Alabama. He dresses the part – he isn’t an urbanite or member of the upper class (as is the case with Dr. Lector). Bill is essentially an Appalachian serial killer – a rapist. He is believable, for American audiences, because at this point in cinematic history it has firmly been established that Appalachia is the kind of place where people like Buffalo Bill live. Hollywood would have us believe that as a result of the region’s isolation and lack of resources, this is the kind of place were a string of brutal murders could take place.
without being solved. It is the kind of place our heroine, Clarice Starling, is trying to escape or transcend.

For a variety of reasons, *Silence of the Lambs* struck a cord with American audiences. Therefore, it had to be reshaped, remade, and redistributed. *Silence of the Lambs* is based on the 1986 thriller *Manhunter*, which was later remade with Anthony Hopkins as *Red Dragon*, 2002, (a prequel to *Silence of the Lambs*). *Silence of the Lambs* was then followed by *Hannibal*, 2001, and then a prequel to the prequel titled *Hannibal Rising*, 2006. All of these films were based upon novels written by author Thomas Harris.

*The Mothman Prophecies (Screen Gems, 2002)*

Growing up in Cowen, West Virginia I was privy to a great number of ghost stories and monster tales. These stories always fascinated me and, as a child, I simply loved to hear them. When I was young, my grandfather would spin stories about Raw Head and Bloody Bones – two ghosts that haunted the nearby Birch River Road (their story sounded an awful lot like that of the Headless Horseman and Ichabod Crane). My father would tell the neighborhood kids stories about the ghosts of Civil War soldiers that walked the winding hollows of Webster County each night. My favorites, however, were the monsters that attracted national as well as regional attention. There was the Flatwoods Monster (aka the Phantom of Flatwoods), a 10-foot tall green creature that was allegedly spotted in September of 1952. According to reports, two local Braxton men claimed to have spotted a flying saucer in the nearby woods. The incident caused quite a stir in the community and even garnered some attention from the national media. I remember traveling through Flatwoods as a child and being entranced by the road sign that read
“Welcome to Flatwoods: Home of the Green Eyed Monster.” However, the most famous West Virginia monster of all was, of course, the Mothman of Point Pleasant, West Virginia.

Reports of Mothman sightings began in 1966 and continued well into 1967 in Charleston and Point Pleasant. Most sightings took place around an abandoned WWII TNT factory in the southwest portion of the state. Townspeople reported seeing a large flying creature with red glowing eyes. As a child, I was extremely fascinated by the Mothman’s mythology. A segment about the Mothman actually appeared on Unsolved Mysteries – Robert Stack continually referred to the town as Point Pleasant Virginia throughout the show. Before long the rest of America became interested in Appalachia’s newest monster. John A. Keel, a well-known UFO enthusiast, would capitalize on the Mothman craze by publishing *Visitors from Space: The Astonishing True Story of the Mothman Prophecies*. Keel’s book, essentially a piece of fiction, linked the sightings to the 1967 collapse of the Silver Bridge in Point Pleasant. This text would serve as the screenplay that eventually became *The Mothman Prophecies*.

The Hollywood adaptation of Keel’s book begins with story of John Klein, a smooth-talking handsome Washington D.C. journalist played by Richard Gere. At the beginning of the film Klein blacks out and finds himself on a back road in Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Clearly an outsider among the Point Pleasant crowd, Klein encounters a few strange locals and, of course, the Mothman himself. The movie attempts to promote and market its “based on a true story” version of reality despite the fact that none of the lead characters ever existed. Though not overtly focused on Appalachian stereotypes, the
film does add to Hollywood tradition that paints the region as the perfect location for a
good monster movie. Since the film’s release the people of Point Pleasant have fully
embraced their newfound claim to fame. The third Saturday of every September kicks off
the Mothman Festival. A statue of the town’s famous creature stands proudly in
downtown Point Pleasant.

Wrong Turn (Summit Entertainment, 2003)

Though the majority of the film was shot in Canada, the opening scene of director
Frank Schmitt’s Wrong Turn informs viewers that they are about to enter the backwoods
of Greenbrier County, West Virginia. From the start, Schmitt aims to paint a grim picture
of the Appalachian region. As the credits roll viewers are given a mixture of gloomy
music and cautionary newspaper clippings. The newspapers tell of missing campers,
rafters, and skiers, and give ominous headlines regarding mysterious mountain men.
Before the action truly begins, the aesthetic and moral dichotomy between the
Appalachian and the outsider is made evident. As viewers, we realize that the outsider is
in danger when entering the savage woods of Appalachia.

In the first scene of the movie, viewers are introduced to Chris Flynn, the film’s
young and attractive main character, as he speeds down the highway in his sports car. A
brief cell phone conversation informs us that Flynn is on his way to an important job
interview in Raleigh, North Carolina. As viewers, we are asked to sympathize with Flynn
as he comes upon a sudden halt in the traffic. His obvious annoyance is clearly displayed
as he repeatedly glances down at his watch. In an act of desperation, Flynn gets out of
the car and approaches an 18 wheeler stopped just ahead. The truck driver’s appearance
seems to startle our hero: Flynn literally takes a step backward. Compared to the films’ main character, the truck driver is aesthetically displeasing. He has a scruffy beard, long gangly hair, and wild eyes. When Flynn asks the driver what he can do to get around the traffic accident, the truck driver responds in a very rude manner: “Well, you can get back in your car, fix your hair about a couple-hundred more times.” His Appalachian accent, as well as his rudeness, is quite apparent. Suddenly realizing that he will be unable to reason with the West Virginian, Flynn throws his hands in the air with disgust and returns to his car. In an attempt to avoid the traffic jam, Flynn then proceeds down a dirt road in hopes of finding a short cut. As viewers, we quickly realize that the dirt road is symbolic. Flynn, our hero, is about to enter the abyss of Appalachia.

While traveling down the remote West Virginia road, Flynn comes upon a gas station. Though Flynn believes he has found salvation, the audience realizes otherwise. Even more so than the truck driver, the gas station attendant is an aesthetic monstrosity. His filthy frame refuses to move from it’s slumped over position in a tattered old wooden chair. As Flynn approaches the attendant the viewer finds that the attendant is drinking Pepto-Bismol as if it were a 20 ounce bottle of Pepsi. He is a cock-eyed, one-toothed, flannel wearing caricature the American audiences have come to expect. When Flynn asks to use the payphone which is obviously out of order, the attendant is uncooperative and somewhat incomprehensible. Unable to communicate with the shiftless Appalachian, Flynn continues his ill-fated path down the dirt road. It is here that Flynn meets up with five campers who have been stranded because of a flat tire. Like Flynn, the stranded campers are young and beautiful. Their physical attractiveness instantly demonstrates
their outsider status. As viewers, we realize these outsiders must band together if they are going to survive in these undesirable surroundings.

As the film proceeds, Flynn and his newfound friends wander deeper and deeper into the dark woods of Appalachia. Finally, the group comes upon a run-down log cabin. Though our heroes have no idea they have just arrived at home of three blood-thirsty hillbillies, their fear of the Appalachian family is evident. Scott, one of the films more intellectual characters, instantly warns his fellow travelers as they approach the cabin: “I’m thinking West Virginia, trespassing…not a good combination.” His remark is an obvious gesture toward a variety of stereotypes concerning the Appalachian region. Unaffected by Scott’s warning; the group marches toward the grim cabin. In a somewhat revealing moment, Scott calls attention to the fact that mass culture has perpetuated these stereotypes: “Do I need to remind you of a little movie called Deliverance?” Scott’s line is clearly designed to evoke the horrific images that have long been established by the film industry.

As the group enters the log cabin, they encounter filthy plates, half-empty mason jars, and an assortment of putrid images. It is here that the audience learns that the home of the Appalachian is just as primitive and repulsive as the Appalachian himself. The characters proceed to make jokes about outhouses and even go as far as to suggest “economically depraved areas are breeding grounds for apocalyptic cults.” These jokes are cut short by the arrival of the savage killers the audience has been awaiting for the entire film. When the blood-thirsty hillbillies appear on the screen for the first time, audiences are meant to be disgusted. The hillbillies are filthy, deformed savages. Their
slumped-over posture and repeated grunts are meant to infer mental-retardation due to inbreeding: this, of course, is another famous Appalachian stereotype. Though the grotesque appearance of our villains is meant to frighten viewers, it is important to note that director Rob Schmidt’s flesh-eating hillbillies are not monsters. Instead, they can be seen as exaggerations of the stereotypes that have existed for centuries. The viewer is given no back-story which explains how these secluded mountain men have become bloodthirsty inbred-hillbillies. As viewers, we are only given aesthetic representation. We are free to assume anything we like. The hillbillies are unable to tell their story. They have no language outside of their bellowing grunts and cackling laughter. They have no voice.

The conclusion to director Rob Schmidt’s *Wrong Turn* is formulaic at best. Our hero, Chris Flynn, gets the beautiful girl, escapes the flesh-eating hillbillies, and saves the proverbial day. The movie ends when Flynn triumphantly returns to the gas station and tears down the map that led him to this dangerous territory. Flynn does so in an attempt to prevent outsiders from ever finding this dangerous terrain again. For viewers, the message is simple: Appalachians have no place in the outside world. The Appalachian hillbilly is subhuman. Therefore, he should resign himself to this isolation. Unfortunately, American audiences continue to shell out large amounts of money to receive these deprecating cultural messages. The success of *Wrong Turn* sparked two additional sequels: *Wrong Turn II: Dead End* and *Wrong Turn III: Left for Dead.*
The Hillbilly as Cinematic Monster: End Notes

While the Celluloid Hillbilly was becoming a mainstay in contemporary Hollywood film during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, many artists sought to capitalize on America’s fascination with the ignorant and violent Hillbilly persona found on the silver screen. In 1992, playwright Robert Schenkkan won a Pulitzer Prize for The Kentucky Cycle – a play that caused quite a stir within Appalachian Studies. Despite criticism that the play reinforced several negative stereotypes of the region, it was nominated for several Tony Awards and went on to become a smash hit on Broadway. With the success of Schenkkan’s play, it appeared that Appalachian stereotypes would no longer be reserved for comic strips, comedies, and poorly-crafted variety shows. The art world had embraced the stereotype of the Hillbilly and Appalachian artists began to take notice.

This is not to suggest that The Kentucky Cycle was without its detractors. The play caused a clear backlash within Appalachian Studies: Dwight Billing’s Back-Talk from Appalachia was, by its editor’s own admission a product of this backlash. However, with the success of The Kentucky Cycle came an outpouring of Appalachian art that claimed to expose the hard truths of life in the region. The image of the Appalachian monster, perpetuated by an abundance of Hollywood films, also became an alluring presence in the world of photography.

In the late 1990s, photographer Shelby Lee Adams, a native of rural Kentucky, released a controversial collection of photographs entitled Appalachian Portraits. For many Appalachian critics, Adams’ collection was anything but representative of the
culture and its people. This was because Adams chose to feature mostly physically
deformed and mentally-challenged individuals in his photographs. Quite often, these
individuals were depicted in a manner that seemed threatening to some viewers. For
instance, one particular photograph featured a knife-brandishing Appalachian man
standing beside a midget wearing a diaper. Other photographs featured Appalachian
families butchering pigs and handling snakes. Adams claimed that these intentionally-
shocking photographs were designed to expose the outside world to the true nature of this
impoverished region. Though *Appalachian Portraits* helped Adams gain almost instant
acclaim in the field of photography, some critics accused Adams of deliberately
attempting to justify the stereotypes created by mass culture. For instance, Appalachian
scholar Dwight Billings argued that Adams’ collection served as nothing more than an
example of how “some Appalachian artists are not hesitant to serve up what mainstream
culture expects from the region” (6). Despite criticism, Adams’ work began to receive
praise from critics from around the country. This controversy would eventually spawn a
2002 documentary about the meaning behind Adams’ photographs. The success of
*Appalachian Portraits* came at a time when the stereotype of the Appalachian family was
begging to change from child-like innocence to something much more dark and sinister: a
more recent collection of photographs *Coal Hollow: Photographs and Oral Histories*
(2006) by Ken Light and Melanie Light play this same card.

The intentionally-shocking Appalachian art released during the 1990s and early
2000s is undoubtedly tied to the Hillbilly as cinematic monster trope established by
mainstream Hollywood film companies. When considering the overwhelming success of
films such as *Deliverance*, one is not surprised to find that many contemporary filmmakers choose Appalachia as the backdrop for their multi-million dollar horror films. In 1991, Jonathan Demme’s *Silence of the Lambs* brought a cross-dressing serial killer to the muddy banks of Clay County, West Virginia. In 2002, director Mark Pellington’s *Mothman Prophecies* frightened American audiences with the tale of a moth-like creature that dwelled in the ominous hills of Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Two years later, *Wrong Turn* introduced audiences to flesh-eating inbred hillbillies from the backwoods of Greenbrier County. In 2006, screen-writer Roger Avery transformed the popular video game *Silent Hill* into a horror movie set in the shadowy hills of a small West Virginian town. It is important to note that these contemporary horror films have much more in common than their rural Appalachian setting: their plots are strikingly similar. Each story begins with outsiders, non-Appalachians, finding themselves lost in impoverished areas of West Virginia. In each instance, the aesthetic beauty of the outsider is starkly contrasted by the otherness of the Appalachian. Hollywood stars such as Richard Gere and Elisha Dushku are cast to show audiences the aesthetic beauty and moral superiority of the outsider. These aesthetic representations are then coupled with images of the native Appalachian which bare only a slight difference from backwoods goons found in Boorman’s *Deliverance*. The notion of the subhuman Appalachia has been successfully marketed and sold to the American public time and time again. In fact, the stereotype has been so fully engrained into the American psyche that it no longer appears recursive. To suggest that these cultural depictions serve only as entertainment is to woefully ignore mass culture’s ability to control public perception.
The Celluloid Hillbilly and the Process of Hegemony

For much too long, the people of Appalachia have been relegated to a subhuman status by the culture industries. Some suggest this collection of television programs and Hollywood movies are simply in bad taste. Others doubt the actual ideological impact these messages have on viewers. However, Horkheimer and Adorno warn us against pretending that the culture industries produce nothing more than entertainment. It is imperative that we, as a society, come to view this cinematic tradition as one intrinsically tied to rhetoric. The legacy of the Celluloid Hillbilly is one of hegemonic articulation. As Victor Villanueva points out, “rhetoric, after all, is how ideologies are carried, how hegemonies are maintained” (121). The Celluloid Hillbilly represents a tradition in which certain privileged sectors of American society have directly profited from the disparaging stereotypes given to a people who are, in most instances, economically and socially disadvantaged. It would be remiss to assume the various examples that I have highlighted in this chapter are innocent, coincidental, or disinterested. The Celluloid Hillbilly frames how society views the people of Appalachia and in return how the people of Appalachia view themselves in relation to their oppressors. To demonstrate how I view the culture industries in relation to the process of hegemony, I will turn to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. I bring Laclau and Mouffe into the conversation because their theory of hegemony reminds us of hegemony’s place within the construction of social identities. Laclau and Mouffe’s work gives us an appropriate starting-point for critiquing the processes by which social identities are crafted and maintained in American culture.
Laclau and Mouffe view hegemony as “more than a space of localized unthought”: rather, it encompasses a multitude of articulatory practices (93). Articulation, for Laclau and Mouffe, “consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity” (113). To paraphrase, these nodal points, or empty concepts, maintain no inherent or fixed meaning: concepts such as “Appalachia” and “America” serve as examples. Articulation takes place when these empty concepts are refashioned and thus appropriated for specific political ends. It is during the process or articulation when these concepts become rhetorical and therefore sutured to a dominant political discourse. Lacalu and Mouffe suggest our identities are relational and can never fully be complete. Such is the case for our region or national identities. Society is never fully actualized. The Other is not in opposition to society, it demonstrates the impossibility of society itself. Social identity is therefore always open and constantly changing to meet the needs of those who wield the power of social, political, and economic influence.

Laclau and Mouffe’s Post-Marxist framework places identity in the category of relational phenomenon. Their work moves us away from essentialized regional or class-based conceptions of identity. This framework also moves us away from any causal or natural explanations of Appalachian identity. Appalachia, an empty concept, has no inherent meaning. It is a term that was invented and articulated by outside forces. In the first chapter I attempted to argue that Appalachia was indeed the product of the American
imagination during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Local color writers, in their hasty attempts to write the next popular travel narrative, produced a socially constructed version of Appalachian identity. This identity was, in return, validated by northern readerships. The same can be said for Roger Goodell Frost’s various attempts to refashion the Appalachian as a pioneer, a historical relic who best symbolized America’s never-give-up spirit. In both cases, Appalachia, as a social identity, became sutured to a political discourse. The region thus becomes an imagined construct intrinsically tied to the rhetorical aims of its creator(s). The various Appalachia(s) presented in popular television shows and Hollywood movies have, therefore, established a rhetorical tradition. These portrayals of Appalachian identity attempt to convince views how to think about and perceive the region and its people. These rhetorics are in all actuality articulations of an empty concept that can never fully be proven false. We see them as true, or at least representations of some inherent truth, because we struggle to grasp their unfinishedness, we have lost sight of their rhetorical aims.

The Appalachian region was named and given a set of Appalachian identity markers long before Hollywood presented the Celluloid Hillbilly to American audiences. The impossibility of the Celluloid Hillbilly signals the impossibility of America. In fact, these two empty concepts share an oppositional relationship with one another. The Celluloid Hillbilly provides Middle America with a false sense of security. This narrative lies to audiences about their place within the existing social order. It tells audiences to be grateful for what they have. Things could be worse. You could be the Hillbilly. You could live in Appalachia. In *Hillbillyland*, J.W. Williamson argues that “Many hillbillies
in the mass media are there to make the normative middle-class urban spectator feel better about the system of money and power that has him or her in its grasp. Someone is always beneath us, lending proof that the twig on which we stand is really a rung of a ladder leading upward to something we must defend with our lives” (20). Because the Appalachian cultural attitudes found in the culture industries are inherently false, many Americans possess little more than a stereotypical understanding of Appalachia. This can be problematic for several reasons. First, many outside of Appalachia begin to accept these stereotypical representations as truth. This consequently leads to a nationwide stigma of the region and its people. Because these unquestioned stereotypes persist, mass culture is able to continue marginalizing the people of Appalachia. Unable to escape the influence of the culture industry, the native Appalachian begins to distrust the outsider. The Appalachian adopts a defensiveness in regard to this process of othering. This defensiveness influences how the Appalachian views his or her relationship to American social structure. As a result of these continuous slanders, the Appalachian becomes mentally confined to his or her economically depraved surroundings. The Appalachian slowly begins to realize he has no business leaving the mountains in which he or she was raised. Suddenly, the Appalachian’s world becomes smaller. The Appalachian’s choices become limited. Unable to imagine a life outside of Appalachia’s protective mountains, the Appalachian turns to the coalmines and lumberyards as a means of survival. The Hillbilly does so knowing that this is where his kind truly belongs.
CHAPTER 3: RHETORIC(S) OF DIFFERENCE: BARRIERS TO CRITICAL THOUGHT

“The starting point for critical elaboration is the consciousness of what really is, and is ‘knowing thyself,’ as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.”

- Antonio Gramsci

“Reality as it is thought does not correspond to the reality being lived objectively, but rather to the reality in which alienated man imagines himself to be.”

- Paulo Freire

The Working Hands of Society

Monday, May 6, 1968.

Around 10:00 in the morning an accident occurs at a mine owned by Gauley Coal Company in Hominy Falls, West Virginia. A continuous miner unintentionally holes through the wall of an abandoned mine. An inundation of water bursts through the wall entrapping 25 workers underground.

The Tragedy at Hominy Falls.

On this day my grandfather, Lowell Alfred Snyder, is a 29-year-old coalminer employed at Island Creek Coal Company in Nicholas County, West Virginia. He had worked in the mines for almost 6 years, dropped out of school at the age of 16, married at 18, and became a father at 19. This day, however, would mark the defining moment of his life. Deployed to Hominy Falls. Like Dante into the Inferno. Into the deep unforgiving darkness. Into the consequence of capitalist exploitation. The belly of the beast. In search of beating hearts. He was given no alternative. Either go help with the

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9 The statistics used in this section were gathered from the official website of the United States Mine Rescue Association.
rescue or be fired on the spot. For the next 10 days, Lowell Alfred Snyder would work his regular shift, not at Island Creek, but in the abyss of Appalachian tragedy.

Initially, rescue crews were unable to enter the mine at Hominy Falls due to flooding. The workers had apparently drilled into an abandoned mine that was, according to their maps, not supposed to be there. This abandoned mine that was, according to their maps, not supposed to be there was completely filled with stagnant acidic water. As the drill penetrated the wall of the abandoned mine, the inundation of water burst through, flooding almost all of the surrounding areas. The four workers operating in this section of the mine were killed instantly. However, 21 of their fellow workers had previously made their way deep into the face of the mine earlier in the morning. Comprised of two groups, a group of fifteen and a group of six, these workers were stranded in separate areas of the mine due to their specific positions when the immediate onrush of water took place. Within a matter of seconds, each group found themselves stranded in soaking-wet-coal-dust-covered-darkness. No contact with the outside world.

For five agonizing days, water was continually pumped out of the main entries of the mine. Rescue teams worked around the clock, sometimes venturing into areas of the mine almost completely filled with water. Lowell Alfred Snyder. Head cocked to the side. Mouth just above water level. Inching along the crevices of a mine. Sometimes rewiring circuits waste-deep in water. Coming home to his family each night with blistered feet. Pruned, cracked, bleeding toes. The results of days spent in a watery tomb. Mentally preparing for his eventual return the next day. His return to Hell on Earth.
With each passing hour, Hominy Falls became a public spectacle. The local media gathered. National media picked up on the story. Families huddled behind yellow police ribbon. Community members gathered at the site to unite in prayer. Mine officials attempted to spin the story in their favor. And workers, like my grandfather, forged into the mine risking their own lives. An all-to-common scene for Appalachian families. A moment of truth. A test of faith. This is the moment in which families, community leaders, and well-wishers are asked to support the miners. Pray for their rescue. Pray for the rescuers. Pray for the job site. To criticize the mining corporation or the mining industry is to criticize the miners. The victims of circumstance. Who are you to ask for regulations at a time like this? Regulations might lead to a safer work environment for miners but they may also lead to a lower profit margins for the company. A lower profit margins for the company gives way to the possibility of the mine shutting down which in return gives way to the possibility of the economic demise of the community. The eventual demise of the people. Or so they say.

On May 11th, 1968, 5 days after the initial accident, a passageway was finally cleared so that a rescue team could enter the section of the mine were the second group of workers were believed to be located (the group furthest away from the initial accident). Due to the elevation level of this particular portion of the mine, these fifteen men were able to quickly reach a safety station on the day of the accident. Because rescuer workers anticipated their exact position, the mission was swiftly executed after the water cleared. For a fleeting moment jubilation rang throughout Hominy Falls. Fifteen workers had been found alive and well. Mixed emotions. A glimmer of hope caught in a fog of
sorrow. There were, at this point, ten workers still unaccounted for. Much of the mine remained underwater. Hopes of rescuing the remaining ten workers began to grow dim.

Five agonizing days later, May 16th, 1968, 10 days after the initial accident, a second rescue team submerged themselves into the portion of the mine where the initial break occurred: my grandfather was a member of this rescue team. The details of this story (the images, dialogues, and happenings of this event) are his to tell, not mine. What is commonly known, however, is that this second rescue team quickly discovered the bodies of 4 workers. A horrific discovery. The rescue mission thus became a recovery mission. This return to the surface would bring tears and anguish to those impatiently waiting for good news. Lowell Alfred Snyder. 29-years-old. Taking orders. Placing bodies in body bags. Facing mortality in a way that most of us will never understand. Forging ahead. Hoping for the best. Two miles deep into the shadowy earth. In search of a miracle. Afraid of what he might find.

   Carefully wading through the ice-cold darkness.

   Onward toward the grim specter of inevitability.

   An albatross around his neck.

   Learning the trade that would define his life.

   And then. A flickering light in the otherwise black nothingness. My grandfather likened it to a faintly lit cigarette in a dark room. A mining light. Struggling to maintain its luminescence. A few hundred feet up ahead. The rescue team scrambled to the light like rodents scurrying in the dark. It was here they stumbled upon a make-shift shelter of brattice cloth near the face of an entry. Slowly pulling the cloth aside. The rescue team
discovered 6 disoriented and weakened West Virginia coal miners. The miracle at Hominy Falls. Lazarus awoken from the dead.

Six months later. Same State. Same Year. Some 133 miles away.

An explosion occurs at the No. 9 coal mine north of Farmington and Mannington, West Virginia. 78 workers were killed as a result of this explosion. The local media gathered. National media picked up on the story. Families huddled behind yellow police ribbon. Community members gathered at the site to unite in prayer. Mine officials attempted to spin the story in their favor. And workers, not unlike my grandfather, forged into the mine risking their own lives.

Tragedy often finds its way to Appalachia. Therefore, 1968 is in no way an anomaly. Just two years later, in 1970, 38 workers lost their lives as a result of an explosion at the Hurricane Creek Mine located in Hyden, Kentucky. In 2001, thirteen workers were killed in an explosion that occurred at the Jim Walters No. 5 mine south of Birmingham, Alabama. In 2006, a mining explosion occurred at the Sago Mine in Upshur County, West Virginia: 13 miners were trapped underground for 2 days. As has become the tradition, mass media quickly found its way to Sago. This media spectacle ends in tragedy as well. Due to false reports, West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin announces to families at a nearby church that all 13 workers have been found alive. Television personality Geraldo Rivera announces the same message to the world via Fox News. CNN also picks up on the story. A false miracle. The 13 miners were found but only one had survived. The information was misconstrued. Accidents happen. The coal industry continually reminds us of this fact.
More recently, in 2010, an explosion occurred at the Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County, West Virginia: 29 workers lost their lives. CNN, ABC, Fox News, and the rest of the usual suspects jumped on the opportunity to bring national coverage to Appalachian misery. As is usually the case, media coverage of the tragedy fell into three archetypal categories: (1) pathos-heavy personal interest stories designed to tug at the heart-strings of viewers, (2) the comparing and contrasting of the recent tragedy to its predecessors, and (3) misguided attempts to explain to the rest of world why Appalachian men take up such dangerous professions. Reporter Devin Dwyer, for example, published an article titled “Craving Coal Dust Like ‘Nicotine’: Why Miners Love to Work,” on ABC’s website just days after the accident occurred in Raleigh County. Dwyer, via interviews with local coalminers who were likely pressured by mining officials to avoid saying anything disparaging about the mining industry, attempted to make the argument that the profession itself contained an inherently addictive quality for workers, a theory that portrays local miners as money-hungry adrenalin junkies. Dwyer also suggests the cyclical nature of coal mining, as a family profession, is due to choice as opposed to necessity. His fictitious Appalachia is one in which 18-year-old high school seniors graduate and receive entry positions that earn them somewhere between $60,000 - $70,000 per year.

Let’s dissect Mr. Dwyer’s flawed logic one fallacy at a time. First, Dwyer suggests that $60,000 is the average starting salary for coalminers. This statistic becomes quite suspect when noting that the average median income for families in Raleigh
County, West Virginia is $34,589\textsuperscript{10}. Dwyer himself notes that this is a county that is utterly dependent upon coalmining. Perhaps Raleigh County is short on high school seniors to fill these apparently vacant $70,000 jobs. Dwyer’s attempt to paint the mining profession as a lucrative and economically enticing choice for Appalachian men is so misguided that it almost needs no refutation whatsoever. Second, Dwyer suggests, via his self-selected interviews, that miners are somehow addicted to the work they do. One miner even likens coal dust to nicotine. This assertion is likely offensive to anyone who has ever lost a loved one to the brutality of life underground. Coal miners may be proud of their work, but they undeniably see it as a sacrifice, not a career. In other words, very few, if any, coal miners refer to their days spent underground as their life’s work.

What Dwyer, and those like him, neglect to consider is the fact that the extract industries’ influence almost every aspect of rural Appalachian life. At the risk of sounding crass, Appalachian politicians have, for years, been in bed with extract corporations. In other words, Appalachian political systems are undeniably influenced by extract industry money and influence. From personal family experience, I can assure Mr. Dwyer, and those who think like him, that mining companies sternly caution their workers how to vote. Thus, we have an Appalachian political hierarchy. Corporations pay state politicians to govern and legislate in a way that is advantageous to their cause. Local mines encourage workers to vote in a way that is advantageous to their cause. The members of these communities are inexplicably placed in a losing situation. The notion that the $60,000 incomes mentioned in Dwyer’s article provide workers with an escape from poverty is a suggestion that, in my opinion, demonstrates how completely unaware

\textsuperscript{10} According to the United States Census Bureau
he is of the material circumstances of Appalachian life. The Hillbilly proletariat does exist in Appalachia, not by choice I might add. Young men and women are born into a cycle of hard labor in the extract industries. To call this sociological phenomenon a matter of choice, as the media often does, is no different than the cultural arguments discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, those who suggest that Appalachian people choose to uphold the Hillbilly stereotype. The Henry Louis Gates Jrs’ of Appalachia escape this cycle via education, via critical-consciousness, via economic opportunity. However, the Henry Louis Gates Jrs are few. The exploitation industries, as they will be referred to for the remainder of this chapter, are in no way vehicles for social mobility. They control and shape the lives of communities. This has been the case since the colonization of Appalachia some 100 plus years ago. Outside interests, outside money, control the material lives of those who have been labeled Hillbilly by their social betters. Whenever possible, critical thought is discouraged by the system established by Appalachia’s oppressors.

If not for my grandfather, I would know little about the dangers of coalmining. Occasionally, when he is in a talkative mood, he will retell stories of life underground. More often than not, these stories bring my grandfather back to the tragedy at Hominy Falls. The vividness of these recollections suggests his mind has yet to return to the surface. Lifeless eyes and disfigured corpses continue to haunt my grandfather’s dreams. His fingernails, smashed and purpled, frailly clutch his Old Milwaukee as he takes drinks between stories. My thoughts often stray from these horrific tales; his hands seem to tell a much more poignant story. Stained in blackness, his fingers now resemble the dust in
which he worked for so many years. Many of his cracked fingernails diverge like the two roads made famous by Robert Frost. My father’s hands tell a similar story. Their callused sandpaper texture bears a striking resemblance to the hands of my grandfather. I now look down at my hands as I transfer these thoughts onto the computer screen. I see nothing but the slightly red discoloration of a hangnail.

In *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* Ira Shor uses the term “working hands of society” to describe the working-class mindset of his Long Island students. Shor’s term is designed to evoke a particular brand of passivity. It is a term that describes one’s willingness to accept one’s working-class place in an exploitive social hierarchy. Shor, like McLaren, Giroux, and others, wants his students to gain the critical thinking skills necessary to recognize and possibly change their social circumstances. However, when I think about my grandfather’s hands, or the hands of my father, I cannot turn my attention away from the physical aspect of a working-class mindset. Lowell Alfred Snyder bears the working hands of society. Michael Lowell Snyder bears the working hands of society. The *working hands of society* suffer both physically and mentally. My uncle Victor Short, for example, lost his right hand in a mining accident in the spring of 2009. He is now forced to spend the rest of his life with a prosthetic hook. Working-class mindsets show themselves physically. I do not bear the working hands of society. My hands, the hands of a writer, teacher, and scholar, are physically different from my before-mentioned family members. I am different from my father and grandfather. Different from my uncle Victor. Both physically and mentally.
If we, as critical educators, are to design and carry out pedagogical practices that help working-class students come to critical consciousness, it is imperative that we study the barriers to critical thought that may impede our progress. One cannot take part in the intellectual liberation of Appalachian students without understanding the various ways that Hillbilly identity has been imposed upon the region by outside forces (e.g. the region’s informal literary tradition, mass media’s dehumanization of the people). Nor can one assist Appalachian students in becoming critical-thinkers without recognizing the material factors that serve as barriers to critical thinking. For the remainder of this chapter I will explore some of the various ways that working class life influences how Appalachian people view themselves and the world around them. These will be discussions of ideology, identity, and difference. My goal will be to demonstrate how the working-class Appalachian mindset (influenced by outside forces such as the exploitation industries) gives way to actual material/physical consequences for Appalachian people.

**Appalachian Ideology, Identity, and Difference**

**“Work” as Barrier to Critical-Consciousness**

I, unlike other men in my family, have been given the opportunity to attend college. At age 18, most of my family members were in an economic situation that placed college enrollment as an unrealistic option. Because these same men came from families of lower socioeconomic circumstances, college was not encouraged or perhaps not even discussed in their households. Because the men in my family have not obtained a college degree or any measure of post-secondary education, they are seen by society as unqualified for most white-collar professions. Therefore, the men in my family have been
forced to take up professions that do not require a post-secondary education. These jobs, more often than not, require manual labor. Because of the lack of economic opportunity in West Virginia, almost every man in my family has, at one point or another, worked in the West Virginia coalmines. Most, if not all, of these men have suffered physical injuries, among other problematic consequences, as a result of their work in the mines. To an outside audience, this may seem like a strange family tradition. One might even ask, “If coalmining is dangerous and exploitive, why do the members of your family keep doing this?” Necessity might be the expected response. Necessity brings us back to the issue of education. To this argument the skeptic might reply by stating, “Okay, the men in your family were not given the chance to attend college, but that does not mean they have to work in the coalmines.” This reply brings us to the concept of work and will eventually lead to a discussion of how working-class Appalachian families view work in relation to other activities in their lives.

As the young Karl Marx brilliantly points out in “Wage Labor and Capital,” the act of work, “labour power,” is itself a commodity (204). The worker sells his labor to the capitalist in return for money. The capitalist measures the value of this commodity by the clock. A coalminer, for example, reports to work at 5:00 in the morning. He is relieved of his duties at 5:00 in the evening. These twelve hours of labor cost the coal mine a fixed amount of money. The money spent buying this worker’s labor could just as easily be spent on a drill bit or any other piece of machinery. The worker’s labor costs the coalmine a certain amount of money per day, week, month, and year. His time at work is factored into the company’s fiscal budget. Why does the company do this? The company
spends its money this way because the collection of duties the worker performs on a daily basis allows the company, a profit-seeking entity, to run more efficiently than might otherwise be the case. If a machine were invented that could perform the worker’s duties in a more cost-efficient manner, the company would undoubtedly purchase this machine and dispose of the worker. Such a machine does not exist, at this point, so the company continues to purchase his labor as a means of maintaining a particular profit margin.

Why does the worker sell his labor to the coal company? As Marx points out, workers work in order to live. If Job A will pay the worker $150 dollars a day for 12 hours of his time and Job B will only pay $100 dollars a day for this same amount of time, it would behoove the worker, who has two children and a wife living within his residence, to pursue Job A. If Job A and Job B are the highest paying jobs in the community, a community isolated from other economic opportunities, then Job A and Job B are undoubtedly the most attractive for workers, regardless of the physical requirements of the job. This process, the buying and selling of labor, is, for the worker, an exploitative and cyclical process. The worker is given a set amount of wages from the capitalist for his labor. The worker must then use this money to purchase the bare necessities for his family. The job that pays the most amount of money thus becomes the best job for the worker. However, regardless of the pay he is given, the worker will never make enough money to escape his proletarian status and become a member of the bourgeoisie elite this is a point brilliantly outlined by the young Karl Marx:

The worker, whose sole source of livelihood is the sale of his labour power, cannot leave the whole class of purchasers, that is, the capitalist class, without
renouncing his existence. He belongs not to this or that capitalist but to the capitalist class, and, moreover, it is his business to dispose of himself, that is, to find a purchaser within this capitalist class. (Marx 205)

Here Marx reminds us that the worker’s livelihood is directly connected to his ability to find a buyer for his labor power. Rarely does the worker find himself in the same position as the capitalist. The worker’s labor for Job A or Job B will certainly not lead to ownership of either company. He will, for the time that he is needed, be a worker. He sells his labor power for money, money used to sustain his life and the lives of his family members. Because the wages given to the worker are so disproportionately different from that of the capitalist, the worker never accumulates enough money to transcend his capitalist class structure. He transcends his net worth only when Job C offers him slightly more money than Job A or Job B. However, the wages offered by all three jobs are never fixed, nor do these wages offer the worker keys to a new kingdom. These wages are calculated measures influenced by supply and demand. When the cost of maintaining a profit increases, the wages of the worker decrease, if the worker is lucky enough to hold onto his job. Also, if the demand for the particular kind of labor power the worker is selling decreases, such is the case for the worker’s wages. This leads to the competitive aspect of working for a living. Capitalism is, of course, based upon competition. The worker rarely has the luxury to move from Job A, to Job B, to Job C in an effortless manner. He is at every turn met by other workers with their own families and economic problems who are competing for the same spot. Therefore, in an economically limited environment, such as Webster County, West Virginia, it is every man for himself.
As Marx points out, as capital grows, the mass of wage labor increases, thus the number of wage-workers grows: “in a word, the domination of capital extends over a greater number of individuals” (210). However, the worker is inclined to believe the success of the company is essentially his own. His hope is that larger crumbs will fall from the table of the master. Marx, however, is correct in arguing that this process does not “remove the antagonism between his [the worker] interests and the interests of the bourgeoisie” (211). As wealth increases, the gap widens. America, as a country, mirrors this assertion. For example, Peter Phillips reported that in 2001 7% of America’s population controlled 71% of our country’s wealth and 1% of the population controlled 38% (207). We undoubtedly live in a society where the crumbs-falling-from-the-master’s-table-metaphor is indeed an appropriate comparison. In America, as is especially the case in Appalachia, the worker never completely reaches the point where he becomes comfortable or is settled into his working endeavors. His livelihood maintains a tenuous character for much of his existence. This is not climbing the social or economic ladder. It is gripping on to a particular rung of a ladder and hanging on for dear life. Our country’s recent economic woes, highlighted by the housing market crash, demonstrate how quickly things can fall apart for Middle America.

To this discourse on wage labor and economic vulnerability the outsider might suggest, “Okay, work in the West Virginia coalmines might be difficult and exploitive but that does not mean one cannot enjoy his or her life.” This response leads us to the question of why and how the worker finds himself as worker and the capitalist in his own advantageous position. First, workers are often born into families of workers. Work, by
this definition, however, leads to a certain brand of working-class consciousness. The worker views his labor as a necessary sacrifice of life. The members of the community who do not work for a living are seen as members of a lower social stratum, the bottom rung of small town Appalachian hierarchies. To be on government assistance bears a certain amount of shame in hard-working Appalachian communities. Therefore, to work is to be a member of a higher rung of the small-town Appalachian social structure. This does not mean that the worker is especially pleased with his work. Rather, he is simply able to maintain his dignity in social settings. To work is to be privileged. However, the worker does not view the 12 hours per day spent exerting labor power for the benefit of the company as a “manifestation of his life” (Marx 205). Rather, for the worker, “life begins for him where this activity ceases” (Marx 205). Thus, the worker’s life begins at around 5:30 in the evening when he returns home and concludes when he goes to bed at around 10:30 at night. Life becomes roughly five hours a day, excluding weekends. One is, therefore, forced to find happiness somewhere in a small window of free time. This viewpoint leads to a variety of socio-cultural assumptions regarding the place of work in a happy and enjoyable life. To not enjoy one’s work is to not enjoy much of one’s life.

Workers, such as coalminers, take part in a process Marx famously refers to as alienated labor. My father, for example, no longer works underground. Even though he works at a coalmine five and sometimes six days a week, he does not see coal, the capital being sold to buyers, on a daily basis. He does not touch coal on a daily basis. Instead, he performs a set number of duties that allow for the process of digging coal from the West Virginia mountains to take place in a swift and cost efficient manner. He is unable to take
pride in or claim ownership of the product being produced or sold. He has no concrete
relation to the product. His rewards are his wages. Therefore, in this social setting, a good
job comes to be measured as one that gives the worker some form of disposable income
to buy more than the basic necessities of life. The joy and happiness of ones life thus
comes from the few waking hours they are with family and friends away from work. A
disposable income allows for the worker to enhance his downtime by using what little bit
of extra money he has on buying products that make him happy or those that make his
family happy. The worker is born into a system where his family and most of the families
that surround him view work in similar manner. However, this is not to argue that this is
a simple matter of choice.

Workers are born into communities that often lack social or educational
opportunities. As we all know, the best schools in America are also the most expensive
schools in America. More often than not, these schools are located in areas of economic
prosperity or privilege. Thus, workers are often isolated from the best schools, and
isolated from jobs that require some form of postsecondary education. A good job, once
again, becomes one that allows for an individual to maintain some measure of a
disposable income. Thus, hierarchies emerge within these impoverished communities.
The McCourts own a brand new double wide and a small plot of land that is their own
private property. The family also owns a camper, an ATV, and two new vehicles. Their
children own a Playstation 3. The McCourts, through the labor they have sold to the local
coal company, have obtained these commodities. The Cogars are supported by labor
power sold to a local timber company. They live in a trailer and do not own private
property. The family also owns one vehicle and their children do not have a Playstation 3. The Thompsons live off of government assistance. They do not own their land. The family lives in a two bedroom apartment complex. The McCourts and Cogars, families of workers, thus become role models for the Thompsons. The McCourts and Cogars demonstrate a path to success; this labor power sold to capitalists becomes a blueprint for Appalachian prosperity. The McCourts and Cogars are working families. They are able to buy commodities the Thompsons are unable to buy. They are able to buy private property that the Thompsons are unable to buy. Therefore, it becomes logical to aspire to the achievements of these two working class families. In this social environment work comes to be seen as a sacrifice, a necessity of life. The Thompsons do not teach their children to reach for their dreams or find occupations that are fulfilling. Instead, the Thompsons teach their children to shoot for jobs that will allow them to obtain a disposable income so that they might buy the possessions the family, at this moment, cannot afford.

This is not to suggest that rural Appalachian communities are completely comprised of workers. There are families of small town doctors, lawyers, principals, etc., that comprise an upper middle class structure within these towns. The children of these families are often the valedictorians, class presidents, and future college students that emerge from the region. This is not to argue for essentialized class struggle or class identity. There are exceptions. Each year, first-generation college students from small Appalachian towns achieve academic success at the postsecondary level. However, educational studies do demonstrate the advantage students from these families have over their peers; this issue will be discussed further in chapter 4. Appalachian students who
come from educated families often do quite well at the college level: the reverse can be argued for their first-generation college student peers. As generations of these children grow up, go to college, and leave the region, those left behind feel this process is simply a natural phenomenon. Working families, such as the McCourts and Cogars, come to see themselves as workers. Thus, their ambition is to obtain the job that will pay them the highest amount of money. They want to be able to take care of their families and buy all of the material items other working families enjoy. These families often come to see college as an unattainable privilege reserved for other families.

Now let’s interject a fourth hypothetical family into the mix. The Robinsons are a family of economic and social privilege within this imagined Appalachian community. They hold power and influence over the McCourts, Cogars, and Thompsons. Papa Robinson is the appointed Circuit Court Judge for the county. In a given year, he earns more money than the McCourts, Cogars, and Thompsons combined. He attended West Virginia University as an undergraduate and received a law degree from this same institution. His wife, also a graduate of WVU, is a local dentist. Their family owns a three-story house, four vehicles, and twenty acres of their own private property. Their daughter will later become the valedictorian of her graduating class. She, like her parents, will go on to West Virginia University and will likely become whatever she wishes to be. Their son, the homecoming king and star football player, will also attend WVU. He, like his sister, will likely receive a fully paid scholarship to WVU, due to the merit-based scholarships offered at his high school. Thus, he, like his sister, has the opportunity to leave Webster County, become educated, and return, if he wishes, with a heightened
position in the community. The Robinsons can buy and do things that the McCourts, Cogars, and Thompsons cannot. Therefore, the life of a Robinson holds more possibilities than the life of a McCourt, Clayton, or Thompsons. The Robinsons, unlike the McCourts, Cogars, and Thompsons, will see the Academy up close. The Robinsons, unlike the McCourts, Cogars, and Thompsons, often travel outside of West Virginia. They have seen the Statue of Liberty, the Grand Canyon, Mount Rushmore, and both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The family has even taken a European vacation. The McCourts, Cogars, and Thompsons cannot see these things, nor do they have disposable income to attempt to do so. Therefore, the Robinsons are able to see America, and the world for that matter, in a way that the McCourts, Cogars, and Thompsons cannot and probably will not ever understand. This education, these experiences, influence the way the Robinsons view work, as a concept, and Webster County, as a home. Money is, of course, the reason for this disparity. The Robinsons have a fair amount of money; the before-mentioned families do not.

In the “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” Marx, in preparing for Capital, brilliantly outlines the true nature of money. Via passages from both Shakespeare and Goethe, Marx connects money and identity by stating I am “that for which I can pay” (103). In other words, “the extent of the power of money is the extent of my power” (103). Here Marx reminds us that the possibilities of one’s life are essentially determined by money:

What I am and am capable of is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy for myself the most beautiful of women. Therefore I am
not ugly, for the effect of ugliness – its deterrent power – is nullified by money. I, in my character as an individual, am lame, but money furnishes me with twenty-four feet. Therefore I am not lame. I am bad, dishonest, unscrupulous, stupid; but money is honored, and therefore so is its possessor. Money is the supreme good, therefore it possessor is good. Money, besides, saves me the trouble of being dishonest; I am therefore presumed honest. I am stupid, but money is the real mind of all things and how then should its possessor be stupid? (103)

In this passage, Marx argues that in a capitalist society money is essentially power. The Robinsons cannot physically journey from Webster County, West Virginia to Hawaii. However, their money allows them to move from point A to point B. The Thompsons, like the Robinsons, cannot physically journey from Webster County, West Virginia to Hawaii. They cannot move from point A to point B because their wages will not allow for them to do so. Eventually, the Thompsons stop dreaming of going to Hawaii. Time forces us to become conscious of our financial limitations. In this same passage, Marx reminds readers that money not only limits ones physical limitations but also ones self-conscious needs:

If I have no money for travel, I have no need – that is, no real and self-realizing need – to travel. If I have the vocation for study but no money for it, I have no vocation for study – that is, no effective, no true vocation. On the other hand, if I have really no vocation for study but have the will and the money for it, I have an effective vocation for it. (103)
Here Marx reminds us that money influences our ambitions. It determines how realistic some goals are to us as opposed to others. This brings us back to the issue of work and how one views work in relation to other day-to-day activities.

The McCourts are proud of the material possessions they have. The labor they sell to the local coalmine allows for them to have material things that make them happy. However, they work for a different reason than do the Robinsons. The Robinsons work to obtain material possessions, but more importantly, do so because they enjoy what they do. They have been trained for their professions. They feel a certain measure of pride in their work. They believe they are making a positive impact in the community. They are proud of who they are in the community. The Robinsons work to have experiences. Their wages, the products of their work, take them different places both physically and mentally. This is why the worker works. He or she works in order to live. However, the concept of life can be viewed quite differently when looking at these examples. Is the life of an Robinson equal to the life of a Thompson? When viewing the quality of life, one has to answer “no.” This is why the coalminer journeys deep into the earth each day. This is why he risks his life. This is why his son will risk his life. Work, for the McCourts, Cogars, and Thompsons is a necessary sacrifice. The McCourt, Cogars, or Thompson must first be a worker if he is to live. Without work, he and his family will die. Therefore, he is a worker first and a human being second.

To this discourse the outsider might reply, “Okay, life in poor Appalachian communities is filled with tough and exploitive work. Anyone with common sense would simply move to a region where this was not the case.” This brings us to the concept of
“home” and how Appalachian workers view themselves in relation to this concept. For the Appalachian worker, home is more than a residence. For the Appalachian worker, community is more than a zip code. Constructs of home are as cyclical as the poverty found in the region. That hill is where grandpa planted his potatoes. This “holler” is where all of our family has lived. Over there is the family cemetery. Here is our grocery store, post office, and high school. We share this common bond just as our family members before us have done. These histories and antagonisms cannot easily be discarded. Home, for the Appalachian worker, is a state of mind. It is his refuge from work.

“Home” as Barrier to Critical-Consciousness

Plotted at the corner of Main Street are the remains of the Mill Vance Theater. Adjacent is the broken framework that once played home to Doc Johnson’s Bowling Alley. The old Camden Clinic, once a site for Ku Klux Klan meetings during the early 1900s, hides in the dangerous interiors of the Camden curves. The three thin wooden stumps planted beside the abandoned Brinsons’ Furniture building were once full-grown crosses which stood beside a large oak sign that read “Jesus Christ is the Lord over Webster County.” These relics of Old Cowen serve the same purpose as do gravestones, they allow for remembrance of days past. For me, the mythologies of these landmarks could be overlooked just as easily as their remains. In my mind, Cowen was a fixed entity. It was as it had always been: a small mountainous coalmining town located in the heart of rural Appalachia. We, its inhabitants, were small town people, defined and essentially limited by our surroundings.
My childhood memories are defined by days in the trailer park. Tucked behind a large fenced-in gravel pile used for the purposes of the State Road Department, was, still is, and will continue to be Willoughby Trailer Park. Just off of route 20, a stretch of road that allows outsiders to quickly pass through the mountainous region, sits the impound that contains many of my boyhood memories. Willoughby is not unlike other trailer parks in America. Some 40-50 trailers line each side of the road in a horizontal fashion. In the middle of the oval shaped road sets a row of trailers that directly face route 20 via the chain-linked barbwire fence of the gravel pile. Though I didn’t know it at the time, it was a dangerous place to be a child. Perhaps there were a few moments when the socio-economic reality did rear its ugly head. I remember the dancing flames of the roaring blaze in our back yard. Our neighbor, in a drunken fight with his wife, had piled her clothes in the front yard, our back yard, and lit them on fire. I remember discovering that my toy bin, a wooden container filled with outdoor toys (e.g. my Big Wheel), had been broken into and stripped clean. I also vaguely recall my father catching a group of trailer park kids playing with my toys some weeks later. But, more so than any of these events, I remember the shame and humiliation of getting off the bus at the trailer park. I remember staying with friends, in their homes, and truly and deeply wanting a home of my own. I felt this way because, to me, there was a distinction between having a home and owning a trailer.

As a young boy, I was somewhat obsessed with my trailer park status. In fact, I recall doing a social studies project on the history of trailer parks in America when I was in the 4th grade. For me, a home was a house (in the traditional sense) and I was acutely
aware that I didn’t live in a house. As a child, I remember asking my mother how Santa Claus dealt with the problem of entering a trailer, one bereft of the traditional chimney I often found in my coloring books. The confining aspect of trailer park life never sat well with me. Embarrassed of my living conditions, I would often avoid bringing friends home from school. I now laugh at this gesture because I realize they were hardly of bourgeoisie upbringing. However, their homes, modest as they might be, were still homes, and I wanted a home. Although I am not certain, I believe my mother maintained a similar mindset. She wasn’t happy living in Willoughby and I could sense it. Perhaps my father was unhappy too, though I never specifically heard him say so. Perhaps all of us Willoughby Trailer Park residents were unhappy. As a child, I understood that my trailer park status signaled that I belonged to a certain social class. I knew that it was, for some reason, embarrassing to be poor. Therefore, I did not like living in a trailer park.

Trailer parks are inherently rhetorical social phenomenona. In other words, they are a rhetorical space. Even the term “trailer park” maintains an underlying rhetorical agenda. Some refer to these manufactured communities as “mobile-home parks,” others call them “mobile-home villages.” I have even heard the terms “trailer community” or “trailer court” tossed around. These terms, many of which arose in the mid-to-late 1980s, were designed to sound more appealing to potential tenants. In “A Poetics of Trailer Park Class,” for example, Ingrid Hill demonstrates how some trailer park landlords evade these labels altogether and refer to their manufactured communities with hyperbolic names such as “Modern Manor,” and “Peachtree Crossing.” Therefore, a resident can potentially say, “We live in Peachtree Crossing,” as opposed to “Peachtree Trailer Park.”
I must agree that “Peachtree Crossing” does sound better. For me, however, Willoughby was a Trailer Park; the sign at the entrance of the park said so. Perhaps I was obsessed with the semantics of living in a trailer park. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines “trailer” as “a large transport vehicle hauled by a truck or tractor.” Even as a child, this didn’t sound like the definition of a home to me. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines “home” as “(1) the place where one lives, (2) a structure or unit for domestic living.” For me, the concept of a trailer as a home was impossible to imagine. Even at a young age, I was unable to get past the semantics of referring to our trailer as a home.

Did Oscar the Grouch (Sesame Street) refer to his trash can as a home? To me, it was a trash can, a device that served a different purpose than living: such was my thinking in regard to trailers.

The naming of a trailer park is not the only rhetorical function that takes place in this setting. Trailer parks are rhetorical in the sense that they subtly offer a series of false promises and luxuries to their tenants. As Hill points out, many trailers are designed to convince blue collar customers that life in a trailer can still be luxurious:

Newly manufactured homes commonly have oversized master bathrooms. These master bathrooms often hold grand color-coordinated fiberglass tubs, with a Jacuzzi option, affecting an opulence equivalent to what one might expect in the home of a star. Skylights are typical in such baths, as well as gilt-trimmed plastic faux-stained-glass… Thus the spa atmosphere takes on a psychologically restorative and reparative (compensatory) function. The manufactured-housing
industry caters to dreams. The buyer is sold the illusion that he or she is the master, and that his or her home is truly a castle. (229-230)

The rhetoric of trailer life, however, extends far beyond the bathroom. Many trailers contain both a front porch and a back porch. This gives the trailer an aesthetic appearance that suggests permanence as opposed to mobility; the wheels of the trailer are often covered by metal paneling for this same reason. The inside décor of a trailer is also rhetorical. Some trailers use elaborate decorating schemes to present the illusion that one does not live in a trailer. Some trailers are equipped with a log cabin look that, in Hill’s opinion, offers the ultimate statement of denial: “I am not a mobile home, no matter what you think. In fact, Abraham Lincoln could have been born here!” (226). Although our trailer had both the oversized Jacuzzi tub and faux-stained-glass skylight mentioned in Hill’s article, it never quite seemed luxurious to me. However, it was far better than the 12 X 6 foot pink trailer my father lived in as a child. Our trailer, in his mind, was no doubt an improvement, a step upward. This is the rhetoric of a trailer park. Residents are convinced they are in a class structure a little higher than might actually be the case. As a child, I remember “snooty” children bragging about their parents newly purchased double-wide homes on the play ground. A double-wide trailer, in this social setting, is, of course, an upgrade from the traditional trailer that I lived in. These living units are more often than not placed on one’s own private property as opposed to a trailer park. Once again, this is a false sense of economic upward mobility in a poor Appalachian community. The salesman convinces the customer that a double-wide is a home, not a trailer.
Today, there are thousands trailer parks located throughout the U.S. Is rhetoric to blame for this? Perhaps not. Trailer parks are more than a covert capitalist operation to convince lower-class inhabitants that they are more than white trash. Perhaps the question I should have proposed in my 4th grade social studies project is “Why do people live in Trailer Parks?” To answer such questions, one must first get past issues of semantics and oversized tubs. Trailer parks are a product of declining economic environments more so than clever rhetoric. First, we must once again recognize the fact that trailer parks give off the false appearance of being temporary or transient communities. Many Appalachian families spend their entire lives in such living arrangements. However, trailers are, of course, mobile. They can be moved. Individuals can be coaxed into believing their situation is temporary. However, we must also recognize that nomadic existence is often discouraged in American culture. We, as Americans, are expected to settle down, start families, and find roots in a community. Why then would someone choose to live in a rooted/established community comprised of mobile living units? To answer this question, we must turn to the social stigma attached to mobility.

Hill argues that Trailer Parks first emerged in America slightly after WW II. Increases in Trailer Park communities can also be found in America after the Korean War and Vietnam War. Hill’s theory is that “the transient nature of the trailer home in the postwar period was connected to deep-rooted and frequently unacknowledged social dislocations produced by the wars themselves”: for Hill, “wars fragment families and communities, then further isolate, impoverish and depress individuals” (225). Early trailer parks in America offered a permanent residence to individuals who were
economically unable to afford property but wanted to avoid the gypsy-esque stigma of having no set place to call home. This gave way to a business opportunity for privileged entrepreneurs within impoverished communities. The rhetoric of a Trailer Park is precisely this – here is an affordable community in which you can live, settle-down, and have a family. If you so choose to leave, you are free to do so. Your home is mobile and can leave with you. However, this is, in all actuality, an illusion. Trailer Parks are also rhetorical in that they give off the false impression that they offer a sense of temporality: Hill notes that moving these homes often costs more than the homes themselves. I’m not sure that I have ever met anyone who has physically moved their trailer to more than two separate trailer parks or locations. These living arrangements are, for the most part, permanent. In other words, once a trailer is plotted on a small piece of trailer park land, it is likely to never move again.

Unlike many of my friends, my Willoughby Trailer Park days did eventually come to an end. My father received a higher paying job at another local coalmine and was eventually able to save up and buy a house for our family. This Appalachian version of upward mobility was not without its price. Each evening I would watch my father come home from work covered in smothering blackness. Because my parents feared this daunting future awaited my arrival to manhood, they began implanting the importance of education into my mind. They didn’t care what I was going to do or what I was going to be, as long as it didn’t involve coalmining. Although my decade plus at Willoughby Trailer Park was filled with confusion and sometimes anger regarding my surroundings, I do remember the sadness of leaving it all behind. I remember a young couple coming to
look at the trailer, peering into my bedroom. I remember the sadness of leaving my trailer park friends behind; by the way, some of these individuals still live in Willoughby. Our new home, a two-story house plotted next to my grandparents’ residence was, however, a welcome change. What I didn’t know at the time was that owning a home, and property for that matter, gave way to a new set of societal expectations and social obligations in small-town Appalachia.

Moving next to my grandparents seemed like the best of all possible situations. For me, living beside my grandma and grandpa seemed like true luxury. However, if I had stopped to take a look around, I would have found that many of my friends and extended family members shared this same luxury. In fact, one does not need to be an Appalachian historian to notice this social arrangement is a common occurrence in the region; the situatedness of Appalachian families has been well documented. Mason Street, though it never had a street sign, was my new home. My great grandmother, recently widowed, lived slightly down the road from the rest of us. It felt as if this were our street. The loop, as we called it (because it veered off the main road in a horseshoe fashion), was our little space. My new neighborhood was essentially a family safe-haven. In Appalachia, many family communities take this same shape. My grandmother, for example, lived up a “holler” with all of her brothers, sisters, parents, and grandparents. Our exodus, our move to Mason Street, seemed like the right thing to do. We escaped the trailer park and essentially moved in with the rest of our family. Our yard was my grandparents’ yard. Their backyard was my great grandmother’s backyard. To me it seemed like one big playground, the perfect scenario. What I didn’t think about at this
time was how my father and grandfather were to pay for their private land and two-story homes. They were able to do so through labor sold to the local coalmine. This means one must worker harder, longer hours each day. Overtime became my father’s regular shift, as was also the case with my grandfather. Eventually, my grandfather, one of the heroes at Hominy Falls, was severely injured in the mines. Although he survived, he would never work in the mines again. This meant that my grandmother, for the first time in her adult life, would have to go out into our small mountain community seeking work.

Economic factors keep Appalachian families in trailer parks and small-impoverished mountain towns. Familial bonds, however, keep us from venturing too far away. Living in a “holler,” or plot of land inhabited by you and generations of your family gives way to a certain territorial mindset. This is our land. We, as a family, have to maintain it so that future generations can take our place. A sense of sameness and safety gives us a false sense of security within these settings. Therefore, “home” as it is perceived by the worker and his family, can be seen as a strong connection to the land. This rhetoric says, “We work and work hard so that we, and our families, can live together on our own land.” However, there are consequences to viewing the concept of home in this fashion. What happens when mothers and fathers raise children who want to be NASA astronauts, Broadway actors, or NBA basketball players? What happens when mothers and fathers raise children who want to be doctors, lawyers, or dentists? What happens when mothers and fathers raise children who want to travel and see the world with their own eyes? I can tell you, without hesitation, what happens. Parents tell their children to grow up and view the world in a realistic fashion. They teach their children
the importance of family and community. To leave the community is to abandon all that they have made for you. To leave the community, even if it were to attend college, is to leave the rest of the family behind. Home, in this context, becomes the actual physical land on which your ancestors were born, lived, and died. This is why one often finds Appalachian families in which the husband commutes sometimes up to 2 hours to work each day. It just wouldn’t be right to move the kids. This is their home. This family-based rhetoric keeps families in their respective communities. The problem is that many of these communities lack economic opportunity and leave little hope for bettering one’s future. This, once again, is why workers enter the coalmines and lumber yards found in the region. These jobs offer one the opportunity to buy a home, buy some land, and start a family. These systems allow for families to move to the Mason Streets of Appalachia. This move, however, is not without its cost.

“Critical-Literacy” as Path to Critical-Consciousness

I always hated the frail blond-haired kid from the Encyclopedia Britannica commercials. I hated how he gleefully sat beside his crammed bookcase waiting to learn. I hated how his mother doted over him like a gardener attending to an un-watered plant. I hated the burly voice of the narrator who kept reminding us how smart little whats-his-name was going to become now that he had a bookcase full of encyclopedias. Most of all, I hated the way this commercial made me feel. It forced me to look around my house and discover I was growing up in a household bereft of literacy. I wanted to bring encyclopedia boy to my house and send him on a scavenger hunt for books. I’m sure that he would have been unable to find anything other than a TV guide, a telephone book, and
the oversized Bible that was collecting a thick coating of dust under our coffee table. 
Because I grew up in such a book-less environment, my relationship to literacy grew out 
of my passion for writing. As a child I would often write short stories and give them to 
my friends. The only stipulation was that I had to be present while they read my work. I 
wanted to see the reactions on their faces. I was amazed at the impact my words could 
have on others. Each smile, chuckle, or grimace suggested that I had accomplished 
something. One day, my fifth grade teacher noticed what was going on and allowed me to 
read some of my stories in front of the class. This was the birth of my identity as a writer. 

As the years went by, my love affair with words helped me succeed in English 
courses. This was a welcomed success because my grades were usually mediocre at best. 
During my early college years I gradually began to fall in love with literature. First it was 
Poe. Then it was Shakespeare. Then I woke up one day and decided that I was going to 
become an English teacher. Though my decision shocked many of my friends, it probably 
wouldn’t have surprised my fifth grade teacher who watched me eagerly stand up in front 
of the class at such a young age. Years removed from this career decision, I now look 
around my apartment and notice the bookcases are no longer empty. Instead of 
encyclopedias, I see Norton anthologies. I see Milton, Donne, Shakespeare and the rest of 
the Renaissance gang. I see Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Frost. I see Hughes, 
Hansberry, and Hawthorne. I see Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*. I even see 
some Anzuldua and hooks. I suspect encyclopedia boy’s mother would be impressed by 
my transformation. For the past seven years, college students have waited patiently at 
their desks waiting to hear my advice on writing. I write scholarly articles for academic
journals and speak at academic conferences. This is a strange dream. Just ten years ago I was an anxious high school senior unaware of whether or not I would get the chance to attend college. Most of my life I had given this decision little thought: in fact, I didn’t officially decide to attend college until after my high school graduation. Literacy has the potential to transform how we see the world and in return how we see ourselves. Literacy can take us places both mentally and physically. My success as a young writer gave me the confidence to take next step in my educational journey.

Like the young Henry Louis Gates Jr., I initially chose to attend a small college that was close to home. Glenville State College, a school of about 2,000 students, was the first stop on my college path. It was cheap, close to home [about an hour and a half away], and good enough for me. However, I quickly found that life at Glenville was not as exciting as I had hoped. Located in Gilmer County, West Virginia, Glenville was essentially my hometown with a small college and a few more businesses plotted in the middle of Main Street. This was not the action-packed or inspirational college experience I had seen on television. I did not have the feeling that I was embarking on an educational journey or accomplishing something great. In a typical suitcase college town, such as Glenville, few of the students stayed for the weekends. The schools offered fewer academic options than I had expected, perhaps something I should have researched earlier. After an unhappy, homesick, semester at Glenville as an undecided major, I began to wonder if I was really college material. Afraid that I might become discouraged with school altogether, my parents offered me an ultimatum. If I give college a second
try, I could transfer to Marshall University, the school that I had originally wanted to attend but didn’t have the courage to attend because it was too far from home.

Located in Huntington, West Virginia, the second largest city in the state, Marshall University was an entirely different world to me. It was a city and a campus different from my hometown in every way. I could walk down the street from campus and watch an ESPN televised football game. I could walk across the street and buy a rap album from a mom and pop store. I could wear baggy jeans and backwards baseball caps to my heart’s content. I could learn in a classroom environment where my last name didn’t signal who I was as a person. At Marshall, it didn’t matter where I grew up or where I came from. In a school of around 20,000 [a large number to a small-town Appalachian kid] we were all nobodies, and I loved it.

Transferring to Marshall University was not without its challenges. I was faced with both culture shock and my own academic unpreparedness. Success in English courses came a little easier for me so I quickly decided that I should become a journalism major. My parents discouraged this notion because journalism jobs are hard to come by in West Virginia: “how are you gonna get a job like that around here?” Next came the idea of being an English major. Once again, my parents shot this idea down: “What are you gonna do with that degree?” Third, came the idea of being an English Education major. My parents were pleased with this move. In four years I could earn my teaching degree and come home to become a high school teacher.

Taking part in the practicum student-teaching clinical experiences offered at Marshall University was truly an eye-opening experience for me. During my four years at
Marshall I visited and taught in Central City Elementary, Beverly Hills Elementary, Barboursville Middle School, Milton Middle School, and Cabell Midland High School. Upon entering these schools I quickly found that I had indeed emerged from an undeniably poor school system. These schools had beautiful new facilities as well as numerous clubs, recreational sports, and educational programs for students. I was amazed by the libraries, sports facilities, and variety of college-prep activities found in these schools. It was a lesson in educational inequality that no book could ever equal.

Returning to public school as a college-student changed the way I viewed my hometown and the way I viewed myself within a larger social structure. These kids took Japanese language classes. These kids had been to foreign countries on vacation. These kids viewed college as the next logical step in an otherwise natural educational progression. College, for these kids, was 13th grade.

My education classes also shaped my view of the process of education. During my junior year, I read an excerpt from Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and instantly fell in love with the idea of education for critical-consciousness. Freire forced me to question the informal education I had received during my upbringing. He made me question my high school’s vocational education focus. He made me view my friends who did not choose to attend college in a different way. Those who said they didn’t want to go to college because they wanted to make money not spend it. Those who said they were avoiding college because it was a waste of time.

Though my college ambitions had allowed me to escape a life underground, it brought me to a darkness of another kind. Midway through my academic journey I awoke
to find myself a foreigner in my own hometown: apparently some other young man was forced to take my place in the mines. Condemnatory eyes gazed upon my newfound posture. Contemptuous ears monitored the metamorphosis of my tongue. My ideologies changed and the natives quickly began to notice. *Boy, don’t forget where you come from!* I began to recognize how I became marked by academia in the eyes of my hometown peers. In coming to this realization, I was forced to think critically about whether or not *home* was still *home* to me.

Becoming the first member of my family to graduate college was one of the most important accomplishments of my life. However, it is second in importance to falling in love with Stephanie Nicole. Stephanie and I found each other lost in an academic wilderness. Like me, Stephanie was a first-generation college student from Webster County, West Virginia. Like me, Stephanie felt, at times, like a fish-out-of-water in Huntington. In hindsight, we likely gravitated toward each other in search of something familiar. Both of us were truly lost in a sea of unfamiliarity. Our relationship, however, confronted me with a dilemma that would forever change my life. While I was set to graduate in the spring of 2004, Stephanie still had two years of college left to finish. Deeply in love for the first time in my life, I could not stomach the idea of leaving Stephanie at Marshall while I returned home to find a high school teaching job. My mother, ironically, proposed a solution. “Maybe you could stay and get a Masters Degree,” she suggested one day. At this point in my life, I had never imagined going to college longer than four years. To me, this sounded like an insane proposition. How would we afford it? Was I smart enough to get a Masters Degree? I had only met a few
people in my life who obtained an M.A. However, after speaking with a few of my education professors, I learned that a Masters Degree could boost my teaching salary. I also learned, from Dr. Seelinger my educational philosophy teacher, that Marshall University’s English Department offered Teaching Assistant (TA) positions. These positions allowed for TAs to teach their own introductory courses for a set stipend. A TA position also waived the tuition fee and most other university fees. Best of all, TAs were given Writing Center work positions for additional pay. In a leap of faith, I submitted my application, never truly expecting things to work out. It seemed too good to be true; this was a chance to become a teacher and remain a student at the same time.

Although we, as critical thinkers, don’t often like to admit it, much of life is left to chance, pure luck. I, for one of the first times in my life, was lucky. A positioned opened and I was offered a TA position.

Memories of my former self quickly began to elude me. I had suppressed them in order to make room for Dewey and Freire. Ah mi Dios, Yo habla Espanol. The diploma hanging on my mother’s living room wall gradually transformed me. I was not the same reluctant first-generation college student that enrolled at Glenville State College. The tables quickly turned. Within four quick years, I went from being an insecure first-generation college student to a college instructor in front of a group of insecure first-generation college students. My duty was no longer to become the first member of my family to graduate college. I was now faced with the difficult task of informing incoming freshmen of how to write at the college-level. My position of power, however, was somewhat false. I existed in the space between student and teacher. On Tuesday and
Thursday I was a graduate student. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I was a college writing instructor. My students, on the other hand, existed somewhere in the space between academia and “the real world.” Few of them truly feel comfortable in the desks in which they sat. They viewed themselves as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. If I was to be their Virgil, a guide who leads them from error, then my job was of immense importance. It was a job that I took very seriously. In other words, the job turned me into a very serious person.

My TA position changed the way I was viewed by all of those around me. Imagine returning to the trailer park and telling your peers that you are teaching a class at Marshall University. Perhaps I was, initially, a little drunk with my own self-importance. I wanted to take a victory trot around the bases. I had not only accomplished my educational goal but also found my niche. I wanted to be the greatest teacher that I could possibly be. I wanted to help other first-generation college students find their way.

Though I didn’t know it at the time, my educational journey had not come to an end. It was essentially just beginning.

One morning I found a surprise in my department mailbox: a bright sheet of paper which read “Hillbilly Speak: Why Appalachian’s Should Embrace their Cultural Dialect.” It was a flyer for a lecture that was to be delivered by a linguist in our department. My rural Appalachian upbringing had nurtured my conscious skepticism of anyone who freely uses the term “Hillbilly” as if it is not offensive. At this point in my life, I believed that the individuals who disregarded the hurtful implications of terms such as “redneck” or “hillbilly” were often the same people who freely used racist identifiers.
behind closed doors. Initially, I found the flyer deeply offensive. Was this not the cultural equivalent of racism? I’m sure that the linguist would have invited me to question and critically evaluate these emotions. I am also sure that the linguist would have suggested that his goal was to dispel the notion that a correct English dialect exists for Appalachian publics. He likely wanted to show us all how and why speaking like a Hillbilly is okay. Though I never attended the presentation, it was at this moment that I realized the linguist doesn’t get to liberate the Hillbilly. This is especially the case if the Hillbilly is convinced that he doesn’t need liberating. After reading this flyer, something changed in my intellectual demeanor.

During my second semester of graduate school, I enrolled in my first Rhetoric and Composition course. It was a course titled “Life Writing,” or something to that effect. The purpose of the course was to analyze the various rhetorical strategies found in autobiographical writing. It was in this class that I discovered my second academic breakthrough. Victor Villanueva’s *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color* changed my life. I was inspired by Villanueva’s work, from his prose style to his ability to explain the role of rhetoric in social systems. I realize that it sounds crazy to suggest that an Appalachian student from a coalmining family in West Virginia can relate to the experiences of a non-traditional academic from a Puerto Rican family in New York. However, this was the case. Villanueva inspired me to study rhetoric. His book made me want to be a rhetorician. It forced me to think about my own culture and to examine its place in the bigger picture of American society.
It was also in my first Rhetoric and Composition course that I discovered my first academic writing breakthrough. To comply with the course theme, our instructor asked us to study some element of our own life’s story. At first, I had no idea what I would write about. While at Marshall, I often pretended that I didn’t come from a rural small town environment. Huntington was a space that allowed me to hide from my roots. Then came an in-class writing exercise that asked us to physically describe a scene from our past. Suddenly things began to click. Fresh off my student-teacher tour of Cabell County public schools, the issue of small-town educational inequality was still fresh in my mind. So, I wrote about the aesthetics of my hometown schools (e.g. the gym floors that also doubled as lunch rooms; imagine playing basketball in gym class and slipping in mashed potatoes). In my free time I began writing about the cracked pavement of Webster County’s curvy roads. And eventually, I wrote about Willoughby Trailer Park. After reading this free write, my teacher encouraged me to look up Census data on my hometown. She thought this process might help me come to terms with statistical rhetorics of poverty. This was an eye opening experience. For some reason, the numbers helped me see the poverty in a new way.

My first Rhetoric and Composition seminar paper was also influenced by my everyday experiences at Marshall. For instance, one day before class I sat eavesdropping on the conversation of a non-traditional student sitting in front of me. He was a gray-haired man probably in his mid-to-late 40s (remember, I am twenty-one at this time). I sat listening to him blab on and one about some poem by John Keats. After the mostly one-sided conversation came to an end, I heard him say something to his friend about picking
his son up from high school. I was shocked. My classmate had a son in high school? This seemed so strange to me. In fact, I couldn’t fathom the idea. I couldn’t imagine my father reading or talking about poetry. Nor could I imagine my father taking college classes while I was in high school. College was for young people, wasn’t it? Poetry was for, well, I wasn’t sure who it was for but I was relatively certain that it wasn’t for fathers who had kids in high school, right? “He needs to grow up, get a job, and take care of his family,” I thought to myself. “Why is he wasting his time here with us?” “What is he going to get out of this class anyway?”

A few days later I was walking along 4th avenue in Huntington when I came to a red light at an intersection. I watched a few middle-aged men jaywalk across the street. The men were wearing three-piece suits and were carrying briefcases. Both were talking on cell phones, at this point I didn’t own a cell phone, nor did anyone I knew personally. I watched these men walk across the street as if they were the first men that I had ever seen. Suddenly, my thoughts were turned to my non-traditional classmate, the one who loved poetry and had a son in high school. I realized that men behaved quite differently in Huntington. They read poetry, wore suits, and carried briefcases. They didn’t dig coal or behave as men – as I thought men were to behave. Finally, I had my topic for my paper. I was going to analyze the rhetoric of masculinity from my hometown. This brought me to the issue of work and how men where I am from viewed work in relation to other activities in their lives. This idea led me to consider how people in my hometown viewed themselves in relation to the rest of the world. My instructor’s suggestions, eventually, lead me to Freire, Shor, McLaren, and Giroux – to critical theory and critical pedagogy.
After my first year of graduate school, I became convinced that I had found my calling, the slice of English Studies that spoke to me. To understand Freire one must come to understand the conditions that plagued his Brazilian pupils. To understand Shor one must come to understand the conditions that plagued his working-class New York students. To understand McLaren one must come to understand the conditions that plagued his working-class students from what was essentially a Canadian ghetto. I wanted to expose the barriers to critical thought which plagued my people – Appalachian people. At this point in my life, I had never referred to myself as Appalachian. In fact, the only time I would ever hear the word used was on television or when someone from outside the region referred to West Virginia as Appalachian. One late spring evening I would discover another Appalachian-themed item in my department mailbox. This time it was a photo copied article from The Journal of College Composition and Communication. It was by a scholar named Kathy Sohn and it was titled “Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College.” My professor, apparently still thinking of my essay, had read the article and felt it was of importance to the work I eventually wanted to do. Two years later, I presented on a conference panel with Dr. Sohn in Louisville, Kentucky. We have since become friends. However, she probably has no idea how important her article, eventually turned into a book, was for my young career. For me, it opened up the possibility of discussing Appalachian issues in a Rhetoric and Composition context. It opened the door for discussions of critical pedagogy and the importance of community literacy.
With the inspiration given to me by Dr. Sohn’s article, I began to dedicate every aspect of my intellectual life to studying and critiquing Appalachian rhetoric. This was to be my life’s work. However, before beginning this work I would have to first obtain the necessary credentials to exist within academia – the PhD. This was a frightening proposition for my family and me. What was I getting myself into? Unsure of whether or not this endeavor was actually a realistic goal, I took my chance. I applied to the two closest schools that I could possibly find. If it didn’t work out, I could always fall back on my West Virginia teaching certificate. Within weeks I received the first rejection letter. A few weeks later, I received a waiting-list confirmation from my second school. The dream was over just as quickly as it had come to me. My first reaction was to call the Webster County Board of Education to inquire about employment. They would give me a job, right? Unfortunately, they were not hiring. The town I had critiqued in my seminar paper didn’t want me back. Perhaps I thought too highly of myself. Phone call after phone call, I kept hearing more of the same: “I’m sorry, but we have no openings at this time” My dreams of becoming the Appalachian-Villanueva were crushed. Finally, I received a callback from a high school in Charleston, West Virginia. However, upon interviewing for the position I quickly became discouraged when the Super Intendment asked me if I had ever taught “inner-city types” before. I knew what he meant and was not excited about working for someone who would use that phrase to describe students. It appeared that my luck had run out.

At this point in my life, I was in an almost constant state of panic. Stephanie and I were planning to get married after graduation. She had no job. I had no job. We were
two first-generation college students with no path. We were overqualified for most jobs in our hometown regions and completely alien to the world of Appalachian labor. It appeared that our college educations made us no better than anyone else. At least that is how it felt to us at the moment.

If I had accepted the public school teaching position I would have made just under $30,000 per year. Many of my friends were now into their 5th year as coal miners or labor workers in for the lumber industry. Those who I felt sorry for just a few years back were going to be making more money than me. I began to fall into the same capitalist-oriented mode of thinking: more money means a better job. I began to wonder if teaching was a good profession after all. I had been spoiled by my two-year teaching appointment at Marshall. I would no longer be able to choose whatever books I wanted. I would have to adhere to state enforced educational standards. I would be teaching classrooms full of much more than the 20-per-class recommendation made by the NCTE. Worst of all, I wasn’t going to have the pride of saying that I was a college professor. In my hometown community, teachers are often looked at as those who simply don’t want to work in the summers. Why else would teachers work for such low pay? This was the thinking of my community and it began to rub off on me a bit.

One does not need to be an expert on rhetoric to recall and recite the rhetorics of one’s own hometown community. My whole life I had heard community members tell me to be grateful for all the coalmines have given us, as a community. The coalmine puts the food on our table. The coalmine keeps the lights on. The coalmine keeps the roof over our heads. We should thank the coalmine for all that we have. During this turbulent
stretch, I began to think the opposite rhetoric was equally true. Perhaps I should thank the coalmine for everything that I do not have. I should thank them for my years in the trailer park, for it was my father’s low wages from the mine that placed us there. I should thank the coalmines for the two-door Ford Escort that I drove. I should thank the coalmines for the various material things I couldn’t buy. I should thank the coalmine for my level of education and all of the career paths that seemed unrealistic to me as a result of growing up in a coalmining family. For if the coalmine is responsible for all that I have, it is equally responsible for all that I do not have. I was bitter. I had been given a taste at academic privilege and wanted more. To make matters worse, I was awarded the William J. Maier Award for Graduate Research for one of my seminar papers. At this point, it didn’t matter anymore. I had given in to the idea that I wasn’t going to be an academic. Instead, I was to return home to receive a dose of reality.

As I stated before, much of life depends on luck, mere chance. Somewhere out there in the world, somebody declined his or her invitation to join the PhD. program at Ohio University. If this person had accepted, you would not be reading these words. However, once again, luck was on my side. Late one Friday evening I received the call from the department’s graduate director, Lazarus awoken from the dead.

At first, I became nervous when faced with an actual chance to grasp the only real dream that I had ever had. Thanks to my wife Stephanie, I didn’t talk myself out of accepting the position. It was her love and support that gave me the courage to become the first member of my family to actually leave the state of West Virginia. I am, in many ways, proof that critical education can transform the material circumstances of
Appalachian student lives. This is not to say I am a success story. Even at this very moment, I have no idea where my academic career will take me. What I am trying to argue is that critical-conscience can be achieved. Every male in my family has taken his crack at the coalmines. I have not. Instead, I am months away from earning my Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition. My hands are not the working hands of society. My pains are not those of a coalminer. Scholars, such as Patricia Bizzell, have wondered whether or not a Freirian approach to critical pedagogy can work with American students. First, I will agree that even many poor Americans enjoy luxuries that Brazilian peasants could never imagine. I, for example, know of Willoughby Trailer Park residents who own a large flat-screen plasma television and IPhone. However, I will argue that critical pedagogy continues to have the potential to change the lives of students. It has changed my life in more ways than I could ever explain. Appalachian students, often left out of the multicultural conversation, are often in need of liberating. They come from a culture that is continually mocked in mass media. They emerge from disadvantaged socioeconomic situations. The barriers to critical consciousness that they face are many. This is not to suggest critical pedagogy can cure Appalachia of economic sickness or rid the region of its social problems. It can, however, transform a coalminer’s son into a college professor. At 29-years-old my grandfather was taking part in the rescue at Hominy Falls. At 29-years-old my father was working underground as well. At 29-years-old I will be preparing to defend my dissertation. Critical pedagogy has the potential to change Appalachian lives, drastically.
“The U.S. system of higher education reinforces generational patterns of income inequality and is far less oriented toward social mobility than it should be. If higher education is to improve the chances for low-and-middle-income children to succeed, the current system must be dramatically redirected, and the sooner the better.”

– Robert Haveman and Timothy Smeeding

“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world”

– Paulo Freire

“Road Less Traveled”: From Trailer Park to Ivory Tower

Ten years old.

My mother is driving my sister and me to Foodland in her red Ford Escort. We pass a graffiti splattered water tower located in an open field near the local high school.

“What is on the water tower, momma?” I ask. “Oh that, the seniors paint the tower every year after graduation, its like a tradition, that’s why it has a big 91 painted on the side of it. They are the graduating class of 1991,” she replied. “Momma, when will I graduate from high school?” my follow-up question. “Well, you will graduate in the year 2000,” she replied, taking her eyes off the road to glance over at me. “The year 2000,” I muttered to myself. I tried to image the possibilities such a year might bring. I imagined Michael J. Fox’s DeLorean with its time traveling capabilities. Imagined a Rod Serling-esque year 2000 with robot teachers and jet packs. “The year 2000. What a year to graduate,” I thought to myself. The year 2000. A year of utopian possibility in my ten-year-old mind.

Fast-forward.

Graduation.

Webster County High School.
The year 2000.

The packed gymnasium was disguised. The basketball rims had been pulled to the rafters, neatly out of the way. The basketball court had been covered with a thick red tarp. A mighty four-foot high stage had been resurrected at the head of the assembly. Dressed in professional attire, the principal, superintendent, and members of the Board of Education stood firmly at the head of the stage. Our parents were disguised as well. Dressed in their “Sunday best,” they sat in the hard plastic chairs placed in neat rows on the gymnasium floor, fanning themselves with the graduation programs made just days prior to the event. I suppose we were disguised too. Dressed in the traditional graduation caps and gowns made famous in early 19th century Europe, we were all inadvertently pretending to be Cambridge graduates. For some, this was to be a grand ceremony, a moment of triumph – a family first. Even the alternative school kids were, allegedly, on their best behavior. Our diplomas sat upon a large table atop the stage. All that we had to do now was parade ourselves through the crowd, cross the stage, shake a few hands, grab our diplomas, turn our tassels, and throw our graduation caps into the air. The end, or so it felt, was drawing near. We were about to enter “the real world” our parents and teachers had warned us about. Just outside the gymnasium, the water tower, covered in a fresh coat of paint, marked the beginning of the 21st century.

Even at the age of 18, all of this pageantry and spectacle rang false for me. Had we not simply completed a task that we had been forced to endure by threat of punishment? “They’ll call the truancy officer on me if you don’t go to school,” my mother said to the 5-year-old me who didn’t want to go to kindergarten. Did we not go to
school because state and federal laws required us to do so? Didn’t everyone graduate high school? The concept of graduation had become a formality in my mind. Graduating was never a goal or conscious ambition. I expected to graduate high school. Though many of my friends were about to become the first members of their families to graduate, this was not the case for me. My parents had both graduated from Webster County High School and I really didn’t see the value in their doing so. I loved hearing about my father’s glory days on the football field but never really asked him about his academic pursuits. My mother spent her first year out of high school becoming a state certified beautician (a 12 month program) but was forced to temporarily give up this dream when I was born. Her new career was that of the typical stay-at-home mother. In fact, she did not work as a full-time beautician for almost 15 years after completing her schooling. I didn’t see my parents as academics. I didn’t see how graduating from high school had benefited their lives much at all. In my eighteen-year-old mind, money was all that mattered. As long as you could make money, it really didn’t matter how many degrees hung on your wall. College was simply a way to increase ones earning power. For this reason, I could understand why college was important. High school, however, was a completely different story. In my mind, the days of applauding the high school graduate were long gone. Obtaining a high school education simply allowed one to claim a normative status. For this young nihilist, graduating high school was nothing to get excited about.

Before graduation, the yearbook committee asked each member of the senior class to compose a brief *senior saying* to be placed under his or her graduation photo. These were to be our parting words to halls of WCHS. Something of a class clown during my
high school days, I wracked my brain trying to come up with a smartass statement to include under my picture in the yearbook. Below is my first attempt at becoming a class of 2000 yearbook anti-hero:

“If I flunk out of college, I can always come back here and be a teacher.”

After submitting my senior picture and senior saying to the yearbook committee, I was called into the principal’s office the next day. The principal informed me that some faculty members might find my statement offensive and upsetting. He lectured me on the importance of one’s reputation in “the real world.” He cautioned me to not take this tradition as a joke. He informed me of the important decisions that were rapidly approaching. After about 15 minutes of his lecturing and my staring at the floor, I was given two options: (1.) I could change the saying to something more appropriate or (2.) I could forfeit the privilege of having a senior saying. His lecture, however, did little to detour my rebellious attitude. Below is my second attempt at yearbook immortality:

“If I flunk out of college, I can always come back here and date high school girls.”

Much to my surprise, my second statement was approved without incident. Today, I look back on this experience, one of my last before graduation, with a different set of eyes. Why did the second senior saying pass the yearbook committee inspection? Was my second statement not offensive to the young women who attended Webster County High School? Was administration not concerned with the feelings of these young women or perhaps the feelings of their slightly older college dropout boyfriends?
If I were a faculty member of the WCHS yearbook committee in 2000, I would have likely viewed these statements as nothing more than the words of a smartass teenager who lacks the maturity necessary to take his life seriously. I admit that it would be easy to regard these words as pure nonsense. However, my present position as a scholar of rhetoric and composition, forces me to view these words in a different regard. From a rhetorical standpoint, one can find several underlying arguments and assumptions beneath the surface.

Several rhetorical commonalities between the first statement and its predecessor can be found when closely inspecting the rhetoric(s) behind these words. In regard to topic, both statements clearly deal with the speaker’s attitude toward going to college. Both statements also suggest the speaker will likely go to college and return to his hometown community as an academic failure. On one hand, both statements suggest that the speaker is indifferent about whether or not he flunks out of college. However, both statements also imply that academic failure is likely. These statements position academic failure, at the college-level, as a common occurrence: the speaker, unqualified teacher, and predatory boyfriends are apparently all three academic failures of some form or fashion. When viewed in this regard, both statements can be seen as containing an underlying fear about returning home from college without a college degree. Despite the intentional transgressiveness on the speaker’s part, both statements scream – I’m afraid of failing at the next level. Both statements attempt to cover up the shame one will likely experience when forced to return home as an academic failure.
Although crass on the surface, there are various underlying rhetorical themes at work in both statements. The first statement suggests that teachers at WCHS are poorly educated. It suggests that these teachers are able to obtain jobs without the proper qualifications. The crux of the joke is that WCHS teachers are indeed bad teachers. However, the joke also suggests that WCHS students are indeed bad students. The speaker realizes he is not better than his teachers. In fact, it appears that he plans to join their ranks, eventually. One could read this joke/statement as a comment on the inevitability of life in Webster County. It says that we, as Webster County citizens, will fail if we attempt to leave. The statement argues that we are failures and we, as failures, belong here in Webster County. Despite the various rhetoric(s) underneath the surface, the statement must be viewed as intentionally offensive to teachers. I agree that it should not have passed the initial inspection. The statement is undoubtedly rude and has no place in a high school yearbook. However, I do find my choice of words rhetorically fascinating. A Freudian psychoanalyst would likely have a field day with the subconscious messages behind my intentionally bold statement. The same can be said for my revision.

The second statement suggests that high school girls from Webster County are attracted to college dropouts, college dropouts who return home after failed academic excursions. This second statement, the one that was allowed to go to print, can undoubtedly be read as sexist and insensitive. It inadvertently blames young women for the romantic inadequacies of the speaker. He cannot find a date because the women he is interested in dating are in relationships with men who are college dropouts, recently
returned to the geographic region. However, the statement can also be read as critique of the order of things in the region. It, like the first statement, is a commentary on the little excuses we tell ourselves on a daily basis. If I can’t accomplish A everything will be okay because I am 100% ready to settle for B. Although the speaker is attempting to critique the college dropouts who prey on young high school girls, he appears to be willing to join their ranks if things do not work out for him in the Ivory Tower. In this scenario, high school girls are forced to settle for college dropouts. The men are forced to wait until they become college dropouts before they can become attractive to the girls they desire. Like the first statement, this senior saying reminds us that Webster County residents are forced to settle. The joke, if it contains any humor whatsoever, is only funny because it is on all of those who are involved in its discourse. It is comment on the false hierarchy of worth and status in a small town Appalachian community.

This second statement, when compared to the first statement, can be read as equally offensive. Slightly altered from the original, this statement should not have passed the second round of yearbook saying inspections. I have no idea why this statement was not removed from the yearbook. At the time, I fully expected to be called back into the principal’s office. When I picked up my yearbook the following fall semester, I was shocked to see my words actually made it into print. Today, I have little interest in debating whether or not these statements were good or bad, right or wrong. Perhaps the question is not “what does this statement tell us about the speaker as a moral being?” The more interesting question is “why would an eighteen-year-old high school senior so blatantly attempt to defy the supposed seriousness of the high school yearbook
senior saying?” Moreover, “what factors contribute to this apathetic worldview?” These are the questions that we, as educators, should be asking ourselves when confronted with such examples of teenage working-class apathy.

Ten plus years removed from my decision to write these words, I now realize the level of immaturity I displayed in choosing to go against the grain with my yearbook senior saying. Both statements display a lack of maturity, this is evident. However, from a rhetorical standpoint, my saying and photo remain clever in that both rhetorics subvert the pomp and spectacle of the high school yearbook tradition. My photo is the image of a young man with little regard for the pageantry and tradition of high school experience. I refused to dress in the traditional yearbook attire. At this point in my life, I did not own a button-up dress shirt or a tie. I refused to shave my straggly goatee or to smile in my photo. The fake silver chain I wore around my neck was, to me, a symbol of rebellion. I wanted my senior photo to be more like an Ice Cube or Dr. Dre album cover. The thesis of both my photo and saying is simple. It suggests that the Todd Daniel Snyder did not like this experience [the American high school experience] and has little regard for its glorification. Should I be embarrassed of my photo and senior saying? Perhaps. Truth be told, I probably wrote the first statement because I felt that I had been wronged by one of my teachers in some way or another. In high school, I was not an astute academic student. Nor was I a member of the top 20 highest-ranking students in my class. Like many teenagers, I was a young man confused about how to behave as a young man. As for the second statement, I probably wrote these words out of romantic frustration. Like many high school students, I struggled to find a date to my senior prom, another example
of the high school ceremony and tradition that I didn’t care much for during my teenage years. Yes, perhaps I should be embarrassed of my eighteen-year-old self. However, our public educational system should share with me in this embarrassment. This photo. These worlds. These are the products of a system that privileges some as opposed to others.

This angry face is not the face of a prom king or homecoming king. It is the face of the boy who sat in the back of the bleachers at the pep rally. These are the words of the student who is utterly indifferent to the system and its various attempts to dole out inspiration and importance to a select few. These are not the words of a young man about to win a full-paid scholarship. These are not the words of a class president or captain of the football team. This image. These words. Rhetoric(s) of a student crying out for help.

The words of a crash dummy rapidly approaching the brick wall …

“This is going to hurt a little bit, I might as well laugh about it,”

“It will all be over soon,” …

June 12th, the year 2000.

I walked across the stage. Shook a few hands. Grabbed my diploma. Turned my tassel. Threw my cap in the air. And didn’t feel any different afterward.

Byproduct (n.) = (1.) something produced as secondary result of the manufacture or production of something else, often something useful or commercially valuable. (2.) Something that happens as an incidental result of something else\(^{11}\).

Capitalist societies produce privileged and affluent elites who own private property and accumulate and control an abundance of the nation’s wealth. Conversely, these social systems also produce apathetic and disenfranchised masses of people who do

\(^{11}\) This definition comes from *The American Heritage Dictionary, 4th edition.*
not get to fully share in the potential splendor of economic and social privilege. Thus, apathetic and disenfranchised masses are the byproducts of a capitalist society. This same framework can be applied to American public education systems. These schools produce valedictorians, salutatorians, homecoming kings / queens, prom kings / queens, class presidents, star athletes, etc. However, these social systems also produce an apathetic and disenfranchised mass of students who feel no the better for their time in these systems. I am writing for the potential college dropouts. I am writing for those who did not make the honor roll. I am writing for those who were not placed on a social pedestal as a result of their adherence to the values perpetuated by these social systems. I am writing for the kid who was not tagged as gifted or exceptional. I am writing for the kid who has been tracked into the vocational education career cluster. I am writing for the kid who recognizes the hypocrisy of high school education – the kid who can see the future and recognizes its bleakness. Smartass apathetic kids who refuse to recognize the importance of education are the byproducts of an educational system that has repeatedly deemed them as unimportant. The American educational system tells students who they are as well as who they are not.

As a scholar and educator, I am immensely concerned with the concept of liberatory education. I believe education has the power to transform the way we see the world and the way we function within its socioeconomic realities. I find it problematic that most poor American high schools produce students, like the eighteen-year-old version of myself, who are less-than-inspired by their educational experiences. These students graduate high school truly lacking an appreciation for these liberatory processes
of recognizing ones place within the world. When these students think of high school they think of organized sports, school dances, school-sponsored clubs, and the pageantry of yearbooks and graduation ceremonies. In these instances, education comes to be seen as the rote memorization of facts and dates in an attempt pass an arbitrary test or a series of arbitrary tests. This brand of education has no practical application to the lives of students. For these students, education comes to be seen as a roadblock as opposed to a vehicle for social and intellectual mobility. Whether we, as a society, like to admit it or not, many students in America view their time in high school as punishment or 13 year state-mandated sentence. If they choose to stay in high school it is because of judicial and social pressures. They do not stop to think about the role of education in a democratic society. They do not think about their place within our democratic society, the United States of America.

I believe my yearbook photo and senior saying(s) serve as a perfect example of how first-generation college students from rural Appalachia often feel about education and, most importantly, themselves. These students often struggle to see themselves in a positive light. For them, education is a system that discourages promise as opposed to one that opens new windows of opportunity. The American public educational system has the potential to foster a deterministic mindset. Report cards, test scores, grade school and high school teachers play a large part in forming our educational identities over a 13-year period. We sometimes take these forms of evaluation for granted. Some of us have stopped questioning why and how we evaluate and rank our students in American educational systems. As college-level composition instructors, we often struggle to resist
the urge to see our incoming freshmen students as a monolithic group of learners. Though we realize the fact that not all freshmen come to our classrooms with the same skill sets, our pedagogies often suggest otherwise. My goal, in this chapter, is to provide first-year composition instructors with a window into the mindsets of first-generation college students from rural Appalachian backgrounds. Because the unique sociocultural problems these students face are often overlooked in the academic books and journals in our field, I think it is appropriate to give these students a voice within our discipline. These students experience college differently than many of their peers. My goal, in this chapter, is to highlight these differences.

In this chapter I will share the results of two separate analytic auto-ethnographic studies conducted within my hometown region of Webster County, West Virginia. My goal is to blend these voices with my own in an attempt to give a fuller picture of the ideological and sociological traits these students share. Both studies are autoethnographic and feature the voices of participants from this same region. I have chosen to focus on Webster County students because my hometown region is, in many ways, emblematic of traditional rural Appalachian culture. Located near the geographic center of the state, Webster County is a small rural coalmining community that maintains the cultural and economic isolation often discussed in the field of Appalachian Studies. I have also chosen Webster County because it is my hometown and I wish to share my experiences and match those experiences up with those of individuals coming from similar circumstances. For me, academic scholarship is a personal endeavor. I cannot help but to
begin my academic career with a critical eye toward my own experiences and lower case “t” truths in regard to Appalachian experience and liberatory education.

The following section will provide readers with a brief review of my first autoethnographic project: a survey of eight Webster County parents with children that were, at the time, high school seniors. This study was conducted in 2005, while I was a graduate student at Marshall University, and was published in *The Community Literacy Journal* in 2007. I bring this study into the conversation because I feel that it demonstrates how the educational attitudes of parents from rural Appalachia sometimes have the potential to discourage the pursuit of a higher education. The study also reveals several gender-specific views of the workplace, gender-based fears and expectations concerning college education, and uncovers interesting insights into the lives of families that have deep-seeded roots in the coal mining industry. In many ways, the results of this study speak to the socio-cultural themes found in the earlier chapters of my dissertation. I resurface this data from my 2005 study because I feel it demonstrates many of the roadblocks Appalachian students face when attempting to fashion themselves as college-material, and more importantly as writers. In briefly reviewing the findings of this study, I will explain how this experience lead to my second journey into analytic autoethnography, a 2007 autoethnographic study designed under the supervision of Ohio University professors Jennie Nelson and Sherrie Gradin. For this study, I documented the writing experiences of two first-generation college students from Webster County during their first semester of college. Each participant was 2007 graduate of Webster County High School. Both participants were interviewed, in person, one month before attending
college. Each participant also maintained contact with me throughout their first semester, once a month to be specific. I have chosen to feature this second analytic autoethnographic study because I feel that it allows me to demonstrate some of the unique feelings of culture-shock that affect students from Appalachia during their early college experiences: the case study data also demonstrates some of the unique ways in which students from this particular background are ill-prepared for their first experiences writing for academic audiences. I have paired both qualitative studies together in this chapter in an attempt to demonstrate many of the sociocultural disadvantages Appalachian students face before and during their first year of college writing. It is my opinion that we must first recognize these roadblocks before we, as educators, prescribe their remedy.

Before delving into the particulars of both empirical studies, I would like to take the time to discuss my methodological choices and inspirations. Early on during my career as a graduate student, I fell in love with Mike Roses’ *Lives on the Boundaries*. The manner in which Rose was able to allow his subjects to speak for themselves and gain voice within his work was quite inspiring to me. As a beginning graduate student, I was equally inspired by Peter McLaren’s *Life in Schools* as well as Katherine Keller Sohn’s *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College*. As a scholar, I was attracted to scholarship that spent less time critiquing the voices of participants and more time giving these voices a place within the discourse of the field. For both of my brief qualitative studies, I have chosen to allow the voices of my participants to shine through. Following in the footsteps of Katherine Sohn’s
ethnographic work, I chose to interview participants from my hometown; individuals who trusted me to best represent their ideas and reactions. Therefore, much of my research consisted of interviewing parents and students from rural Appalachia and simply allowing their voices to be heard. Unlike many ethnographic researchers, I never attempt to present my findings in a neutral or unbiased fashion. I believe the value of true autoethnographic research rests in the researcher’s connection to the topic at hand, a willingness to keep one’s connection to research out in the open. In fact, my methodological approach in both qualitative studies clearly fits the five key features of analytic autoethnography outlined in Leon Anderson’s 2006 article “Analytic Autoethnography.” First, in both studies I maintain “complete membership researcher status” (Anderson 378). In other words, my interviews and conversations take place in a collaborative effort and sometimes grow organically. My participants did not see me as Todd Snyder, a college professor from Ohio University. Webster County is a small Appalachian community. My participants viewed me as Todd Snyder, Mike and Cherly’s boy. Both studies also attempt to maintain analytic reflexivity in regard to my connection to the research situation (Anderson 382). In both studies, I take time to discuss my personal and emotional connection to the topics being discussed. Third, both qualitative studies are autobiographical. I present the voices and experiences of my participants in conjunction with my own. Therefore, I maintain “narrative visibility” throughout both studies (Anderson 378). Fourth, I maintain dialogue with my participants “beyond the self,” meaning that my research often extends beyond my personal experiences or the experiences of my participants (Anderson 378). In both studies, I am specifically
interested in surveying the voices of members of my hometown community and connecting those voices to a larger cultural picture. And finally, both studies remain “committed to theoretical analysis,” (Anderson 387). In other words, my goal is to do more than share my experiences, or the experiences of my participants, in an attempt to evoke emotion or tug at the heartstrings of readers. My data is presented in an attempt to “gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena that notes provided in the data itself” (Anderson 387). I chose to study the experiences of parents and students from Webster County because they provide readers from outside the region with a small slice of Appalachian culture.

Analytic autoethnography does, of course, have its limitations, as do all research methodologies. I do not pretend to present definitive empirical answers, nor do I pretend that all members of Appalachian culture feel and think about the world in a unified way. Instead, I am more interested in creating what Anderson calls “insider-meaning” (389). I want to theorize about Appalachian culture from the inside. Like the participants of my two studies, I continued to be influenced by the rhetoric(s) of Appalachian culture. Insider-perspective is what this dissertation project offers the field of rhetoric and composition. Though quite brilliant, most Appalachian studies are crafted by scholars who are non-natives of the region. I, on the other hand, have spent my entire life within the confining walls of Appalachia. Because of my experiences and background, I think I will be able to present my findings with a strong ethos. My study, as a whole, is unique in that it is written about rural Appalachian students by a rural Appalachian student.
I believe this chapter will benefit the field of rhetoric and composition because it will allow scholars to examine the pedagogical needs of college students from rural Appalachian areas. These students are from a unique cultural background: a cultural background that is often woefully ignored by instructors from outside regions. This study will also benefit any instructor interested in expanding contemporary notions of Appalachian identity. However, my goal is not to simply paint a vivid picture of Appalachia and suggest those who reside within the area are the only ones that may benefit from an expanded and carefully considered approach to critical pedagogy. This study will also aim to demonstrate the complexity and educational benefits of critical pedagogy for all students, even those from traditionally privileged backgrounds. Like the great critical educator Ira Shor, I believe that we, as instructors, cannot teach our students to think critically until we are able to diagnose and recognize the roadblocks to critical thinking which our students face on a daily basis. My goal, in this project, is to bring these roadblocks to the light. The notion of the Hillbilly, as a literary and political tradition, pointed out in the first chapter, is the proper starting point. The media-perpetuated tradition of the Appalachian Hillbilly, as monster or fool, is an appropriate next step in this process. Third, we, as instructors, must recognize how many of these various roadblocks are tied to working-class consciousness and hegemonic conceptions of difference: the day-to-day material circumstances of working-class Appalachian life. This chapter, more so than its predecessors, will bring us to the issue of educational roadblocks for Appalachian students. After presenting these two small qualitative studies, I will examine the history of critical pedagogy, as a complicated set of theoretical
movements that have undoubtedly influenced our discipline, in the following chapter. In outlining this history, my goal will be to use the Appalachian region as an example of a contemporary student population that could particularly benefit from educational experiences geared toward critical pedagogy. My goal will be to shed light on the potentialities of critical pedagogy for members of this often-overlooked and disenfranchised section of the country.

The Webster County Blues: An Exploration of the Educational Attitudes of a Small Appalachian Community

- A Critical Review -

An Introduction

The sun rarely shines in Webster County. Dilapidated trailers sink into the earth’s moist surface as if they haven’t the courage to sit upright. Beat down rusting pickup trucks lie on concrete cinderblocks like corpses in a morgue. Rickety skeletons of half enclosed silos decorate the shadowy West Virginia wilderness. Condemned buildings rear their ugly faces alongside the cracked pavement of curvy roads. Tucked within an unknown county in an invisible state, Webster County hides from the rest of the world. Despite a persistence of poverty and lack of economic opportunity, residents of this region often refuse to relocate. It is as if some omnipresent force shuns them from ever leaving. Perhaps the mountains are to blame. Dark and menacing, they discourage any thought of escape. With each passing year generations of hard working West Virginians die in the same “hollers”, trailer parks, and mountain towns where they were raised. In this land where inspiration is as scarce as income, they suffer the cyclical effects of poverty. As is the case for many Appalachian natives, the residents of Webster County possess a strong attachment to the land. It is the only home they have ever known. (Snyder 91)

These were the opening words of my 2007 article “The Webster County Blues.” In some ways, I regret these words as much as the ones I penned for my class of 2000 yearbook. My original goal was to paint a vivid socio-cultural picture for readers. I wanted this picture to reflect the bleakness of the situation at hand. I wanted those outside

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12 This ethnographic study originally appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of The Community Literacy Journal. Some sections have been edited for this project; others remain exactly the same as the original publication.
the region to understand the economically depraved circumstances surrounding the subjects about to be discussed in the study. However, loosely borrowing from John F. Kennedy’s famous description of the state of West Virginia and its people (“the sun doesn’t always shine in West Virginia, but its’ people do”) was probably a poor start to an otherwise ambitious effort to explain Appalachian educational experience. Using this allusion to Kennedy’s version of Appalachia (e.g. West Virginia) does, in some ways, play into a dominant political caricature of the region. Today, I find it more important to question these rhetorical inventions of Appalachian existence as opposed to subscribing to already-existing narratives, especially already-existing political narratives. I also find my particular choice of Appalachian imagery to be somewhat problematic. The personified trailer, which sinks into the moist earth’s surface as if it hasn’t the courage to sit upright, says more about my own educational insecurities and shortcomings than it does about the material circumstances of Appalachian poverty. I look back on my first published article with a critical eye. In doing so, I can now see that I was not as removed from the situation as I had led my self to believe. My words, like those of my participants, were a window into a certain socio-cultural Appalachian mindset.

A Rationale

Now five years removed from writing “The Webster County Blues,” I return to this article a noticeably different scholar and thinker. My rationale, located toward the end of my introductory section, serves as a window into my thinking during this transitional period in my life:

Eleven years removed from my departure from Willoughby, I now find myself sitting in front of the computer in my office at Marshall University wondering why
more of my peers have not taken this route. During the past five years I have read some of the most beautiful literature ever written in the English language. I have studied under a Yale scholar and taught composition to students from all over the country. There are mornings where I get up, briefcase in hand, and wonder how things could have been different. What if I would have taken that job at the mines? A sense of guilt consumes my consciousness. Why do so few Webster County students pursue a college education? Is poverty too strong an adversary? To what extent does parental involvement play in the collegiate aspirations of Webster County High School students? These questions have brought me back to my hometown. These questions have forced me to reexamine everything that I have ever known about my identity. These questions have fueled my interest in the economic and educational consequences of traditional Appalachian values. These questions have forced me to look for answers. (Snyder 92)

I continue to enjoy this particular section of the article because I think it accurately documents my intellectual mindset at the time in which it was written. These are the words of a first-generation college student completely in awe of his professors, and perhaps in awe of his place in the Ivory Tower. Remember, I went from being an 18-year-old first-generation college student struggling with the decision of whether or not to attend school in the spring of 2000 to teaching a college composition course at Marshall University in the fall of 2004. These words, in my opinion, reflect a certain brand of Appalachian insecurity that is highlighted by feelings of guilt and disbelief. These are the words of a young man amazed at his newfound ability to have a conversation with a Yale scholar. The author, a younger version of my present day self, is willing to subscribe to the belief that a Yale scholar is inherently a scholar of a higher brand of worth. These are also the words of a young man amazed by his interactions with students from different cultural backgrounds. During my first year as a teaching assistant at Marshall University I taught students from Korea, Vietnam, and the Dominican Republic. This was indeed an amazing experience for a young man from Willoughby Trailer Park. I also find my
forthright honesty in regard to my feelings of guilt quite interesting. Simple actions such as sitting behind the desk in my office and carrying a briefcase caused me to harbor feelings of guilt. These behaviors and actions did not feel natural. I knew that at the very moment I was composing those words many of my friends were underground in coalmines or sweating in lumberyards. My work didn’t feel like work, at least the kind of work that I had been raised to appreciate. At the time, I was unaware of the extent that my own socio-cultural truths were on display just as plainly as those of my participants.

**Research Setting**

Webster County is located slightly east of Flatwoods, the geographic center of West Virginia. Fewer than 10,000 residents call home to this mountainous region. According to the US Census Bureau, 58.2% of Webster County citizens over the age of 25 have obtained a high school diploma or GED (2000). Only 8.7% of the county’s residents over the age of 25 have obtained a bachelor’s degree or some form of secondary education (2000). There are currently 4 grade schools and 1 high school located with the county limits. When considering the staggeringly low percentage of postsecondary graduates, one can infer that many of the college educated individuals who live in the county teach in the public school system. Webster County is the fifth lowest paying school system in the state of West Virginia. The median household income falls slightly over $21,000 (2000). A staggering 31.8% of families in this region live below the poverty level (2000). There are currently 3 coalmines and 5 logging companies operating within the county limits. Beautiful outdoor surroundings and plentiful game hunting bring

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13 According to the County Board of Education, the average Webster County teacher makes $36,789 per-year.
thousands of sportsmen to Webster County each year. No major highways or interstate routes pass through this region.

**Participants**

I began this project with one simple question in mind: can parental involvement (positive encouragement) overcome the economic roadblocks first-generation college students face when attempting to succeed in academia? Therefore, my first instinct was to interview parents of potential first-generation college students. I wanted to find out what they were saying and thinking about their children’s’ potential futures as college students. At the time, I felt it would be unnecessary to interview parents of active college students because these students had already made it to college. I wanted to see how the first-generation college student’s parents helped them prepare and form their own opinions of whether or not a college degree was a realistic goal. In hindsight, I wish I had interviewed both the students and the parents. I feel this would have given my research more depth. It would have been interesting to see how parental attitudes matched up with the attitudes of their children. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I only had the opportunity to interview parents. Below is my overview of the participants chosen for the study:

*The target population for this study was parents of freshmen at Webster County High School. These parents were interviewed in order to determine how early families began discussing the college aspirations of their children. Out of 20 parents contacted, 11 individuals (8 women and 3 men) agreed to participate in the survey. Of the 11 participants, 10 parents had children who were enrolled in the same high school they went to as a teenager. The one parent who attended a different high school had grown up in a neighboring county (Nicholas County, West Virginia). Only 1 of the participants had received any form of postsecondary education. This individual had enrolled in nearby community college, at the age of 31, for 2 semesters before dropping out. Of the 8 women interviewed, 4 were currently unemployed. Of the 3 males interviewed, 2 had a job and 1 individual was currently on disability. None of the participants had parents who both*
graduated high school. It must also be noted that none of the individuals interviewed were married to each other. This study represents 11 different families. Two of these families had more than one child currently enrolled in high school. Participants were contacted over the phone and interviewed in person. Interviews were conducted at separate times for each family and no students were present during the interview process. All participants were asked the same set of twenty questions. Audio recordings of the interviews were made in order assure the accuracy of their comments. (Snyder 94)

As stated before, my methodological approach to this first study was perhaps that of a novice. Although I was quick to point out that no universal conclusions could be drawn from such a small study sample, I did, however, neglect to consider some of the socio-cultural factors that held the potential to sway my results in a certain direction. Today, I wish I had taken more time to include participants from various socio-cultural backgrounds. Most, if not all, of these participants fit into the lower middle-class range or lower-class socioeconomic range. This key variable should have been addressed more fully in the study. The voices of these participants were the voices of parents who had came up the hard way, so to speak. Their children held little social or economic privilege within this small coalmining community. My concern, at the time, was finding enough participants to complete my study. Though the voices of my participants definitely shed light on some of the roadblocks first-generation college students face, I do wish I had taken the time to gather a more diverse pool of participants.

**A Hypothesis**

At this point in my career, I was unable to fully understand how socioeconomic and cultural factors influenced parental attitudes regarding education. Rather, I simply held strong to the belief that parental involvement could overcome economic roadblocks for potential first-generation college students. Before conducting my research, my
tentative hypothesis was that parental involvement would play a decisive role, more so than socioeconomic status, in the college attendance decisions of Webster County students. I understood that parental involvement had played a huge part in my college success and wanted to understand more fully how it played a part in the college successes or failures of others from my region. I wanted to pinpoint the educational attitudes that were unique to the region. Because parental involvement had helped me overcome my educational obstacles and insecurities, I was convinced that properly educated parents could do the same for their children. Unfortunately, I had yet to fully consider how social, cultural, and economic factors contribute to a parent’s willingness to view college education in a positive light. Therefore, I believe I was both right and wrong in this regard. I was right for pointing out the extreme importance of parental involvement for first-generation college students. I was wrong in my inability to consider how such involvement is tied to issues of class.

Results

After interviewing participants in my “Webster County Blues” study, I found that participants appeared to share six distinct attitudinal characteristics concerning education. First of all, (1.) participants seemed to know little about the college admissions process. Misconceptions, in my opinion, created the false perception that college is only for wealthy or extremely intelligent individuals. (2.) Participants also expressed an attitude that I referred to as “The fear of the outsider.” This brand of thinking suggests that dangerous or predatory individuals dwell just beyond the confining limits of the county. Therefore, an insider / outsider dichotomy is established that positions life in Webster
County as safe and life outside the region as risky or potentially dangerous. (3.) I also found that participants tended to view college as nothing more than a party spot for rebellious teenagers. Disturbingly exaggerated, these perceptions seem to be somehow tied to the media’s portrayal of college life. (4.) Participants also held strong to the belief that manual labor jobs are more profitable than jobs that require some from of postsecondary education. In other words, going to college requires money, money these families didn’t have at the time. Going to work was a means of improving ones condition, more so than going directly to college after high school. This viewpoint positions learning and working in opposition to each other. (5.) Because of the region’s dependency on the extract industries and wage labor working conditions, I also found that participants tended to view the workforce in a gender specific manner. Perhaps the most obvious finding in my study, these responses often demonstrated how parents sometimes pushed their children into traditionally gendered occupations. (6.) Lastly, participants seemed to be overly critical of the college failures of others from the region. Because a fair number of Webster County residents have apparently returned to the region without a college degree, these participants sometimes considered the pursuit of a college education as a very risky endeavor. These participants, in my opinion, seemed unaware of the wide range of difficulties that first-generation college students face on a daily basis. Thus, the small town college dropout becomes a highly ridiculed figure within the community. Perhaps this social-phenomenon brings us back to my two rhetorically suspicious yearbook senior sayings. At the time of my study’s publication, I had yet to fully make this connection to my own struggles as a first-generation college student from the region.
As I look back on these findings, I am satisfied with the manner in which I was able to highlight the commonalities among these various discourses. I think each of these social factors were present in all eight participant interviews. However, I do think my methodology was flawed in some regards. First, I am still unable to explain the extent to which my choice to audio-record interviews influenced the responses of the participants. Because some of these statements were quite bold, I do wonder if the verbal aspect of the face-to-face interviews influenced their responses. I do not think each participant would have responded in the same fashion if they were asked to write their responses as opposed to speaking them aloud to me. Looking back on my study, I also regret the fact that I did not share my transcriptions with my participants after transferring their thoughts into words on a page. I am inspired by the manner in which ethnographers such as Katherine Sohn are willing to share her findings with her participants; this helps the researcher to maintain a strong ethos. I wish I had done so with my participants but this was not the case.

For the remainder of this critical review, I will briefly share some of the most interesting voices from my study. In doing so, I will discuss my analysis of each of the six educational attitudes and will explain how these findings lead to my more recent analytic autoethnographic study found later in the chapter. Before doing so, I will remind readers that I am not attempting to establish a unified voice or set of attitudinal characters concerning the Appalachian region. These are the voices of a collection of participants within a very small space in Appalachia. However, I do feel there is academic merit in considering these voices. A large number of community colleges, small colleges, state
universities, and private schools enroll students from similar backgrounds. Critical educators, if they are truly concerned helping students become critical thinkers who understand the material circumstances of their place within our democratic society, should consider these voices. Far too often, scholars ignore the problems that Appalachian students face because they do not feel their struggles are worthy of consideration. Although Appalachian Studies, as a field, is somewhat circumscribed, I argue that the problems poor and disenfranchised masses face within this region do connect to a multitude of larger universal issues regarding equality and exploitation.

*The Cost of a Future: Understanding the Admissions Process*

In an impoverished area such as Webster County, it comes as no surprise that parents would suggest college expenses are a major concern. In fact, each participant brought up the subject of money when discussing their child’s academic future. These responses often displayed a hyperbolic understanding of college expenses and entrance requirements:

**Interviewer:** Would you consider allowing your child to go to an out-of-state college?

**Woman #2:** “No. I’m cheap (followed by laughter). Seriously though, out-of-state tuition is double or triple the regular cost. I just don’t think it is necessary. A degree from [West Virginia] is just as good as one from anywhere else. I don’t see the sense in paying $30,000 or $40,000 a semester when your degree ain’t a lick better than one you can get around here” (qtd. in Snyder 96).

**Interviewer:** What would you say is the #1 factor that keeps Webster County students from going to college?

**Woman #4:** “The high school doesn’t teach enough. The slower kids can’t make the mark you need on that test. That test you need [to take] go to college. The teachers aren’t helping them study for it. That’s why they’re making low marks. I think money is a big problem too. Most people in this area don’t
have a lot of money. They can’t afford those tests. College costs too much for us poor folk” (qtd. in Snyder 96).

In the above segments, it is important to note that several misconceptions are taking place. To begin, the first participant seems stunningly misinformed about the cost of out-of-state tuition. Throughout the interview process parents recurrently expressed the notion that West Virginia colleges were the only realistic option for West Virginia students. In fact, 10 of the 11 participants stated that they would discourage their children from going to college in another state. Each of these 10 participants cited high tuition as the reason for their stance. What I was unable to fully grasp while examining this data the first time around was the obvious fact that participants were limiting the educational choices of their children because of both social and economic circumstances. The educational choices of these potential first-generation college students were being limited or narrowed as a result of their belief that out-of-state tuition is an insurmountable obstacle for Webster County families. There is, of course, some truth to this assertion. Out-of-state tuition is more expensive. However, my participants did not demonstrate a clear understanding of out-of-state tuition fees. I also came away from this study with the impression that many Webster County parents discourage the pursuit of an out-of-education because of social reasons. In other words, these parents discourage their children from attending out-of-state institutions because of financial reasons but are also quite resistant to the idea of their children leaving the state. Therefore, even the most ambitious of Webster County students is given a narrow set of institutions to choose from. West Virginia is a small Appalachian state and has limited college opportunities for in-state students.
To understand the problematic nature of these attitudes, one must consider the average income of families from this area. The median household income falls slightly over $21,000 and a staggering 31.8% of families in this region live below the poverty level (2000). If a family that earns less than $30,000 per year honestly believes that the cost of a college semester exceeds this amount, then it would only seem logical that they would discourage their child from pursuing an out-of-state education. None of my participants were able to discuss specific tuition rates at out-of-state institutions. It is also important to note that none of the parents interviewed mentioned any form of financial aid or scholarship program during the interview process. Participants also seemed to be misinformed about ACT and SAT standardized testing requirements. Woman #4’s comments suggest that she mistakenly assumes that students who did not meet a certain requirement on these tests are unable to apply for college admission. Once again, the idea that only exceptionally intelligent individuals belong in college is clearly expressed. The participant’s inability to name the tests or testing fees also exemplifies an obvious lack of understanding of this process. On the other hand, her assertion that the school system is to blame may indeed contain some merit.

Though one can easily make that the argument that schools fail to inform parents of admission requirements, scholars Erica Chenoweth and Renee Galliher suggest that “regional isolation sometimes prevents accessibility of information and assistance” for students attending rural public schools. Chenoweth and Galliher suggest high school personnel from rural Appalachia often find it difficult to obtain and maintain access to admission requirements and financial aid information for various colleges located outside
the region. Assuming our public schools are just as misinformed as these parents seems quite troubling. My conclusion, at the time of this study, was that some form of dialog between parents, counselors, and universities needed to be established in the area. Many families in this area do not have internet access in their homes and are therefore unable to easily search for the answers to their tuition concerns. Students cannot succeed in college if they do not understand the financial realities of such an endeavor.

*Fear of the Outsider: The Insider/Outsider Mentality*

The isolationist attitudes of Webster County parents can be attributed to the region’s apparent lack of diversity. This lack of exposure to different cultures has seemingly given birth to a “fear of the outsider.” This belief suggests that citizens of Webster County are somehow sheltered from the dangerous individuals who exist in the world. This fear is clearly expressed in the following excerpts:

**Interviewer:** Do you have any concerns about your child going to college?

**Woman #2:** “Safety. I worry about her getting hurt. You hear about girls getting raped at those bars and clubs. It’s awful. There are some real sleazy people lurking around just waiting to take advantage of some innocent little country girl” (qtd. in Snyder 98).

**Woman #4:** “The shape of the world these days. It’s wicked out there. There are so many things that can happen. You just want to protect your kids from it all” (qtd. in Snyder 98).

During the interview process individuals from areas other than Webster County were often depicted in a derogatory manner. Here the description of “sleazy people” is juxtaposed with the “innocent” identity that this participant associates with the people of her home county. Although I was, at the time, able to pinpoint this fear, I wish that I had discussed the social consequences of such a fear in a more sophisticated manner. This is
not to suggest that college campuses are not always danger-free, violence against college-going women is all too common in the United States. The horrific incidents at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University have also changed American conceptions of campus safety. However, I was bothered by assumptions that life in Webster County is somehow safer than life on a college campus as well as comments suggesting that attending college may not be worth the risk to one’s safety.

It is also important to note that the first participant in this excerpt immediately associated “bars and clubs” with college life. With no mention of libraries or dormitories, her perspective seems strongly influenced by the evening news. The second participant clearly exhibits this same fear. Her “wicked” description of the world seems to be reserved for only areas outside of Webster County. Subtly, her comments infer that her child will somehow be protected by staying within the county limits. For many Webster County natives, the media is the only connection they have to college life. This can be problematic in several ways. For instance, the media typically reports crimes, such as rape or murder, which occur around college campuses. If this is the only information parents are receiving about college then it should come to no surprise that they are discouraging their children from enrolling.

Hollywood’s portrayal of Appalachian life may be equally to blame for this latent distrust for the “outsider.” Because Appalachians are frequently stereotyped as “hillbillies,” scholars Chenoweth and Galliher suggest that generations of West Virginians grown to distrust the general American community: for this reason, West Virginians often “strive to preserve their isolated lifestyle for fear of rejection.” The
Hillbilly as monster and Hillbilly as fool traditions, discussed in Chapter 2, are also responsible for a certain amount of shame Appalachians face when venturing outside of the region. Their accents are mocked and their culture reduced to the famous rape scene in *Deliverance*. Many Appalachian students arrive on college campuses with this unhealthy distrust of people who do not share their same cultural values.

From MTV to “Animal House”: The Rebellious Lives of College Students

Throughout the interview process, participants made numerous references to the media and television programs that promote an image of college life as wild and rebellious. Quite often, parents involved in this study were unable to separate college life from teenage rebellion. These parents often viewed college as nothing more than a party spot for rambunctious teens. In fact, all eleven parents brought up the subject of partying during the interview. An unmistakable contempt for MTV and other pop culture outlets was brought to the forefront by their concerns:

Interviewer: Do you have any concerns about your child going to college?

Man #2: “Yes. Partying. I worry about her going crazy when she isn’t under daddy’s roof anymore. The peer pressure is so bad these days. A lot of these good kids get messed up. If she is in her room trying to study and a bunch of kids come in and say ‘hey, lets go out’ what is she going to do? She is going to go. I’m not stupid. I see those shows she watches on MTV. Kids emulate that stuff” (qtd. in Snyder 98).

Man #3: “As a parent, I worry about the party atmosphere. The party scene. It’s the only reason most of these kids go [to college]. They see it on television every night” (qtd. in Snyder 98).

These participants directly associate peer pressure with college life. In both instances, they seem to partly blame television for the creation of this “party atmosphere”. Not only do these parents feel they have to worry about other students providing a negative
example, they have to worry about the nightly influence of television. These parents also
tend to hold this “party scene” responsible for the past collegiate failures of Webster
County students:

Interviewer: What would you say is the #1 factor that keeps Webster County students
from succeeding in college?

Woman #5: “They party too much. That’s what gets them into trouble. There is
nothing to do around here, so when they actually get somewhere they go
nuts. It’s a lack of resources. They have lived in this hole in the ground all
their life and don’t know any better” (qtd. in Snyder 99).

Woman #5’s willingness to categorize Webster County as a “hole in the ground,” serves
as an excellent example of the self-denigrating attitudes some residents foster in regard to
their hometown region. This excerpt also suggests that some Webster County parents are
overly concerned with the past failures of local students. What these participants neglect
to mention are the numerous obstacles that first-generation college students must
overcome in the pursuit of a postsecondary education. The party atmosphere becomes the
only reason for academic failure. Although this may indeed be the case in some instances,
research shows that financial problems, culture-shock, and academic issues also play a
huge part in a first-generation college student’s success.

*Education v. Manual Labor: In Search of Pragmatic Career Options*

The majority of parents interviewed seemed to favor manual labor jobs over those
that require a postsecondary education. These parents expressed high praise for the high
school’s vocational education program. Their comments subtly suggest that the school’s
core curriculum does not prepare students for “the real world”: 
Interviewer: Do you think the high school should provide more vocational options?

**Woman #2:** “Oh yeah. Sure. My oldest boy is going to take vo-tech next year. His friends love it. They can get their [welding] certificate after two years. I say it’s a good deal. There needs to be things in school that can help students get ready for the workforce” (qtd. in Snyder 101).

**Woman #4:** “Yes. I think it helps them learn skills that can help them get jobs. Well, it all comes back to opportunity. They offer students opportunity. They can get a good job by learning a trade. I think they are good” (qtd. in Snyder 101).

**Woman #8:** “Yes. It provides the students with a way to make a living. Let’s face it, this town isn’t computerized. This is our modern way of life. Some of these kids don’t have any business going to college. That’s the Webster County blues but that’s the way it is” (qtd. in Snyder 101).

These disturbing comments suggest that a high school education does not prepare students for the workforce. It appears as if these parents consider a standard education impractical or useless. According to these parents, “skills” are directly linked to physical labor. The last participant’s comments seem especially troubling. This is because she blatantly suggests that the majority of Webster County students do not belong in college. This defeatist attitude creates the assumption that Webster County students should accept their fate. Though parents apparently appreciate the value of a vocational education, they often expressed little interest in improving the school’s core curriculum:

Interviewer: Do you think the high school should focus more on college preparation?

**Woman #2:** “I guess they are. They have honors classes that are harder. I’m not sure, but I think they still have gifted [program] too” (qtd. in Snyder 101).

**Woman #4:** “I don’t know. I guess that’s what they [the high school] are doing” (qtd. in Snyder 101).

These indifferent attitudes carry very important underlying messages. By assuming that college preparation consists of difficult courses reserved for only exceptional students,
these parents are ignoring the importance of understanding financial aid and scholarship programs. Only two of the eleven parents interviewed were passionate about the college preparation programs in their child’s high school. These men seemed to express their beliefs with conviction:

Interviewer: Do you think the high school should focus more on college preparation?

**Man #2:** “Yes, I think all kids deserve a shot at going to college. They need to have some sort of class that helps kids get ready for college. God knows the parents aren’t going to do it. I think kids need to learn about how to do a job interview too. When I went for my job interview at [the coalmines] I was scared to death. I didn’t have no idea what they were going to ask me…that’s another thing. I would like to see the kids have to take some sort of speech class. So they wouldn’t be ashamed when they have to go out and communicate in the real world. Me, I can’t get up in front of anyone and talk. I get too damn embarrassed.” (qtd. in Snyder 102)

**Man #3:** “Yes I do. They don’t tell them what they need to do to get ready for college. When I was a senior I thought about going to college. I went to the counselor’s office and asked [the counselor] what all I needed and she printed me off this thing off the computer and said ‘here you go’. Not another word. Well, I looked at that sheet and didn’t know half of what it was talking about. I threw that [piece of paper] in the garbage and was on my way. It would have took me all year to get that stuff ready. You see, nobody talked to me about college. Not my parents. Nobody. They need to at least see what’s out there.” (qtd. in Snyder 102)

These comments suggest that some Webster County natives are aware of the cultural disadvantages which plague local students. In both instances, these individuals call for a change in the school system. Their perspectives show that they are conscious of the benefits of an academic education. In the case of the first individual, he realizes that his vocational education was somewhat incomplete. His comments suggest that a high school education is necessary to function within society. The second individual, more specifically, demands that parents and school system authorities should inform students
of the college admissions process. Both parents are essentially making the claim that all students, regardless of their intelligence, deserve to know the facts about college.

**Gender Roles**

Webster County parents often view the workforce in a gender specific manner. These parents often expect their male children to work at jobs which require some form of manual labor. Females, on the other hand, are expected by parents to work at jobs which are traditionally feminine. For instance, males often worked at jobs which can be labeled as masculine (coal miner, logger, truck driver). Females, on the other hand, seem more apt to become homemakers. Those women who do work often hold jobs which will allow them to care for their children (teacher, cook, house keeper). It appears that both fathers and mothers tend to attach these gender roles to their children:

Interviewer: What type of career do you see your child pursuing?

**Woman #2:** “I would like to see her become a teacher. They make good money for a woman. They get the summers off. You can be with your kids. When your kids are old enough to go to school, you are right there with them. If they need something, you are right there in the same building” (qtd. in Snyder 103).

This parent, in particular, immediately assumes that her daughter is going to have children. She also assumes that her daughter will teach in the same school that her child will attend. This perspective infers that motherhood should be the main career goal for Webster County females. Fathers also tend to view their daughter’s future occupations in this same gender specific manner:

**Man #1:** “I would like to see her become a nurse. Her mother wants her to be a teacher but I think she should go into nursing. There’s just no money in teaching” (qtd. in Snyder 103).
It should be noted that Man #1 and his wife are encouraging their daughter to take up occupations (nursing and teaching) that have been historically viewed as gendered professions in American culture. Boys, on the other hand, are often encouraged to pursue jobs that do not require a college education.

**Woman #4:** “He says he wants to be a police officer. He has a cousin who works at a prison, so he might do something like that. I would say he will do something with law” (qtd. in Snyder 103).

**Woman #5:** “My husband is a mechanic. I could see [my son] going into something like that. He is like his daddy. Not much of the school type” (qtd. in Snyder 103).

History shows that viewing the workforce in a gender specific manner can lead to social and economic inequality. In 2005, when Lawrence Summers, President of Harvard University, argued that women were underrepresented in the sciences because of “innate sex differences” our nation was reminded of the fact that many American thinkers continue to view education and career-training in a stereotypically gender-specific fashion (qtd. in Peril 13). Although I cannot argue that Webster County parents force their children into traditionally gendered occupations, I do feel these comments suggest that some parents do encourage their children to pursue occupations that are traditionally viewed as gender-specific.

**The Trials and Tribulations of First Year College Students:**

More often than not, participants tended to be overly critical of college dropouts from their region. The majority of these parents infer that partying is the only reason for academic failure. Though this may be the case for many students, these parents seem uninformed of the disadvantages that face first-generation college students that might
impact their success. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics released a report that highlighted the characteristics of first-generation college students. The report suggested that first-generation college students are more likely to work while attending school (“United States”). Though working while going to school full time may seem like a good idea for many first-generation students, doing so undoubtedly adds pressure to the already hectic transition to college life. When considering this information, it seems only plausible to assume that this particular phenomenon could be just as accurately responsible for the academic failures of at least some Webster County students.

At no point during the interview process did parents blame the failures of recent college dropouts on academic or intellectual immaturity. Researchers Dennis Carroll and Chen Xianglei report that “first generation college students are at a consistent academic disadvantage after entering postsecondary education” (53). Carroll and Xianglei argue that first generation college students “complete fewer credits, take fewer academic courses, earn lower grades, need more remedial assistance, and are more likely to withdraw from or repeat courses” (53). As a result, Carroll and Xianglei suggest “the likelihood of attaining a bachelor’s degree is lower for first-generation students compared to their peers whose parents attended college” (53). This is not to suggest that first-generation college students are not intellectually capable: many first-generation college students do succeed at the college level. However, educators and university administrators must continue to work toward better understanding the social and economic factors behind Carroll and Xianglei’s conclusions. Parents, on the other hand, need to become aware of the fact that most first-generation college students struggle to make the transition from high school to college. Regardless of their success in high school, all first generation students should be aware of the tutoring programs and help opportunities offered by the universities that they attend.
Ernest Pascarella argues that first-generation college students face problems that exceed the boundaries of academia:

Not only do first-generation students confront all the anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties of any college student, their experiences often involve substantial cultural as well as social and academic transitions. (252)

A sudden feeling of culture shock can be quite traumatic for students from the rural Appalachian region. It is important that students from these regions are educated about different cultures and ethnic backgrounds before attempting to immerse themselves into the multicultural world of college life. In my opinion, implementing courses on contemporary world religion, popular culture, current events, and international studies into the core high school curriculum would be a terrific first step in combating this particular social problem. Not only do these students have difficulty adjusting to different surroundings, they often possess a limited understanding of how college works. For instance, Pasarella argues that “first-generation students are more likely to be handicapped in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making beneficial decisions about such things as the kinds of academic and social choices to make while in attendance” (252). It is important that parents of first-generation college students, especially those from rural Appalachia, take into consideration the various educational, economic, and social problems their students will likely face when attempting to succeed in academia.

**Recommendations**

After completing my research and coming to the conclusions outlined in the above sections, I chose to end the article by briefly outlining my recommendations in
regard to parental involvement and first-generation college students from rural Appalachia. Below is an excerpt from my recommendations section:

*Immersed in culture which deemphasizes the worth of a college diploma, Webster County parents often discourage their children from pursuing a postsecondary education. Before this cycle of economic and educational deprivation can be broken several steps must be taken. First, the school system needs to implement some sort of course which informs students of the college enrollment process. A specific version of this course should be created for each grade level. This hypothetical course should not only inform students of financial aid and scholarship opportunities but also data concerning college expenses in general. A section of this course should be designated to informing high school students of the ethnic and cultural differences of others. For such a program to work, the school system must make an effort to inform parents of this information. Class trips to various colleges and universities around the state could also be extremely beneficial. My hope is that the recognition of these distinctly un-educational attitudes will somehow spark change in my hometown. I truly love the people of Webster County. This is why I fear for their future. I want to see other trailer park children rise from the mountains and realize their dreams. I want to free these prisoners from this underlying sense of helplessness which has polluted our minds. For us to prosper when must first separate ourselves from this societal illusion and realize that there is indeed nothing holding us back.* (Snyder 104)

I was perhaps being hyperbolic in my suggestion that, in reality, there was “indeed nothing holding us back” (Snyder 20). If fact, a variety of material factors hold first-generation college students from Appalachia back, parental involvement being only one small factor contributing to the college enrollment dilemma. During the past few years I have begun to focus my work on the role of rhetoric within social systems. I have begun to consider how ideology or worldview play a part in cyclical poverty, just has how byproducts of capitalism play a part in Appalachian poverty. This study, although far from brilliant or perfect, did serve as an embryo to my later academic pursuits. The data forced me to consider education as a life-long process as oppose to something that merely happens in a college classroom. The data reminded me of why I was initially drawn
toward critical theory and critical pedagogy. It is the process of recognizing and critiquing one’s place within the world that I found especially liberating. After studying the educational attitudes of parents from my region, I began drafting plans to study first-generation college students from this same region. I felt as if my “Webster County Blues” study demonstrated some of the problems students faced before coming to college. Now, I wanted to create a study that highlighted some of the unique struggles these students face upon entering academia. The result of this ambition was, “College is not a Fairytale”: Listening to the Voices of First-Generation College Students from Rural Appalachia.” Although the study does have his limitations, I do believe the study moves us closer to educational issues at hand.

“College is not a Fairytale”: Listening to the Voices of First-Generation College Students from Rural Appalachia

Introduction

Academia is much like a costly four-year resort. Some clients plan in advance for their stay. Others find themselves trying to book a room at the last minute. While some clients pay up front, most have to borrow money to visit the facilities. Many of these individuals possess little more than a vague familiarity of the policies and procedures of the resort. They have yet to learn the lingo of our establishment. The hotels they have visited in the past pale in comparison to the landscape of academia. As composition instructors, our duty is to work the front desk. We greet customers as soon as they walk through the doors. Management asks us to give clients the specific directions that will allow them to maneuver through the facilities. Our ability to give these directions is of utmost importance. If we confuse clients or allow them to wander aimlessly they will
likely make a wrong turn. Some will eventually find their way; others will grow weary of their new surroundings and decide to leave the facilities prematurely.

Beginning one’s college career is a daunting task, even for the most privileged of college students. The transition from high school to college is one that marks a ceremonial right-of-passage from adolescence to adulthood in the lives of young Americans. For the first-generation college student, however, such a transition is one cloaked in mystery. These students are entering an uncharted territory. As front desk workers, instructors of introductory composition, it is our obligation to familiarize ourselves with the various problems these students face. We must familiarize ourselves with our clientele, so to speak. Archival historians such as James Berlin and Bob Connors have charted the history of our discipline as one tied to the first-year composition course. Our field has grown and flourished as a result of scholars who were keenly aware of the educational problems beginning college students face. Ours is also a field that, in the past 25 years, has also begun to explore the inequalities that minority and marginalized student groups face in the academy. Geneva Smitherman’s *Talkin and Testifyin*, Victor Villanueva’s *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, Shirley Brice Health’s *Ways With Words*, and Harriet Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations* have each, in their own unique way, turned our attention to the problems of students who have been *othered* by society. This project is an attempt to bring both aspects of our discipline’s rich tradition back into the contemporary conversation.

At this point in my career, I am deeply interested in pinpointing the problems that first-generation college students face attempting to write their way into the academy. I
am also dedicated to exposing the economic, social, cultural, and educational difficulties that Appalachian students encounter as well. These two student groups, although not mutually exclusive, are indeed difficult to separate. Many rural Appalachian college students are first-generation college students. However, I will admit that my focus, in this study, is somewhat influenced by my own experiences as a first-generation college student from rural Appalachia. My ethnographic work often focuses on Appalachian students from rural lower-middle class and lower class backgrounds. Therefore, my work sometimes ignores the experiences of urban Appalachians students as well as Appalachian students from normative or privileged backgrounds. As a scholar following in the rich tradition of critical pedagogy, I am interested in the liberatory aspect of education. I am interested in paideia\textsuperscript{14}, the ancient Greek term often touted by scholar Cornel West. My scholarly inquiries are also personal inquiries. To examine ones life with a critical eye is, in my opinion, a difficult but immensely important aspect of being a critical thinker. As a teacher, I want to discover pedagogical techniques that allow my students to engage in paideia. Therefore, I want to discover how training in rhetoric and composition can improve the lives of my students, be it in the job market or in their everyday encounters with the world. My work is influenced by my own liberatory experiences in academia. My life has been forever transformed, for the better, as a result of critical-rhetorical teaching practices. I admit that my own work is sometimes selfishly focused on discovering the nuances of such a transformation, in my own life and in the

\textsuperscript{14} In “Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud,” Cornel West describes paideia as “deep education that connects you to profound issues in serious ways. It instructs us to turn our attention from the superficial to the substantial, from the frivolous to the serious. Paideia concerns the cultivation of self, the ways you engage your own history, your own memories, your own mortality, your own sense of what it mans to be alive as a critical, living, aware human being” (22).
lives of my students. In this sense, my work can never be seen as unbiased. My work, be it ethnographic or theoretical, is deeply personal.

While the scholarly conversation regarding first-year composition is one with a long history, the same cannot be said for conversations regarding Appalachian college students in the first-year composition classroom. Until recently, the field of rhetoric and composition has ignored its Appalachian students. The field has assumed they are no different than their peers, or has at least assumed the difference is too small to matter. In the rich tradition of our field’s most prominent and respected journals, *College English* and *College Composition and Communication*, only two articles concerning Appalachian students have made it into publication: Katherine Keller Sohn’s “Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia” and Jennifer Beech’s “Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Composition Classroom.” With the publication of these articles, however, conversations in our field have begun to change. In 2006, Amy Winans’ “Local Pedagogies and Race: Interrogating White Safety in the Rural College Classroom” was prominently featured in an NCTE book-length project. In 2007, *The Community Literacy Journal* featured an entire issue regarding Appalachian literacy, an issue that I am proud to be a part of. In 2009, *Composition Studies* featured “Places of Composition: Writing Contexts in Appalachian Ohio” a case study written by my good friend and colleague Nathan Shepley. As the conversation of Appalachian experience continues to gain momentum in our field, I would like to turn our attention to a new direction. First-generation college students from rural Appalachia face a unique set of obstacles when making the transition from high school to college-level learning. These students also face a series of cultural
and economic roadblocks when attempting to transition from rural Appalachia to the Ivory Tower. This study, more so than any of my previous work, is an attempt to highlight and diagnose these problems and roadblocks. Although I believe critical-rhetorical pedagogy has the potential to benefit the lives of students from this region, I hesitate to outline a collection of pedagogical remedies before first exploring these roadblocks in a detailed and scrupulous manner.

This analytic autoethnographic case study, one that follows two first-generation college students from rural Appalachia through their semester in college, is a reminder to both teachers and scholars that it is important to listen to the voices of their students. It is important to document the experiences of students learns as they attempt to find themselves within the university system. This is especially important when considering the experiences of minority or non-normative student populations. I offer my personal experiences in this project for two reasons. First, doing so allows me to better understand and critique my own ideological worldview and position within the academy. Second, doing so allows me to shape and craft my own “insider meaning” in regard to Appalachian experience and exploitation. I offer the voices of my participants to the field of rhetoric and composition for two separate reasons as well. First, I want those outside the region to better understand this population of citizens who have been marginalized by mainstream society and sometimes forgotten by critical educators. Second, I want those who do reside within the region, or its surrounding areas, to consider these problems and work toward solutions. I seek the help of my fellow teachers and scholars within the field because I, in my own limited experience as a teacher and scholar, am unable to craft a
utopian pedagogical approach that will rescue economically poor first-generation college students from their circumstances. I am one voice among many. My own journey, the road less traveled, from the trailer park to the ivory tower does, however, demonstrate that it is possible for first-generation college students from rural Appalachia to transcend the material circumstances of their lives. This ethnographic study, despite its flaws and limitations, does serve as a public documentation of such a struggle. As a reader, I ask you to listen to the voices of my participants. Take their struggle seriously and consider how ours, a field rich in theory and pedagogy, might address the needs of these students. In doing so, we, as a field, can begin and continue new conversations regarding Appalachian experience in the Burkian parlor conversation of rhetoric and composition.

Participants

Below is a brief description of both case study participants. Each participant was given a pseudonym of their own choosing. The names of their respective educational institutions have also been changed. I have also changed the names of the towns in which these schools are located. Only the names of each participant’s hometown remain unchanged.

Participant #1: Marshall

Marshall is an eighteen year old male from Cowen, West Virginia. His father, a high school dropout, is a truck driver for a local coalmining company. Marshall’s mother, who is currently unemployed, graduated from Webster County High School in 1977. His older brother, currently employed at the same coalmine as his father, is a 2002 graduate of this same high school. Marshall is a very soft-spoken young man. He is polite and
speaks gently. However, Marshall reminds me of myself in the sense that once you get him talking he becomes more extrovert than introvert.

Organized school sports are a huge part of Marshall’s life. During his senior year in high school Marshall lettered in basketball, football, and baseball. It was during his days on the playing field that Marshall decided he was going to become a high school coach. In order to obtain this goal, Marshall would have to first become a teacher. This dream led to Marshall becoming the first member of his family to pursue a college diploma. When I first met with Marshall, he was six days away from his first week as a college freshman. His institution of choice was Fathom State University. Located in Fairtown, West Virginia, Fathom State University is a small Appalachian school nestled in a small Appalachian college town. According to Fathom State University’s official website, the town has a population of fewer than 20,000 residents while the university has an enrollment of just over 7,000 students. Previously known as Fathom State College, the school was granted university status in 2004. It should also be noted that Fairmont State University is located exactly 108 miles from Marshall’s home in Cowen, West Virginia.

Participant #2: Tina

Tina is an eighteen-year-old female from Webster Springs, West Virginia. Her father, a local Methodist preacher, is a graduate of Webster County High School. Tina’s mother, a worker at a local nursing home, is also a graduate of this same school. It should be pointed out that these individuals are not Tina’s biological parents. Tina was adopted when she was an infant and has no contact with her biological parents; this was a story that Tina shared with me almost instantly. Unlike Marshall, Tina was not involved in
high school athletics or social clubs. Instead, Tina pegs herself as more of an “outsider.” I
found this self-description fascinating because my first impression of Tina was that she,
like Marshall, was much more of an extrovert than introvert. To me, Tina seemed like the
kind of student who would be involved in various school-sanctioned social activities.

Tina appeared to be the more academically prepared of the two subjects. She was
ranked eighth in her graduating high school class and was a member of the National
Honors Society. Tina describes herself as a “heavy reader,” and suggests that religion
plays a tremendous role in her life. Her career goal is to become an elementary school
teacher. Though she is uncertain of which grade she would like to teach, she does
recognize that she would like to work with younger children. When I met Tina, she was
finishing up her final week of work at her summer job as a clerk at a local grocery store.
At this point, Tina was less than a week away from her first day as a college student.
Tina’s institution of choice is West Virginia Christian College; located in Buckington,
West Virginia, a town with just over 5,000 residents. According to West Virginia
Christian College’s official website, the school has an enrollment of just over 1,200
students. It should also be pointed out that WVCC is a small liberal arts school affiliated
with the United Methodist Church. The school’s campus is located exactly 84 miles from
Tina’s home in Webster Springs.

**Materials Used**

Initial face-to-face interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed to assure
the accuracy of participant comments. During the course of the first semester, participants
were sent three separate Microsoft Word documents. Each document contained five
questions regarding their academic experiences: I will later refer to these documents as E-Journal questions. Quotes from E-Journals have been copied word-for-word from these documents.

**Activities and Procedures**

Participants were interviewed in person on separate days and times. During the initial interview, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions. These questions pertained to their high school writing experience, confidence as a writer, and concerns about college life in general. My goal was to capture the mindset of the first-generation college student from rural Appalachia has he or she is set to enter the academy. During the academic school year, 4 e-mails were sent to participants during the semester. The first set of questions came 3 weeks into the semester. The second set of questions came 6 weeks into the semester, the third set of questions came 9 weeks into the semester, and the final set of questions were e-mailed one week after final exams had been conducted at each participants respective institution. Each E-Journal contained 3 questions (12 total questions). Participants wrote their answers in the Microsoft Word Document and e-mailed it back to me. I had no further contact with participants about their answers. My goal was to let their answers serve as a journal entry into their mindset during their first year in college.

**Analysis of Face-to-Face Interview Responses**

After recording and transcribing participant responses to the initial face-to-face interviews, I began coding the data by looking for examples of familism, localism, and historicism. I get these terms from scholars Erica Chenoweth and Renee Galliher’s
influential study “Factors Influencing College Aspirations of Rural West Virginia Students,” perhaps the first ethnographic study to focus on the college-going decisions of West Virginia youth. Chenoweth and Galliher highlight three cultural factors that seem specific to the region: “familism, localism, and historicism” (29). Familism is a concept that applies to students who have had very few, if any, college graduates in their family. For these students, college is uncharted territory. Localism is a term given to students who consciously plan on living in their specific region for the rest of their lives. This, of course, has a direct influence on their willingness to leave home to attend college. Historicism pertains to a student whose entire family resides within their home state. For Chenoweth and Galliher, these students come to see themselves as part of a history within their respective communities. Because I could strongly relate to the findings of Chenoweth and Galliher’s study, I used these terms as a means of coding the responses of my participants.

After conducting the interviews, all references to family relations and friendships were grouped together as examples of familism. All references to local histories that seemed to be tied to life in West Virginia were labeled and grouped together as examples of historicism. In separating and analyzing these various responses, I was able to uncover many behavioral and socio-cultural commonalities. The following charts contain questions and transcribed responses from this initial face-to-face interview. These responses serve as clear examples of Chenoweth and Galliher’s definitions of familism, localism, and historicism.
These responses clearly suggest that the unique brand of “familism” discussed in Chenoweth and Galliher’s study is present in the lives of these participants. More often than not, participants chose to depict their parents as helpless spectators to the college admissions process. Because these students cannot turn to their parents for answers, they...
often look to friends for explanations. In fact, these participants also seem willing to give their friends credit for their college acceptance. When listening to their responses it becomes quite clear that these participants view their friends as a support system. At no point during the interview did participants suggest that school officials or family members played a positive role in their college enrollment process. Unfortunately, participants gave little indication of whether or not their parents or guardians have actually encouraged their college aspirations. Instead, we are given only references to financial aid disputes and quarrels. From these statements one can infer that both Marshall and Tina’s parents were quite apprehensive about the financial aspects of the college enrollment process. Though references to family and finances dominated this initial interview, a localized concept of “home” was also clearly present.

Table 2

**Interview Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Localism</th>
<th>Marshall</th>
<th>Tina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Did location have any influence on your choice of institution?</em></td>
<td>“No. Not really. I looked at a lot of schools [in West Virginia]. No. I didn’t really care about it being far from Cowen.”</td>
<td>“No. I pretty much decided that I was going to have to go away regardless of where I picked.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Did you visit your college before deciding to attend? If so, what factors made this institution a desirable choice?</em></td>
<td>“Yeah, I did a campus visit with Daniel [a friend]. We both thought it looked cool. We didn’t want to go to a big school. So, I guess size. It wasn’t too big and it was close to home.”</td>
<td>“I went once with my mom and once with Kara. I liked it because it was not too far away. It was close to home. I wouldn’t say it was a major factor. I really just wanted small classes were my professors could interact with me personally. It seemed safe. Easy to get around.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These responses suggest that participants are blind to the fact that cultural isolation plays a huge part in their college choices, behaviors, and attitudes. During the interview both participants initially stated that location had nothing to do with their choice of institution. Their future responses, on the other hand, suggest otherwise. Both Marshall and Tina seem drawn to their respective institutions because they closely mirror the small town atmosphere they have grown accustomed to. Their responses also suggest that they have intentionally chosen intuitions that are located within close proximity of Webster County. It is important to note that both Marshall and Tina constantly use the exact phrase “close to home” when discussing their choice of institution. From these responses one can infer that “home” plays a huge part in this process. Ironically, both Marshall and Tina seem hesitant to admit that their choices are influenced by location. When closely analyzing their comments it became evident that participants felt a strong tie to their home regions. Quite often, their comments suggested that they see themselves as part of a family history within Webster County.
Table 3

*Interview Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historicism</th>
<th>Marshall</th>
<th>Tina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Briefly describe your reasons for choosing your academic major.*           | “My dad played ball at Webster, my brother played ball at Webster, my cousins played ball. You know, I just think it would be really cool to come back [from college] and coach here. It would be cool if I could coach my kids here one of these days.” | “There are tons of teachers [at Webster] about to retire. There should be so many openings by the time I get out. I think it would be amazing. Teaching in the same school I went to.” |}

| *On a scale of (1-10) rate your anxiety about college life in general. What factors make you anxious or nervous about your transition into college?* | “6 or 7. There is nothing I am going crazy about. I realize that I am going to have to get used to a new place and different kinds of people. But it’s really not that big of a deal. It’s just four years.” | “10. I have a big fear of being away from home. I am worried about living around people I do not know. I love the idea of living in a new place but I like my parents and friends around me. I admire people who can just pick up and move but that is not me.” |}

Although Marshall recognizes that he is breaking a family tradition by pursuing a college degree, it is clear that he sees himself as a part of a history within Webster County. His goal is to not leave Webster, obtain a college degree, and find a great job. Rather, his goal is to leave Webster, obtain a college degree, and return home. Marshall recognizes that his family has roots in this county. His responses suggest that he is reluctant to start anew in another county, state, or region. Marshall seemingly calms this fear of leaving the protective isolation of his hometown by assuring himself that college will only last “four years,” and that he will one day be able to return. Tina’s responses also suggest that she sees herself returning home after college. Her hope that an abundance of local teachers will retire, thus making room for her, is similar to the unique
brand of historicism mentioned in Chenoweth and Galliher’s study. Tina does not acknowledge that things may not work out in Webster County and that she may have to find work elsewhere. This is a reality that she apparently refuses to recognize. Like Marshall, she hopes to one day return to her hometown with an elevated status. Though Tina claims to admire “people who can just pick up and move,” her comments suggest that she is not one of those people. She undoubtedly plans on returning to Webster County. Both Marshall and Tina displayed little confidence in their ability to leave their hometowns and adjust to a variety of cultural environments. Quite often, these fears were manifested when discussing their writing identities.

Table 4

**Interview Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Identity</th>
<th>Marshall</th>
<th>Tina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>How would you rate your confidence as a writer?</em></td>
<td>“I know I’m a decent writer. I’m not college material yet but I can get my ideas across.”</td>
<td>“I can do it but it hardly turns out to be what the other person wants.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel college writing will differ from the work you have completed in high school?</td>
<td>“I have been told that there will be no more two page essays. I guess they will be looking for both quality and quantity.”</td>
<td>“I have no idea how it will differ. I just know that it is going to be harder. I know that they are going to be looking for so much more.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you consider yourself a writer?</td>
<td>“Not really. I get stressed too easy. I’m not really that good at it.”</td>
<td>“I would love to write poetry or novels or stuff like that but I just can’t do it. I’m not poetic or creative.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe your general attitude toward writing?</td>
<td>“I guess you could say that I have a bad attitude toward writing. I always hated the topics we had to write about in high school.”</td>
<td>“I’m a big reader. I read everything I can get my hands on but I’m not much of a writer.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout the interview Marshall and Tina were reluctant to characterize themselves as writers. In fact, both participants displayed an almost self-deprecating modesty when talking about their writing identities. For example, Marshall is willing to give himself the title of “decent” writer but refuses to acknowledge that he is “college material.” This same uneasiness comes through when Tina suggests that she is neither “poetic,” nor “creative.” Judging from these statements one can easily infer that Marshall and Tina see themselves as anything but polished academic writers. Both Marshall and Tina struggled to describe the difference between college-level and high school writing. This uncertainty caused participants to view writing through a stereotypical lens. Especially for Tina, writing is an activity reserved for creative minds such as those of poets and novelists.

**Analysis of E-Journal Journal Responses**

Four times during the semester participants were asked to answer a short series of questions about their college experiences. After receiving these responses, I coded data by labeling and separating references to social and academic issues. For example, the first response questions asked participants to list three things that surprised them about college life. If a participant commented on the difficulty of making new friends the response was labeled as a social response. If participants were to answer the question by discussing class work or studying, the response was labeled as an academic response. After separating and analyzing these responses, I was able to find several commonalities. The following sections will explore how these responses can serve as a window into the
Appalachian cultural mindset. The following questions and responses were transcribed word-for-word for the original E-Journal documents.

**Findings: E-Journal Responses**

The first series of E-journal response questions were designed to uncover each participant’s general reaction to college life. Quite frequently, their responses suggest an obvious social anxiety:

**Q:** What has been the most difficult aspect of college-life thus far?

**Marshall:** The first thing that surprised me wasn’t anything to do within classes but it was the huge variety of people that there are. There are people here that you only think you would see on TV.

**Tina:** The social aspect of college life is much more difficult than the actual work. The portion of homework that I receive daily isn’t any different than high school. It’s living around different kinds of situations that makes things difficult from time to time. There is this one girl. It bothers me just seeing her. She has 3 piercings in her lip. She is one of those people who wear black lipstick and hang out in front of dorm buildings smoking all night. I know she is probably a decent person but I can’t help but feeling strange living around her. Sometimes I just want to scream or call my parents and have them pick me up (kidding).

These responses clearly suggest that both Marshall and Tina have experienced a version of culture shock that is common among students from rural Appalachian backgrounds.

Marshall’s suggestion that he is among the “kind” of people featured on television deserves serious consideration. This statement likely suggests that he has had little to no contact with individuals from various ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. His comments also suggest that he may hold a stereotypical view of these individuals based on his limited exposure to diverse cultures. Unfortunately, Tina’s comments about her pierced dorm mate seem to suggest the same. Like Marshall, Tina seems taken aback by
the cultural climate of her small liberal arts campus. More often than not, participants’ comments suggested that college life has been much different than they had anticipated:

**Q:** What was your initial impression of your college campus?

**Marshall:** I couldn’t believe the amount of alcohol and drugs that are available just by mentioning it to someone. People really have too much free time. I think it gets them into trouble. I really wasn’t ready for that side of things. I guess you have to be careful who you hang around with.

**Tina:** At first it seemed like there were just too many people. It felt like I was never going to get to know everyone. I felt like I was lost in the shuffle.

Once again, Marshall and Tina’s responses reflect a clear social anxiety. It appears that both participants have experienced some difficulty adjusting to life on campus. For Marshall, college life has seemingly brought about temptations and social dangers that he had not anticipated. These responses also demonstrate how Marshall and Tina sometimes “other” themselves when talking about their respective institutions and university peers.

As a fellow first-generation college student from Webster County, I can relate to these responses. I understand the fear of being “lost in the shuffle.” I also understand Marshall’s sudden realization that college life brings about new levels of social pressure. As an undergraduate, I often felt as if I were a visitor as rather than a true inhabitant of academia. These responses, in particular, reminded me of my feelings of academic otherness as an undergraduate student at Glenville.

The second series of questions were designed to discover the early writing experiences of participants. After reading these responses, I began to question whether or not Marshall and Tina had isolated themselves from their peers, professors, and university programs just as I had done as a freshman. During my first year of college, I
never visited my professors during officer hours. Nor did not have the intellectual
courage necessary to speak out in class. I also avoided campus tutoring programs, even
when I clearly understood that I needed assistance. My hometown community had taught
me to be a rugged individualist. After reading the second series of responses, I began to
see some slight similarities between my stubborn resistance to any form of university
assistance and the responses of my participants:

Q: Have you visited an academic writing center or any campus tutoring program this
semester? If so, describe the experience.

Marshall: I have yet to do either one of those. I am hoping to stay away from
tutoring unless things get bad. I’m not sure of any writing centers or anything like
that. If there is [a writing center] I haven’t heard of it yet.

Tina: No. Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that.

These responses indicate that participants are hesitant to reach out to university services
such as writing centers and tutoring programs. Though one could argue that these
responses are typical for college freshmen, I will suggest that these comments should be
taken seriously. Each year, writing centers and university tutoring programs keep
thousands of students academically afloat. The fact that both participants view these
services as punishment or spaces for unintelligent students is quite troubling. This is
especially true when considering the economic, social, and cultural disadvantages these
students face.

After receiving the last group of response questions for the semester, I was
shocked to learn that neither of my participants had composed a graded writing
assignment longer than five pages in length. Much to my surprise, both Marshall and
Tina were doing very little writing. In fact, both participants described their classrooms in
a lecture-based, authoritarian manner. To this point, their classroom activities have consisted of quizzes, multiple choice tests, and one page response papers. The small amount of writing that participants are doing is completely expository in nature. I was also surprised to learn that neither of my subjects had chosen to take their first-year writing requirement in this first semester. This, of course, made it very difficult for me to study their writing experiences during their first semester. Though Marshall and Tina’s comments have allowed me to get a glimpse of their initial academic experiences, social commentary has dominated their journal responses. More so than any discussion of academic anxiety, I was somewhat shocked to learn that neither Marshall nor Tina had spent a weekend at their college or university. Their early responses clearly indicate that they have much more on their minds than academics:

Q: How have your parents, family, and friends reacted to your first semester as a college student?

Marshall: My mom and dad are still not going good with it. They want me home. My mom calls wondering about me two or three times a day. It has also been difficult with [his girlfriend]. She is still a junior [in high school]. Sometimes I talk with them on the phone for about two or three hours every evening. This sucks when I have stuff to do. Sometimes I feel like I am being pulled both ways.

Tina: My parents really miss me, they aren’t really going crazy or anything like that. I leave on Thursdays at about 8:30 and come back on Mondays at about 1:00 or 2:00 in the evening. So, I really get to see them about five days a week. It’s good because I can still go to church with them and I really don’t have to miss out on their lives.

Marshall and Tina’s comments have caused me to wonder how many Appalachian families have inadvertently sabotaged the college careers of their children by encouraging them to come home each weekend to attend family functions and community activities.
Both Marshall and Tina are clearly “pulled” in different directions. On the one hand they are faced with a unique brand of culture shock that causes them to question whether or not they truly belong on their respective campuses. At the same time they are faced with the constant pull of their families and hometown communities. Though Marshall and Tina are actually a short distance from “home,” it is clear that they feel they have entered an entirely new world. In a sense, this has actually been the case. Academia has introduced them to a cultural environment that is in stark contrast to the mountain towns in which they were born.

I began the final series of E-Journal questions by asking Marshall and Tina to reflect on their first completed semester as a college student. In doing so, I quickly found that the economic realities of being a college student were begging to weigh heavily on the minds of my participants:

**Q:** Now that you have completed your first semester of college, discuss the biggest challenge you have faced as a college student.

**Marshall:** Staying on top of my work is a big challenge. You don’t have anyone there to make you do it but yourself. Getting use to the dorm is also a big challenge. I have had my fair share of roommate problems. Money is a big challenge too. By money I mean spending money and tuition money. I guess all of these are big challenges I have had to face this semester.

**Tina:** Learning how to manage my own finances was the most difficult challenge I faced. This year I had to learn how to take out a loan from a bank. I found it hard to budget my money. I had to keep in mind the funds I would need for living expenses and textbooks.

Both responses indicate clear social and financial anxieties. Less than two full weeks after the completion of their first semester, Marshall and Tina appeared to be coming to terms with the financial realities of their place within the academy. Like many college
students, Marshall and Tina are finding college to be an expensive endeavor. Student loans, financial aid, tuition fees, and meal plans are just as much a part of the college experience as attending class or studying in a library. These responses suggest that Marshall and Tina have been forced to adjust their social, cultural, educational, and financial habits in order to exist within the academy. This is a lesson that we, as educators, sometimes forget. The material realities of student lives influence their ability to join and exist within our unique social spaces. College students encounter a multitude of new influences and pressures before, during, and after they leave our classrooms.

In my final set of E-Journal questions, I found that both Marshall and Tina began to shape their academic identities in a variety of interesting ways. Marshall, it appeared, had begun to see his former self, the high school version of his self, differently. In his final set of answers, Marshall seems to be suggesting that he recognizes that he must become a different type of student, one with better study habits, if he is to exist within this new social space. Tina, on the other hand, is beginning to realize that her new college self must be one that is responsible and independent. It should also be noted, that in this final set of reflective questions, financial issues once again resurfaced in participant responses:

**Q:** Reflect on the most difficult aspect of being a college student?

**Marshall:** Money is the biggest worry for me but the most difficult aspect for me was changing study habits. Our high school never prepared us for the college level. Even some of the college classes I took in high school.

**Tina:** At first the hardest part of being a freshman was learning how to live on your own. No one is there to set a schedule for you. Every responsibility was mine, including finances. The class work was difficult but learning how to
manage money, set your own schedule, and how to navigate a new city proved to be more challenging.

Q: Has your first year of college changed the way you view yourself as a writer, or learner? In other words, what has college taught you about yourself?

Marshall: Yeah, it’s changed the way I view myself as a student. I don’t procrastinate as much. Because if I get behind then I can’t catch back up.

Tina: College has taught me that I am resourceful. I was on my own, I had to find a way to resolve any problems presented to me. This proved true for writing and learning.

These responses tell us several things about these two first-generation college students from rural Appalachia. First, we can see that financial, social, and cultural burdens weigh heavily on their minds. Second, we can see that both Marshall and Tina clearly believe they were not prepared for the academic aspect of college life, although both participants passed all of their classes. And, finally, Marshall and Tina remind us of that first-generation college students often harbor a sense of self-reliance that may prove to be problematic in the long run. Although college has taught Tina that she is “resourceful,” it has also reminded her that she is on her own. As is the case with many first-generation college students, Marshall and Tina tend to view themselves as disconnected from the institution. They struggle to operate within the system, to conform to its behavioral and educational standards. After initially reviewing these responses, I began to realize that both Marshall and Tina were not taking advantage of community or institutional resources, if such avenues existed in their respective towns. Instead, both participants seemed to be attempting to succeed on their own.

In my final two E-Journal questions, I asked Marshall and Tina to consider how this experience, their first semester in college, has changed the way they now view their
potential lives after college. I quickly found that one semester had squashed any utopian notions of life after school:

Q: Has your first year of college changed the way you think about your future career?

**Marshall:** College makes you think about your career differently. If you are going to put all of this time and work into a career you want it to be something that is going to pay off in the end. You don’t want to do all of this work for nothing.

**Tina:** Yes, I now have a realistic outlook on my future. People tell you that you can be what ever you want to be. However, things such as finances can greatly narrow down the window of opportunity. I had huge dreams coming out of high school and I now realize that achieving your goals is a step wise process that is filled with bumps in the road.

Q: If you were to advise a first-generation college student from Webster County, what would be your first piece of advice?

**Marshall:** My advice would have to be to relate back to studying. I would develop good study habits while in high school so you are somewhat prepared.

**Tina:** College isn’t a fairy tale. Go into it with a realistic mindset. Its hard work, so work hard… ALLL THE TIME. Take it seriously from day one.

Humbled by their academic experiences, Marshall and Tina are forced to become realists. College is a lucrative American business and Marshall and Tina have taken notice. No longer an abstract idea, college is a material reality in their lives. Both participants realize the large amount of work and sacrifice that will be necessary to maintain their exclusive memberships to the college world. Tina’s suggestion that “college isn’t a fairy tale” is extremely fascinating. One semester in college had apparently crushed Tina’s utopian notions of college-life. Marshall also seems reluctant to acknowledge his own place in the academy. Both Marshall and Tina were, at least in my opinion, beginning to realize their tenuous status as college students. For them, college is a difficult mountain to climb.
**Update**

Marshall and Tina began their academic careers during the Fall Semester of the 2007 / 2008 academic year. In the following section I will provide a brief update on each participant’s academic progress as of August 2010.

**Marshall**

After completing his freshman year at Fathom State College, Marshall transferred to a larger state university, located just over 20 miles from Fathom’s campus. Marshall suggest that his reasons for doing so where twofold. First, he was dissatisfied with the social aspect of his initial year at Fathom State University. Unable to make friends and find his place within the campus community, Marshall often found himself traveling 20 miles up the interstate to visit friends at the previously mentioned state university (let’s call this school Appalachian University). Second, Marshall also suggested that he found the small college atmosphere provided by Fathom’s campus to be somewhat anticlimactic. Marshall wanted to attend Division I college football games, tailgate, and go large campus parties and concerts. In other words, Marshall wanted to take part in all of the social activities that he expected to experience while working on toward his college education. Although Marshall’s reasons for transferring seem, on the surface, a bit shallow, I can fully relate to his behaviors. Like Marshall, I began my freshmen year at a small Appalachian school that was located within 2 hours of my hometown. Like Marshall, I quickly became dissatisfied with the small campus atmosphere. Like, Marshall I transferred to a larger Division I school before my sophomore year. In retrospect, it appears that both Marshall and myself had our hearts set on going to bigger
schools, schools further away from “home,” but initially did not have the courage to make this leap; this was certainly my experience as a college freshman.

Marshall’s initial career plan was to become a high school teacher and perhaps one-day return to Webster County to coach the local football team. However, after transferring to Appalachian University, Marshall decided to change his major from education to criminal justice. In doing so, Marshall decided that he wanted to be a West Virginia State Policeman. However, after two full years at Appalachian University Marshall has decided, once again, to transfer to Appalachian University Technical College, located in Hamlin, West Virginia – a town of 1,914 residents. Marshall plans to continue his criminal justice career path while at Appalachian University Technical College and will begin his studies at this campus in the fall of 2010. Marshall was comfortable with me sharing that his new girlfriend, also a resident of Webster County and freshman at Appalachian University Technical College, played a huge part in his decision to transfer schools for a second time. When Marshall’s new girlfriend decided to enroll at Appalachian University Technical College, he began looking into transferring from the school’s main campus.

Marshall tells me that he will not be able to graduate on time (spring commencement of the 2010 / 2011 academic year). Due to lost credits (non-transferable credits) and his change in major, Marshall will likely need at least three more semesters to finish his coursework. Though I am not aware of the specifics, Marshall did tell me that his grades suffered while at Appalachian University. Marshall also informed me that he has worked a variety of part-time jobs while in school the past few years (i.e. working
at two separate Family Dollar Stores and working in a retirement home). Marshall also expressed his concern for the growing number of student loan bills that he has compiled during the past three years. Like many college students, Marshall will be forced to begin paying off these debts six months after completing his schooling.

I must admit that I was, at first, a little surprised by Marshall’s academic career path. I was taken aback by Marshall’s change in career major as well as his choice to attend three different universities in four years. I am not sure what his experiences tell us about the first-generation Appalachian college student, other than perhaps that Marshall has yet to find a university setting in which he feels comfortable and satisfied. I wish him all the best in his academic pursuits.

**Tina**

Years removed from our initial conversation, Tina is now set to graduate from West Virginia Christian College in the spring of 2011. Tina remains an Elementary Education Major, with a minor in English, and a pre-K endorsement. Although Tina is interested in seeking employment in Webster County, she has taken a liking to Buckington. After graduation, Tina plans to seek employment in the surrounding areas. As of now, Tina does not have a job lined up for the following academic year. If Tina is unable to find employment, she plans to substitute teach in Webster County until something full-time becomes available. To be honest, I was not surprised by Tina’s steadfast academic success. I was also happy to learn that she is now an active member of a sorority. It appears, from our brief discussion, that Tina’s sorority activities play a huge part of her life. Tina describes her sorority sisters as her “Fairtown family.”
Like Marshall, Tina expressed a concern about paying back student loans. Although Tina did not work during the academic school year, as was the case with Marshall, she did, however, work as a bank teller in Webster County during her winter and summer breaks. I was pleased to hear about Tina’s academic success and have little doubt that things will turn out in her favor.

**Conclusion**

Below are the key themes that emerged during my two brief ethnographic studies. I believe this data moves us closer to understanding the educational, economic, and socio-cultural problems many Appalachian students endure before and during their entrance into the academy.

*The Webster County Blues: An Exploration of the Educational Attitudes of a Poor Mountain Community*

In this brief study, parents of potential first-generation college students from rural Appalachia displayed the following characteristics:

- Participants sometimes struggled to understand admission requirements and financial aid obligations.
- Participants sometimes displayed a fear of the dangers of living outside the region.
- Participants often viewed college as a rebellious party spot for teens; this attitude seems influenced by mass media.
- Participants often viewed higher education as a financial risk, leading to a view of manual wage labor as a safer, more pragmatic alternative.
- Participants sometimes viewed the workforce in a gender-specific manner
Participants were also highly critical of college dropouts from the region, thus, parents seemed unaware of the various obstacles first-generation college students face.

“College is not a Fairytale”: Listening to the Voices of First-Generation College Students from Appalachia

These first-generation college students, displayed the following characteristics:

- Familism, localism, and historicism played a huge part in the college-going decisions of these students.
- Both participants experienced social anxiety as a result of their isolated cultural backgrounds.
- Both participants experienced a social and familial “pull” from their hometown regions.
- Both participants displayed a rugged form of individualism that is, in my opinion, indicative of the Appalachian region.
- Social and financial concerns weighed heavily on their minds as they attempted to adjust to life in college.

Studying the experiences of parents and first-generation college students from my hometown has been an extremely rewarding experience. Their stories remind me of the struggles I faced just a short time ago. Though I believe there is value in thinking critically about their stories, I am in no way attempting to suggest that the experiences of these parents and participants are completely representative of all first-generation college students from Appalachia. I do, of course, realize that this is an extremely small study sample. I also acknowledge that Webster County, West Virginia is not representative of
all Appalachian communities. It is indeed a unique cultural environment. More research needs to be conducted on the experiences of first-generation college students from all areas of Appalachia. I also realize that my study does not give us an appropriate window into the academic performances of these students in the classrooms. Participant responses, in this regard, were sometimes far too vague. With this being said, I will suggest that these studies can be beneficial to the field of rhetoric and composition because they allow scholars to examine the ideological worldview of the first-generation Appalachian college student. This is perhaps the first step in attempting to meet the pedagogical needs of first-generation college students from rural Appalachian areas. I believe the voices of these participants highlight the need for teachers and scholars to recognize the potential influence of place on a student’s experiences with college-level writing.
CHAPTER 5: A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR THE APPALACHIAN REGION

“Critical Pedagogy resonates with the sensibility of the Hebrew symbol of tikkun, which means ‘to heal, repair, and transform the world, all the rest is commentary.’ It provides historical, cultural, political, and ethical direction for those in education who still dare to hope.”

- Peter McLaren

"A population richly critical and creative would be a risk to hierarchy and exploitation.”

- Ira Shor

Thinking Critically about Critical Pedagogy

For many, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is critical pedagogy’s foundational text. This is because Freire’s highly influential work outlines many of the key theoretical principles and terminologies that continue to define this tradition. I remember the first time I held the great Paulo Freire’s classic book in my hands. Even as a 20-year-old sophomore at Marshall University, I knew there was something special about Freire’s message. I was inspired by Freire’s pedagogical aim, critical consciousness. At this point, my college education had already changed my worldview. With each passing semester I began to see my hometown in Webster County, West Virginia in a different light. My history courses had taught me about American imperialist ambition, social inequality, and capitalist consequence. My social science courses brought me up to speed on cyclical poverty, hegemonic control, and identity politics. My English / Education courses taught me how to think; more specifically, how to think for myself. Freire, however, reminded me that teaching is an act of love. He also taught me that teaching is a reciprocal act: teachers and students should never stop learning from each other. Most importantly, Freire’s work demonstrated the possibilities of education as liberation. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* made me take a step back and reconsider my connection to the exploitive social hierarchy that had defined and dictated
the lives of so many of my friends and family. For this, I will always be in debt to the great Brazilian theorist.

Thus far in my project I have attempted to argue that Appalachia, as a rhetorical space, has historically been dominated by outside economic forces. I have attempted to argue that Hillbilly identity, the dominant rhetoric imposed upon the region and its people, has exploitive capitalist roots (exploitation for profit). This is a rhetorical tradition that continues today via television, movies, and mass marketing. The “Hillbilly” is oppression by outside forces. The “Hillbilly” is also internalized oppression, a byproduct of oppression in the traditional sense. In Chapters 3 and 4, I attempted to explain how the material realities of 21st century Appalachia influence the thought processes and worldviews of Appalachian learners. These barriers to critical thought often discourage the pursuit of a postsecondary education and must be recognized by critical educators. In this final Chapter, however, I will resist the urge to propose a solution befitting the problems of an Appalachian student population. If I thought passing out photocopied chapters from Freire’s work would better the lives of poor Appalachian people I would probably give it a shot. Critical pedagogy is not the answer to Appalachian poverty. Nor is critical pedagogy a one-size-fits-all approach to improving the critical thinking skills of Appalachian student populations. It is unlikely that critical pedagogy will replace the authoritarian skill-and-drill practices of the American public school system; it will always be an educational other. Because our public school system mirrors the corporate model, educational inequality will continue to be tied to socio-economic inequality. Appalachia’s problems are too big for critical pedagogy. With this
being said, I do want to use this final chapter to make a case for critical pedagogy in the Appalachian region. This is not a call for converts. I am simply attempting to demonstrate how critical pedagogy speaks to the various educational needs outlined earlier in my project. When considering the economic and social realities of the Appalachian region, I find it strange that most critical educators do not consider Appalachian student populations when outlining the need for critical pedagogy in American schools.

When we, as educators, think of critical pedagogy we often think of impoverished or marginalized student populations. Maybe you think of Freire’s Brazil. Perhaps you think of McLaren’s inner-city Canadian students or Shor’s working-class Long Island pupils. In regard to published scholarly work, critical pedagogy has not fully addressed the needs of an Appalachian student population. Appalachian people have been left out of this particular scholarly conversation. As I have stated earlier, pairing critical pedagogy with an Appalachian student population will have a dual effect. Pairing the two will change both theory and praxis. I want to pour gasoline on the flames of the fire started by rhetoric and composition scholars such as Katherine Sohn, Jennifer Beech, Amy Winans, and Sara Webb-Sunderhas. These influential scholars have reminded our field of the problems of a 21st Century Appalachian student population. These, in my opinion, are conversations that should be of interest to critical educators from both inside and outside the Appalachian region because critical pedagogy speaks to the educational needs outlined by Sohn, Beech, Winans, and Webb-Sunderhas. We should avoid the faulty assumptions such as the notion that critical pedagogy is a pedagogical method designed to liberate impoverished populations abroad. We should resist the urge to see critical
pedagogy as relevant only to urban or inner-city student populations. It is time we bring “critical pedagogy” and “Appalachia” into the same scholarly conversation.

In this final Chapter, I will attempt to outline critical pedagogy’s potential for an Appalachian student population:

- Critical pedagogy poses a positive threat to the unique brand of internalized oppression found in Appalachian communities
- Critical pedagogy can assist Appalachian students in becoming more critical viewers of mass media rhetorics
- Critical pedagogy gives Appalachian students the opportunity to more fully understand their place, as well as Appalachia’s place, within real-life American social systems
- Critical pedagogy can assist Appalachian students in more fully evaluating their career choices, literacy practices, and habitual day-to-day lives
- Critical pedagogy can help Appalachian students more fully understand concepts of rhetoric, as well as rhetorics connection to written discourse
- Critical pedagogy can help Appalachian students learn to read and write rhetorically.

However, before I can argue for a critical pedagogy for the Appalachian region, it is necessary for me first to clearly outline my interpretation of this pedagogical approach and its place within American colleges and universities. Because I do not want to assume a readership that shares a monolithic view of critical pedagogy, it is important for me to begin with a detailed overview of the key thinkers and terminologies that define my
interpretation of critical education. Defining a pedagogical tradition is, of course, no easy task. This is especially true for contemporary notions of critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy’s influence on English Studies is undeniable. Just a few decades ago, conversations of critical pedagogy dominated the pages of scholarly journals in our field. Today, the current status of critical pedagogy (the term most commonly used to describe a political, social, or cultural studies emphasis in the classroom) is unclear. Although critical pedagogy has experienced a decline during the past 10 years, the field of Rhetoric and Composition has yet to fully abandon the critical theory makeover it has experienced since the early 1970s. Ours is a field that often promotes critical awareness for oppressed and marginalized groups both in and outside of American borders. However, without a strong scholarly presence within our field’s leading academic journals, critical pedagogy’s popularity has become difficult to discern.

During the past eight years scholarship regarding critical pedagogy has begun to disappear from major academic publications such as College English and The Journal of College Composition and Communication. The critical theory surge that was apparent during the late 1980s and early 1990s appears to have come to a rolling stop. This, of course, is not to suggest that our field has moved beyond critical pedagogy’s influence. Many scholars and instructors continue to frame their classroom practices around the socio-historical-political-economic situations of student writers. However, critical pedagogy’s decreasing visibility within recent scholarly publications has left the movement open to a number of longstanding criticisms. For critical pedagogy to be
taken seriously within the academy, contemporary proponents must begin to explicitly outline their practices for both colleagues and detractors.

My goal for this project is to place critical pedagogy in conversation with the problems of a 21st century Appalachian student population. However, before doing so, I find it important to first stop and consider critical pedagogy as more than a social or political emphasis in the composition classroom. Where does critical pedagogy come from? Who are key thinkers who have influenced this tradition? What does critical pedagogy look like in the classroom? How might critical pedagogy meet the needs of an Appalachian student population? Before we can answer these questions, we must first look back to critical pedagogy’s history. My objective will be to pay close attention to the historical and political realities of these movements. By briefly outlining the history of critical pedagogy I hope to expose the set of economic and socio-political circumstances that have caused these movements to flourish during various points in history. Doing so may also lend itself to self-examination and reflection in regard to our country’s current economic and socio-political climate. Perhaps we, as a field, will find that our country’s current economic and social conditions speak to the need for critical pedagogy, for both Appalachian and non-Appalachian students. It is time for us, as a field, to think critically about critical pedagogy.

**Defining Critical Pedagogy: The Key Thinkers**

Critical pedagogy is hardly an American invention. It would be foolish to assume critical pedagogy was simply a product of the radical social and economic changes of 1960s America. The core tenants of critical theory come from non-American thinkers,
philosophers, and teachers. Below is a brief outline of some of the key thinkers who I believe are responsible for the foundation of critical theory and critical pedagogy. These subsections are intentionally brief and are by no means designed to serve as a compressive overview of the contributions of each group of thinkers. Instead, these subsections are designed to simply highlight some of the key thinkers who are sometimes unrecognized as contributors to this theoretical and pedagogical tradition.

**The Sophists**

If critical theory has roots in Classical Greek Antiquity, the Sophists are certainly its forefathers. The Sophists (5th Century B.C.) were a group of nomadic scholars who passed from city to city teaching the art of rhetoric to anyone who could afford their services; this significantly lessened their popularity among the Greek aristocracy. In *The Rhetorical Tradition* Bruce Herzberg and Patricia Bizzell outline the Sophistic view of knowledge and truth: “Sophists believed that human knowledge relies solely on sense perception and is therefore necessarily flawed. Certainty or absolute truth is not available to humans, the Sophists argued, but probable knowledge can be refined by pitting opposing positions against one another and examining the arguments thus brought forward” (22). Protagoras, often seen as the first and most influential of the Sophists, is credited for developing this technique of “exploring probable truth via opposing arguments, or *dissoi logoi,*” a technique not all that dissimilar from Marxist interpretations of dialectical thinking (Herzberg and Bizzell 23). Because the Sophists viewed knowledge as specifically tied to language, they often taught their students how to make weak arguments stronger through rhetorical techniques and audience awareness.
Simply put, the Sophists were professional educators interested in exposing the rhetorical nature of truth to their students.

During their lifetime, the Sophists were branded as greedy spin-artists concerned only with manipulation. Today, however, many contemporary rhetoric and composition scholars argue that there is more to Sophistic rhetoric than persuasion. Scholars such as Bizzell, Herzberg, and Susan Jarratt remind us that we should not rely completely on the narratives of those in opposition to the Sophists to define their pedagogical or theoretical aims (e.g. Plato). The Sophists did not believe truth or knowledge was ever neutral or unbiased. For the Sophists, all knowledge is rhetorical. In *Rereading the Sophists*, Susan Jarratt reminds us that “with the Sophists we get: a recognition of all discourse as ‘rhetorical,’ knowledge and values are historically contingent … they were skeptical of a divine source of knowledge or value and focused attention on the process of group-decision making in historically and geographically specific contexts” (xviii). This Sophistic attention to *Kairos*, the role of language in determining truth, and relentless questioning of social hierarchies is, in my opinion, a key element of critical theory and critical pedagogy. For these reasons, the Sophists can be seen as critical educators.

**Hegel and Marx**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), the great German Idealist, deserves consideration for his contributions to critical pedagogy if for no other reason than the fact that his work was so vastly influential to that of Marx. Marxism does, in many ways, speak directly to and often against Hegel’s work; Marx often positions himself in direct opposition to Hegel. However, Hegel’s major contribution to critical
theory, the dialectic, should not be ignored. Dialectical thinking is a foundational principal of critical pedagogy. Hegel’s “Master/Slave” dialectic is also of interest to critical educators interested in internalized oppression or any issue tied to colonialism or oppression. Although Hegel’s “dialectic” is different from that of Marx, his work deserves recognition as being influential to critical theory and critical pedagogy if for no other reason than it helped pave the way for Marxism.

Many see the great Paulo Freire as the founder of critical pedagogy. Others look to contemporary theorists such as Ira Shor, Peter McLaren, or Henry Giroux. Although I agree that each of these four influential minds have shaped and molded modern conceptions of critical pedagogy, all of these figures, in my opinion, stand on the shoulders of Karl Marx. There is no brand of critical theory or critical pedagogy that has not been influenced by Marxism or Marxist thought in some form or fashion. If critical pedagogy has a founding father, it is the highly influential and controversial Karl Marx (1818 – 1883). Marxism’s focus on materialist history, class-based inequality, and social/economic oppression laid the groundwork for critical pedagogy. Marx’s work gives us, as critical educators, a theoretical framework for critical examination of the material realities of marginalized and exploited human lives. Concepts of alienated labor and class-based thinking are crucial to critical pedagogy. Marxism gives us a starting place to begin such critical inquiry.

Post-Marx Critical Theory

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the great Italian philosopher and political theorist, is influential to the critical pedagogy tradition mainly because of his theory of cultural
hegemony. Hegemonic control and ideological oppression are key issues in critical theory and critical pedagogy. Gramsci’s cultural theory of hegemony gives critical educators a framework for discussing how dominant perspectives are maintained and reinforced through social and economic practices. Also, Gramsci’s critique of economic determinism made a tremendous impact on Western Marxist thought and contemporary notions of critical theory. Therefore, Gramsci’s work is vastly important to the advancement of liberatory teaching. In many ways, Gramsci’s work served as a theoretical bridge from Marx to the Frankfurt School.

The Frankfurt School, an unofficial collection of social theorists associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (founded in 1923), began as a series of critical reactions against the various ways in which Communist parties had begun to distort and oversimplify the ideas of Karl Marx. These scholars were bound by their criticism of orthodox communist movements and their inability to explain and critique capitalism’s global prominence. The series of scholarly conversations born out of the Frankfurt School were interdisciplinary yet tied to a common set of social concerns. Germany’s first intellectual hub for Neo-Marxist thought, the Frankfurt School can be seen as the birthplace of critical theory. This theoretical tradition greatly influenced intellectual discourse on Marxism, capitalism, and opened the door for intellectual conversations regarding popular culture and cultural studies. Max Horkheimer, 1895 – 1973, and Theodor Adorno, 1903-1969, perhaps the leading names from the Frankfurt School, are key figures in defining the intellectual aims of this theoretical movement. Horkheimer and Adorno deserve credit not only for their ability to advance neo-Marxist theory but
also for their ability to redefine mass media as a rhetorical tool that possesses the ability to lull the masses into un-critical passivity (e.g. *The Culture Industries*). The Frankfurt School tradition gave us the theory that informs critical pedagogy. Simply put, there would be no contemporary critical pedagogy tradition without the contributions of the Frankfurt School of philosophy.

**Freire**

If there were a critical pedagogy hall of fame, Paulo Freire (1921 - 1997) would be a first ballot hall-of-famer. Often seen as the forefather of critical pedagogy, Freire has given us numerous terminologies found within this tradition: banking concept of education, problem-posing education, critical-consciousness, narration sickness, etc. For many, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the Bible of critical pedagogy and Freire is a patron saint. Freire’s *Pedagogy of Freedom* and *Education for Critical Consciousness* are also seen as cornerstone texts within the tradition. Freire has influenced the works of numerous contemporary pedagogy scholars such as Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and more specifically the work of Ira Shor. Freire’s legacy continues through his numerous books, which remain in print, and through The Freire Project (The Paulo and Nita Freire Project for Critical Pedagogy), founded by Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. However, Freire was more than a famous educator or highly influential author. Freire was a liberator. His global impact is immeasurable. His contributions to his native Brazil are innumerable. He was a hero for the downtrodden and critical pedagogy is his legacy. There would be no such tradition
without the loving words of Paulo Freire. He is the man who brought critical pedagogy to North America.

**Critical Pedagogy in North America**

Before discussing histories of critical pedagogy in the American colleges and universities, I will briefly outline some of the key thinkers who have shaped and molded critical theory and critical pedagogy in North America. Acknowledging these influences will allow me to more fully demonstrate my interpretation of critical pedagogy and its social-epistemic focus in the composition classroom.

**Giroux**

In 2002 Routledge publishing named scholar Henry Giroux as one of the top fifty modern educational thinkers; this was not without good reason. Over the last 30 years Giroux has vastly influenced the advancement of critical pedagogy and educational scholarship. In works such as *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling* (one of my personal favorites), *The Hidden Curriculum and Moral Education: Deception or Discovery* (w/ David E. Purpel), *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, and *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, Giroux calls into question dominant and oppressive educational practices in America. In *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies* (w/ Peter McLaren) and *Living Dangerously: Race, Violence, and Youth*, and *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, Giroux connects critical pedagogy to conversations of cultural studies, an important step in the progression of critical pedagogy. Giroux’s impact in American education is unquestionable. He is a leading voice in contemporary critical
pedagogy, a voice that reminds us that our Capitalist-driven American educational system is inherently flawed.

**McLaren**

Over the past 30 years Canadian-born scholar Peter McLaren has developed a global reputation for his work in critical theory, the sociology of education, radical pedagogy, Marxist theory, and cultural studies. During the 1970s, McLaren worked as a public school teacher in Toronto’s notorious Jane-Finch Corridor. It was these experiences working with marginalized and disadvantaged Canadian students that would lead to the publication of McLaren’s ground-breaking critical pedagogy work *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy and the Foundations of Education*, a book that reinforced my belief in critical pedagogy. During the 1980s McLaren came to the United States to teach at University of Miami’s School of Education, where he became a colleague of Henry Giroux. For the next eight years, McLaren and Giroux would work on several important projects that would help establish critical pedagogy’s place within mainstream academic conversations. McLaren, like Giroux, is largely responsible for shaping our contemporary notions of critical pedagogy.

**Ira Shor**

I will gushingly admit that Ira Shor is perhaps my favorite contemporary American critical educator. His book *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* profoundly influenced my thinking in regard to the importance of critically evaluating the everyday “taken for granted” aspects of life. His later work, *When Students Have Power*, also greatly impacted my understanding of how one might go about crafting a student-
centered, democratic, critical pedagogy classroom. I can relate to the struggles of Shor’s working-class Long Island, New York students. Though I come out a very different social demographic, I understand their educational obstacles. I see them in my own life and hear them in the voices of my case study participants. Shor’s greatest accomplishment, in my opinion, is his ability to continue and carry on the legacy of Paulo Freire. Shor’s *Freire in the Composition Classroom* is one of the greatest collections of pedagogical scholarship ever assembled. A longtime friend of the late Paulo Freire, Shor has assured that Freire’s vision and message of hope has yet to disappear from contemporary scholarly conversations.

**hooks**

*bell hooks* should be recognized as a leading African American feminist voice within the history of critical pedagogy. One of our country’s most accomplished feminist scholars, hooks’s work often focuses on how issues of race, class, and gender are tied to oppression in America. Ever the public intellectual, hooks has also appeared in several documentaries where she demonstrates her ability to critique issues regarding popular culture and mass media. In regard to her connection to critical pedagogy, hook’s *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* is seen by most critical educators as a cornerstone text within the critical pedagogy tradition. I also find it necessary to note that hooks was born and raised in Hopkinsville, Kentucky – thus making her one of Appalachia’s most accomplished and respected critical educators. After I learned of her humble Appalachian upbringing, hooks instantly became an inspirational figure for my own work on critical education.
Kincheloe & Steinberg

Together, Joe Kincheloe (1950-2008) and his partner Shirley Steinberg have published numerous works on critical theory, critical pedagogy, feminist theory, and post-colonialism. Over the course of 50 books, countless articles, and book chapters, Kincheloe “systematically uncovered the ways in which institutional influences in the construction and representation of knowledge, identity, and culture were badly serving certain populations” (Willinski). Kincheloe’s recent work, *Contextualizing Teaching: Introduction to the Foundations of Education* (w/ Shirley Steinberg and Patrick Slattery), *Knowledge and Critical Pedagogy*, and *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?* (w/ Peter McLaren), has assured that critical pedagogy, as a scholarly conversation, will continue into the 21st Century. I would also like to take a moment to point out Kincheloe’s Appalachian background. Born in Sullivan County, Tennessee, Kincheloe, like hooks, should be recognized as a critical educator who arose from Appalachian poverty to become a leading voice in critical pedagogy.

Kincheloe’s partner, Shirley Steinberg, also deserves consideration for her contributions to critical theory and critical pedagogy. Steinberg’s work has been equally influential in shaping and advancing critical pedagogy traditions (e.g. *Cutting Class: Socioeconomic Class and Education* (co-edited with Joe Kicheloe), and *Thinking Queer: Sexuality, Culture and Education* (Co-edited with Susan Talburt)). During their 19-year relationship, Steinberg co-authored numerous works with Kincheloe alongside her own original scholarship. While at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, Kincheloe and Steinberg helped establish *The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical
Pedagogy. Today, Steinberg serves as the director of The Paulo and Nita Freire Project, the site that aims to establish an international community of critical educators who fight for social justice.

Defining Critical Pedagogy: Material Realities

It would be false to assume that critical pedagogy was born on American soil when Freire arrived on Harvard University’s campus during the late 1960s. It would be equally false to assume it first took shape when North American scholars such as Giroux, McLaren, and Shor came on the scene during the 1980s. Critical pedagogy has a variety of histories in American education. In this section I will highlight some of the key moments regarding critical pedagogy in American educational systems. In doing so, I will pay close attention to the social and material circumstances of these movements.

Pragmatist Philosophy and the Progressive Education Movement

Boiled down to its simplest meaning, pragmatism refers to a school of thought that asks us to examine the practical consequences of truth/belief. Like the Sophists of ancient Greece, Pragmatists see truth as both social and contextual. Pragmatists are concerned with the social aspect of truth/knowledge via communication and shared argumentative perspectives. Pragmatism, as an American philosophic tradition, emerged during the late 1800s. Heavily influenced by the work of Charles Darwin, pragmatism is often depicted as the brainchild of scholars Charles Peirce (1839-1914) and William James (1842-1910). Members of the now-famous “metaphysical club,” Peirce and James moved American educational theory toward critical pedagogy through the advancement of American pragmatism. Without pragmatism, progressive education would likely have
never taken hold in American schools. Pragmatism’s focus on “lower case t truth” and emphasis on the rhetorical nature of belief opened the theoretical door for future critical educators.

John Dewey (1859-1952), a colleague of Peirce and James, is also seen as a key figure in advancing pragmatist thought and connecting pragmatism to educational theory. Dewey’s influence on the progressive education movement in American is profound and unquestionable. The progressive education movement argued that students learn best by engaging in critical problem solving via experimental hands-on learning and collaborative group work. Dewey, credited as the inventor of the field trip, wanted to students to explore the social and democratic possibilities of education. His was a pedagogy of social responsibility and democratic participation. Dewey wanted students to see education as something more than words found in a textbook. Ever the pragmatist, Dewey wanted students to see the practical applications of their education (i.e. education’s connection to the workforce, the community, and the larger society). Dewey, like the great Paulo Freire, saw learning as a life-long process. Thus, Pierce, James, and Dewey should be seen as key figures in moving American education away from skill-and-drill rote memorization and authoritarian teaching practices. The progressive education movement opened the door for critical pedagogy.

The Great Depression as an Educational Turning Point

Tuesday, October 29th, 1929 will forever mark a turning point in American history. The market crash that occurred by day’s end would begin a period of economic strife unlike anything American citizens had ever witnessed before. Black Tuesday, as
this notorious date came to be known, jolted the American mindset. With each passing month, unemployment rates soared as American families began to lose confidence in our country’s economic future. By 1934, over 34 million Americans belonged to families that had no regular full-time wage earner (Spring 326). From the slums of Hooverville to the hills of Appalachia, the American economic machine had failed its citizens. Bereft of hope, American workers gradually came to the realization that high unemployment rates, low profits, and lost opportunities for personal achievement were now realities of the time. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that The Great Depression would have a significant impact on philosophical and theoretical minds throughout the country. The feeling of utter desperation that permeated throughout America left many to wonder how things might be done differently in the future. Because of America’s crumbling economic framework, educating the masses and expanding the workforce suddenly became more important than ever before.

In The American School, scholar Joel Spring argues that The Great Depression “caused several major political shifts in the educational world” (326). First, the economic crisis of the 1930s began to split alliances among local school administrators, local school boards, and local elites (Spring 326). More often than not, these debates centered on disputes over educational programs being slashed as a result of the country’s rapidly growing economic crisis (Spring 326). Within a few years, programs such as kindergarten and vocational education began to disappear as student populations steadily increased as a result of the school-building boom of the 1920s (Spring 327). Second, the economic pressures of The Great Depression “caused some leading educators to advocate
the use of the schools to bring about a radical transformation of society” (Spring 326).
This led to the widespread fear that radical / communist teachings would eventually find
their way into and soon become commonplace within American public schools. These
fears were a byproduct of The Red Scare of the early 1920s – the first major wave of anti-
communism in American culture. During this era, any educator willing to push against
the pedagogical norms was at risk of suffering the undesirable fate of being mistaken as a
communist sympathizer. Though almost everything about this communist witch-hunt was
the result of America’s fear of Bolshevik anarchy-spreading threats to the American way,
there was some smattering of rationality in these fears of communism’s philosophical
reach.

Born out of a sense of economic desperation and hopelessness, the beginnings of
critical pedagogy slowly began to take shape during the late 1930s. This newfound
interest in the social aspects of writing and learning was especially prevalent in American
colleges and universities. In *Rhetoric and Reality*, James Berlin argues that a growing
“tendency to view writing as a social activity, growing within a social context and
carrying social consequences, increased after the onset of the Depression” (81). In some
ways, this pedagogical shift was a return to the “social reform impulse found among the
proponents of progressive education before WWI” (Berlin 81). As the country swiftly
plunged into an unprecedented economic depression “collectivist alternatives to solving
the nation’s economic and social realms” began to catch fire within academic circles
(Berlin 116). For instance, scholar Arthur N. Applebee has pointed out that policy
statements by the American Historical Society, the Progressive Education Association,
and the NCTE during the 1930s “all underscored a reawakened sense of communal responsibility both at home and internationally” (qtd. in Berlin 116). This concern for the social implications of writing instruction would force many scholars to reconsider the importance of making grammatical correctness and surface-level expression the focus of their pedagogical practices. For example, Roy T. Thompson of the University of Southern California, while admitting that superficial correctness was more important than subject matter in freshman composition, argued that the composition course “ought to prepare individuals for citizenship by asking them to write about political subjects” (Berlin 82). Despite Thompson’s overt current-traditional leanings, his comments clearly foreshadow the social turn that was about to take place in English Studies.

As the 1930s brought about a new era of economic and personal suffering to various sectors of American life, “the attention of the [college] composition teacher became more clearly focused on writing as a response to social context” (Berlin 82). This is not to suggest that critical pedagogy experienced a full-blown pedagogical revolution during 1930s, 1940s, or 1950s. American conservatism, especially in the form of anti-communist attitudes, would keep critical pedagogy at bay for some time to come. Current-traditional rhetoric, with its focus on grammatical correctness and surface-level expression, would continue to be the dominant pedagogical model for the next thirty years. The beginnings of critical pedagogy had done nothing more than stir the academic waters. It had yet to become a fully realized pedagogical approach to teaching composition. At this point in American history critical pedagogy was a nameless
alternative to “traditional” methods of teaching that often ignored the social or political issues in the classroom.

**Critical (Re) Awakening: Expressive Rhetoric and the Civil Rights Movement**

As America moved slowly through the Depression years and on to more optimistic times of economic prosperity, English departments within academia steadily maintained their current-traditionalist shape. More often than not, American writing instructors during the 1940s and 1950s relied on literature rather than rhetoric to teach composition to their students. In *Rhetoric and Reality* James Berlin suggests that many English professors “dismissed providing rhetorical contexts for discussion since these were commonly seen as trivial” (108). Berlin also reminds us that many of our scholarly ancestors were adverse to student writing which dealt with social or political topics (108). For these early scholars, “students could be made good citizens through literature” (Berlin 110). However, this dominant current-traditionalist mindset would soon change with the emergence of expressive rhetoric.

According to Berlin, expressive rhetoric began to take shape in American institutions slightly after World War II (146). The scholars of this movement railed against the “elitist rhetoric of liberal culture” which viewed writing as something that arose only from pure genius (Berlin 146). As the years went by, this emerging pedagogical approach gave birth a certain form of “political activism” in the composition classroom (Berlin 146). Spearheaded by influential scholars such as Peter Elbow and Donald Murray, a new form of expressivism began to emerge in American colleges and universities during the 1960s (Berlin 146). These expressive scholars were interested in
teaching writing as a means of self-discovery. For expressive scholars, the job of the writing teacher was to help student writers discover their own unique voice through the process of writing – the end product being expression. Though expressive pedagogy differs from its socially-critical counterpart in many ways, expressivism did move the field of composition studies away from elitist and current-traditional forms of writing instruction. As expressivism quickly gained followers and influence within colleges and universities across the country, current-traditionalism’s monopoly began to crumble.

Despite expressive rhetoric’s swift rise in the academy, there were, of course, those who were skeptical of its pedagogical aim. Many American scholars took issue with expressive rhetoric’s tendency to depoliticize the composition classroom by ignoring the various social factors influencing students and academic institutions. Expressivist critics were also dismayed by expressive rhetoric’s suggestion that we, as human beings, have some common measure of collective or shared experience. For these scholars, we, as writers, have no authentic writing voice to be found. Instead, our “voices” have been influenced, modeled, and shaped by the various social, economic, and political circumstances of our everyday lives. Though expressivism would remain popular within English departments for some time to come, these negative reactions to the expressive movement would eventually lead to the theoretical framework that would later come to be known as critical pedagogy.

In “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” James Berlin argues that critical pedagogy sets itself apart from expressivism by arguing that truth/reality is located “in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse
community, and the material conditions of existence” (484). Proponents of this brand of rhetoric suggest the structures of our material world are social in nature – “specific to a particular time and culture” (Berlin 488). Therefore, no authentic self can exist outside the material conditions of the thinker or writer in question. This postmodern approach to critical insight suggests there are no universal truths – only social constructions. Berlin also points out that critical pedagogy assumes no method of teaching is ever completely innocent (492). With its emphasis on self-criticism and self-reflection, critical pedagogy continually finds new ways to question the ideology of any particular approach to education. Thus, critical pedagogy, as we understand it today, was born out of a reaction to the expressivist movement’s assumptions about truth, knowledge, and the process of self-discovery. This is not to suggest that expressivist interpretations of the writing process were solely responsible for the emergence of critical pedagogy during in the 1970s. Our country’s shameful history of racial segregation, disenfranchisement, exploitation, and violence had created the need for critical pedagogy long before expressive rhetorics found their way into the academy. To fully understand critical pedagogy’s revolutionary roots, one must first turn to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s: for it was during this pivotal time in our country’s history that critical pedagogy began to clearly take shape.

During the early 1960s America had once again found itself at the intersection of cultural and philosophical crossroads. Racial tension spread throughout the country, especially the south, as the landmark verdict of Brown v. Board of Education ruled that segregation was unconstitutional. In Montgomery, Alabama, a little known woman
named Rosa Parks refused to obey public transportation guidelines that forced African Americans to sit in the back portion of the bus. Her act of defiance would lead to the now famous boycott of the Montgomery transportation system - organized by a young Baptist preacher named Martin Luther King Jr. On the other side of the spectrum, the Nation of Islam, and a young charismatic speaker by the name of Malcolm X, quickly began to grab headlines in newspapers and local media outlets throughout the country. As America quickly found itself involved in an increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam (another battle against communism), it was apparent that change was in the air. By the mid 60s, the Black Power Movement was in full swing. Years of racial inequality had come to a head as southern communities and universities struggled to resist government-mandated integration. Because the need for social and political awareness was ever increasing, the 1960s were the perfect time for critical pedagogy to mark its place in the academy.

In “Freedom Schooling: Stokely Carmichael and Critical Rhetorical Education” Stephen Schneider argues that proponents of critical pedagogy are brought together by a notion of the classroom as a site for raising consciousness rather than a space for simply assessing work and applying standards. However, Schneider takes issue with simplistic accounts of critical pedagogy’s history and theoretical scope. For Schneider, absent from many of these conversations are “considerations of historical sites where critical pedagogies – those that encourage students to challenge oppressive power structures – have already been deployed” (49). His argument is that we, as a discipline, have overlooked the various educational sites that took shape and were developed out of the
Civil Rights Movement. An example of such a site would be the freedom schools that were established by Civil Rights activists in the Mississippi Delta. First opened in the fall of 1961, these schools were established to provide a basic education in math, reading, politics, and cultural critique to African American Mississippians suffering from the state’s segregated educational system (Schneider 50). Normally held in local churches and community buildings, these schools were designed “to provide an educational experience for students which will make it more possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternative, and ultimately new directions for action” (Schneider 49). In this sense, the freedom schools of the Mississippi Delta were the first educational institutions to openly promote a critical brand of pedagogy.

In his brilliant 2006 article, Schneider focuses on an account by Jane Stembridge, the executive secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), of a “speech class” conducted by Stokely Carmichael. A “black power” activist and honorary minister of the Black Panther Party, Stokely Carmichael helped found SNCC in the early 60s and would eventually become an instructor at several freedom schools in Mississippi. In this particular class, Carmichael focused on the relationship between Standard American English and African American Vernacular English. From the outset, Carmichael focused his pedagogical energies on “helping students take seriously the social-epistemic conditions” of their everyday lives (Schnnieder 52). In doing so, Carmichael introduced students to various language exercises designed to help them understand how AAVE can be seen as a “counter-language” that emerged as the result of
our country’s long history of slavery and racial violence (59). Carmichael’s pedagogical approach emphasized “code-switching” and the communal value of AAVE to question both the relationship of students to white oppression and their rationale for learning only “correct English” in American public schools (59). Therefore, Carmichael’s pedagogical goal was to develop an “organic classroom” that focused on the link between critical rhetorical pedagogy and community action – this focus would later become one of the major tenants of critical pedagogy found in colleges and universities across the country (Schneider 60).

When taking into account the social and political realities of the 1960s, the need for critical pedagogy becomes clear. Carmichael believed that education was supposed to prepare one to live in his or her community. Unfortunately, these needs were not being met for poor African Americans in Mississippi. For Carmichael, linguistic code switching was about recognizing and exercising discourses of power and representation (Schneider 61). Negotiating cultural transactions while maintaining face, while at the same time remaining aware of the structures of social oppression that constantly inform language use was paramount if African Americans in the Mississippi Delta were to ever gain some measure of social and political standing in a region that fully embodied American’s racist mindset (Schneider 60). Though Carmichael is rarely associated with critical pedagogy (as the definition stands in the modern university), his tireless efforts to awaken the critical consciousness of marginalized peoples with our country should not go unnoticed. His work in the Freedom Schools of Mississippi serves as an excellent example of critical pedagogy. Jane Stembridge’s account of Carmichael’s speech class also suggests that he
was ahead of his time: for it was during the next few years that critical pedagogy would finally mark its space within the academy.

**Critical Pedagogy in Post-Vietnam War America**

By the early 1970s the American university found itself at the center of the country’s swiftly changing cultural and political landscape. The open admissions era changed the way American publics viewed academia in regard to accessibility. The Vietnam War fiercely divided our nation as anti-war protests were staged on college and university campuses around the country. As students were gradually becoming more politically aware, instructors were begging to consider writing’s connection to political and social agency. Thus, during the 1970s English Studies began to re-imagine the importance of teaching composition. By decade’s end, social-epistemic rhetoric would join its current-traditional, expressive, and cognitive counterparts as a theoretical approach to be taken seriously. In “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Classroom” James Berlin points out that early proponents of the social-epistemic brand of rhetoric were “brought together by the notion of rhetoric as a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer with language and the agency of meditation” (488). In *Fragments of Rationality* scholar Lester Faigley suggests this “new political awareness in composition studies influenced some members of the field to look for ways to encourage the political consciousness that was present at the beginning of the process movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (71). During this movement, scholars such as John Trimbur and Patricia Bizzell began calling for rhetoric to be introduced to the composition classroom “as a means of fostering public discourse” (Faigley 71). Thanks largely to the contributions and efforts of scholar
Richard Ohmann, this emerging social focus would soon gain visibility with major academic publications in English Studies.

From 1966-1978, scholar Richard Ohmann forced those within English Studies to acknowledge the material circumstances of their existence both in and outside the academy. Though Ohmann is more widely known for his controversial 1976 work *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*, a book that attempts to break down the ideological assumptions behind English Studies, it was during his time at *College English* that Ohmann would begin to most explicitly advance the scholarly conversation of critical pedagogy. As editor of *College English* Ohmann was determined to make those within the profession think critically about the discipline’s recent social turn. During his time with *College English*, Ohmann was the first editor of a major journal in English Studies to devote an entire issue to what was then referred to as “The Homosexual Imagination” (November, 1974). In 1972, Ohmann would dedicate an entire issue to Marxist criticism – a theoretical tradition that was deeply influential on Ohmann’s own scholarship. This issue, in particular, would ignite a heated scholarly debate between Brent Harold of Brown University and scholar Harold Brent. In “Beyond Student-Centered Teaching: The Dialectical Materialist Form of a Literature Course” Brent Harold vehemently argued for a new innovative, progressive, radical/Marxist pedagogical method designed to move students toward critical-consciousness rather than rote memorization of academic conventions and standards. Harold Brent, however, would respond in the following issue by suggesting that the struggle for critical consciousness should not interfere with the primary business of the class – learning about literature. In
the following issue, Brent Harold would respond to Harold Brent by arguing that critical pedagogy asks students to explore the relationship between their social experiences and cultural experience of reading a novel rather than simply venting their personal feelings (209). Though there are no clear-cut winners in such theoretical debates, critical pedagogy had stood up for itself and Ohmann had given it the platform to do so.

With this increasing presence within *College English*, proponents of critical pedagogy began to speak to members of the discipline and define their pedagogical goals against the assumptions of those that were skeptical of the movement. For instance, Ira Shor, one of the leading scholars in this movement, began his career publishing articles, such as “Questions Marxists ask about Literature,” in *College English* during the Ohmann years. A recurring theme in Shor’s early work was that rhetoric be taught in order to help disenfranchised working-class students obtain critical consciousness. This is a notion most eloquently expressed in Shor’s *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. For Shor, “critical learning aids people in knowing what holds them back; it encourages them to envision a social order which supports their full humanity” (48-49). Shor’s pedagogical approach, heavily inspired by Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire’s groundbreaking work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, asks students to think critically about various aspects of their everyday lives. As a professor of English at The College of Staten Island, City University of New York, Shor constantly found himself struggling to adjust his pedagogy to meet the needs of his working-class students. His goal as teacher was to help students engage in critical thinking activities that may allow students to recognize and then possibly change “their powerless places in society” (49).
For instance, Shor suggests that vocational education is not only a curriculum but also a form of consciousness: “It is an institutional course of study which imposes a class-based, hierarchical thinking on students, conditioning them to accept their lesser place in society, distanc[ing] them from philosophy” (49). Shor argues that citizens immersed in this consciousness come to view themselves as “the working hands of society” (51). In this sense, Shor’s *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* serves as the first full-length book on the philosophy of critical pedagogy to be published in America. Unfortunately, Shor’s work left many detractors of critical pedagogy wondering how one might practically apply critical pedagogy in the classroom. Throughout *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* Shor reminds us that a “population richly critical and creative would be a risk to hierarchy and exploitation” (48–9). This, of course, is the goal of Shor’s liberatory classroom -- his duty as an instructor of rhetoric. Through reflection, critical thinking, and mutual dialogue, Shor aims to help his students deconstruct the world around them (49). This is the rhetoric of awakening. His goal is closer to a rhetoric focused on personal experience and social change. The point of *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* was to outline the theory that informs this particular pedagogical approach. It would not be until his 1996 work *When Students Have Power* that Shor would be able to specifically articulate the day-to-day workings of his Freirian-based classroom practices.

To say Ira Shor’s pedagogy has been influenced by Paulo Freire would be an understatement. More so than any critical pedagogy scholar, Shor clings to the Freireian notion that critical education can be used as a tool for liberation. This, of course, is not to suggest that Freire and Shor are the theoretical equivalent of identical twins. Unlike the
late Brazilian philosopher, Shor is not faced with the difficult task of liberating illiterate peasants. Instead, Shor’s scholarship focuses on the working-class students he encounters at his small open-admission campus in Staten Island, New York. Shor’s pedagogical goal is to help these disenfranchised students become aware of their relation to institutional and societal powers. Shor’s desire to disrupt hierarchy and class-based thinking is clearly reflected in his pedagogy. For example, in Shor’s later works Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change and When Students Have Power he calls for student-centered, critical pedagogy that is dialogic in nature. Through reflection, critical thinking, and mutual dialogue, Shor hopes to create a democratic atmosphere conducive to critical learning. Shor rejects the traditional authoritarian classroom setting by backloading teacher-talk and sharing power with students. This form of critical learning forces both students and instructors to become self-actualized critical thinkers. Boiled down to its simplest form, Shor’s pedagogy invites students to become active participants in their education rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. His pedagogical aim is to help students become aware of competing discourses both in and outside of the academy. This notion, in particular, was one powerfully echoed in Patricia Bizzell’s widely celebrated 1992 work Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness.

In Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness Patricia Bizzell argues that teachers should not treat students “simply as a matter of innate and individual abilities” (106). Like Shor, Bizzell suggests that teachers recognize “the social circumstances” which students bring with them to class (106). Bizzell’s work reminds us that “students from different social classes come to school with different abilities to deal with academic
discourse” (107). Therefore, many upper and middle-class students will be better-suited to participate in academic discourse because of their privileged educational backgrounds and relationship to literacy. Unfortunately, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, such as those from mountain hollers and inner-city ghettos, come to class with an “unequal removal from academic language” (107). This, of course, is problematic for students whose “home language does not resemble the so-called Standard English” (107). For Bizzell, it is imperative that we understand “the relationship between the academic discourse community and the students’ discourse communities” (108). We must recognize “the tension between the individual student, with his or her own cultural identity and creative potential, and the conventional requirements of standardized writing instruction” (108). According to Bizzell, academic failure awaits students who cannot speak the discourse of the institution.

Though many within English Studies came to agree with Bizzell’s point of view, some remained unsure about the writing instructor’s role in this process of awakening. How do instructors communicate the importance of academic discourse to students? Do they merely suggest their grades depend on their ability to master academic discourse? For Bizzell, the role of the composition and rhetoric profession is that of a mediator:

Composition teachers, therefore, now often find themselves in the position of mediators between their students and the rest of the academic community. To the mediator, it often seems that the two groups to whom he or she is responsible have opposed interests: that is, the students want, sometimes unconsciously, to retain their “own” language, and the academy wants, sometimes grudgingly, to
assimilate them. It seems to me, however, that the answer the mediator must give to both groups lies in the persuasive power of the ‘educated ethos’ (141).

For proponents of Bizzell’s discourse-based brand of critical pedagogy, the duty of the composition and rhetoric instructor is to convince students that academic discourse is something “valuable and worth attaining” (Bizzell 141). This, of course, is not an easy task. Depending on the institution, writing classrooms are often comprised of students from a variety of racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Unfortunately, some students are simply not prepared to speak the language of our institution.

More so than Shor, Bizzell’s work forced English Studies to reevaluate the importance of teaching students the set of conventions that she believed was necessary to achieve success in academia. For Bizzell, our students must come to understand that academic discourse is not a utopian method of communication. Instead, it is merely a set of standards and conventions followed in academia. Academic discourse is not the correct form of communication but rather the correct form of communication for this particular context. Bizzell’s work also reminds us that no two brands of critical pedagogy are ever the same. Each scholar has his or her own take on the importance of critical education. Though Ohmann, Harold, Shor, Freire, and Bizzell each came to be known as proponents of critical pedagogy during the 70s, 80s, and early 90s, their theoretical and pedagogical approaches are distinct. Their collective and sometimes contradictory approaches to educating student writers would mark the beginning of the social turn in English Studies. Thanks to their various scholarly efforts critical pedagogy had finally arrived in the academy. More so than ever before, critical pedagogy could be seen as a
specific set of practices and assumptions about the social nature of knowledge. Critical pedagogy had become something that could be discussed, studied, and implemented into the composition classroom. As scholars such as Shor and Bizzell became more widely read within the discipline, many within English Studies began to find ways to reconcile their expressive assumptions about the writing process with this newfound socio-political focus.

**Pop Rhetoric: Cultural Studies in the Composition Classroom**

The 1990s undoubtedly ushered in a new American mindset. With the advent of the set of technologies that would later become the Internet, Americans would soon be able to access information more efficiently than ever before. Within the span of a decade, the World Wide Web became just the click of mouse away. The 1990s also mark a time of economic prosperity in our country. NBA basketball players were making over 30 million dollars a year. Movie stars were making over 30 million dollars a picture. Pop superstars were selling over 10 million albums within one calendar year. As disposable incomes became a reality for many middleclass Americans, our country’s fascination with celebrity and entertainment was clearly stronger than ever before. With this technological and economic boom came a resurgence of pop culture in the academy.

With critical pedagogy’s newfound relevance within English Studies came a new breed of scholars who were looking to find ways to use pop culture as a teaching tool in the composition classroom. One such scholar would be Bruce McComiskey. In his highly influential work, *Teaching Writing as a Social Process*, McComiskey urges composition instructors to “teach students the social nature and function of writing – both in the texts
they produce for class and in those they encounter everyday outside of class” (19). Through social-process rhetorical inquiry, McComiskey attempts to awaken a critical consciousness in students that allows them to discover rhetoric’s ability to create social change. Much like Ira Shor, McComiskey prefers to focus his student’s “rhetorical attention through social-process rhetorical inquiry on the discourses and institutions that most profoundly impact their own lives (56). His assignments require students to engage in critical thinking while paying specific attention to the rhetorical aspects of their own writing. Regardless of whether or not McComiskey’s students obtain a college diploma, they leave his composition classroom with a rhetorical awareness that has practical uses in their everyday lives.

McComiskey’s pedagogical approach is designed to help students escape binary logic by bringing elements of popular culture into the composition classroom. During the first three weeks of McComiskey’s composition course, he asks students to focus on “position statements” (74). For this assignment, McComiskey brings 2 Live Crew’s album “As Nasty as They Wanna Be” into the classroom. He then discusses with his students the banning of this album by a federal district court in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Students are then asked to write a position statement on two essays that represent differing views of this controversy. Rather than blatantly agreeing or disagreeing with the authors of these texts, McComiskey asks students to negotiate a middle position in this debate based on their own cultural experience. McComiskey argues that when we teach students to read cultural texts through binary screens, we only limit their abilities to
negotiate these texts (74). For McComiskey, these are skills students must learn in order to become active participants in our postmodern democracy.

Though McComiskey’s pedagogy demonstrates how the civic and personal aspects of rhetoric can work together to promote social change, this, of course, is not to say that he was the only scholar employing a pop culture focus in the composition classroom. In “Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom” Jennifer Beech invites composition students to explore the “race and class-based epithets that circulate around their local communities” (148). In doing so, Beech provides her students with an opportunity to reposition themselves among these often competing cultural discourses. Beech focuses her pedagogy not only on cultural awareness but also civic action. She does so in an attempt to convey to her students the power of critical consciousness.

Beech’s particular brand of critical pedagogy asks students to consider and often position themselves within a cultural identity. By bringing pop culture artifacts such as material from comedian Jeff Foxworthy into the classroom, Beech is able to give her students the opportunity to critically evaluate the implications and origins of cultural stereotypes. Beech is, of course, aware that some critics argue that teaching academic writing, rather than social reform, should be the goal for composition instructors. However, she refuses to agree that cultural studies professors are neglecting their duty to teach composition. Beech, for example, introduces beginning composition students to a combination of library and nontraditional research methods. Her assignments also “offer students opportunities to learn and even use strategies for civic engagement” (148).
Beech fires back at her critics by pointing out that students have lives outside the walls of academia. If her students choose to return to their working-class background after college they will at least be armed with “rhetorical strategies for addressing those within positions of power within their community” (148). In my estimation, Beech is able to justify bringing Foxworthy’s material into the classroom by reminding critics of pop culture’s impact on the lives of her students.

Beech’s particular brand of critical pedagogy is designed to force students to evaluate their own cultural attitudes and influences. Beech wants her rural working-class students to question the underlying agenda of anyone who freely uses the term “redneck” as if it is not offensive. Through a method of social-process rhetorical inquiry similar to that of McComiskey, Beech invites students to question and critically evaluate these emotions. She also encourages students to challenge these cultural stereotypes through civic discourse. Through skillfully crafted rhetorical critiques of pop culture, Beech is able to help students rediscover their position in society. Her goal is to teach students how to use civic rhetorical skills to shape the cultural truths they no longer want to accept. In many ways, this was the original goal of critical pedagogy.

Though scholars such as McComiskey and Beech have defined their careers by blending cultural studies with critical pedagogy, this particular method of teaching composition is beginning to lose its scholarly presence within the field. The pop culture craze in English Studies slowly began to subside by the second term of George W. Bush’s reign as President of the United States. Since 2004, few scholarly articles concerning pop culture, critical pedagogy, or social-process rhetorical inquiry have
appeared in major academic publications such as *College English* or *The Journal of College Composition and Communication*. The rise of New Media Studies and the ever-growing need to adapt to *the digital* seems to have marked a new chapter in English Studies. My concern, however, is that within the past few years critical pedagogy has begun to slip away from the dominant Rhetoric and Composition conversations. Given our country’s current economic crisis, the need for critical pedagogy’s emphasis on reevaluating one’s place within the dominant social hierarchy is perhaps needed now more so than ever before.

**Critical Pedagogy and the Appalachian Learner**

Critical pedagogy. Social-epistemic pedagogy. Radical pedagogy. Marxist pedagogy. Consciousness-raising pedagogy. Critical-rhetorical pedagogy. For many contemporary readers, these terms have become caricatures of themselves. More often than not, we are given little more than vague definitions of these classroom practices and their underlying pedagogical goals. Therefore, it is important that we call these terminologies into question when evaluating the purpose and usefulness of this particular pedagogical tradition. The following section will explore some of the key terminologies and classroom goals associated with critical theory and critical pedagogy. In doing so, I will attempt to demonstrate how these practices meet the needs of potential Appalachian student populations. However, this section is not a how-to-guide for critical educators. Though I will provide examples of specific activities from my teaching, my objective is not to demonstrate how to critically educate Appalachian student writers via a multi-step process or rigid set of classroom maneuvers. My goal is to explore the language of
critical pedagogy in an attempt to demonstrate how the pedagogical aims of this tradition meet the intellectual needs of many first-generation college students from small town Appalachia.

**Critical Pedagogy Promotes …**

**Critical Thinking**

For many, the “critical” in critical pedagogy refers to the act of critical thinking. The term “critical thinking” often finds its way into the mission statements of American colleges and universities. Today, both public schools and private schools claim to promote critical thinking. Employers tell us they want critical thinkers, problem solvers. Politicians and pundits ask us to exercise critical thinking before casting our ballots. Most will agree that “critical thinking,” as a concept, is almost always seen a positive attribute in mainstream American society. The process of critical thinking is, however, one that can be quite difficult to define. How does one demonstrate critical thinking? How might we define uncritical thought? Perhaps this is an appropriate place to begin such a discussion.

The binary opposite to critical thought would likely be some form of thinking that resembles the blind acceptance of truth without consideration for the speaker(s) disseminating a particular truth. This would perhaps be the acceptance of truth without consideration for the motivations, be they blatant or hidden, of the speaker. Uncritical thought fails to consider the rhetorical nature of truth, or truth narratives. The uncritical thinker fails to consider context and is unable or unwilling to take alternative viewpoints into account. The uncritical thinker wants the answers and cares little for the process of
questioning. Therefore, critical thinking, by this definition, can be seen as the process by which thinkers question, examine, and consider issues such as rhetorical intention, audience awareness, use of evidence, any other appeal that falls under the argumentative umbrella. As opposed to uncritical belief, critical thinking is the process of questioning and reserving judgment. Critical educators want their students to resist the urge to settle on an easy answer. On the other hand, the American public school system is designed to adhere to a teach-to-the-test mentality geared toward the standardized testing industry. This process is not the promotion of critical thought or critical questioning. Ours is a system designed to promote correct answers, a system that rewards good test takers – individuals with the capacity for rote memorization. Although some might argue that American public schools promote critical thinking, these systems, more often than not, actually reinforce dominant perspectives and encourage learning through rote memorization.

The American learner is constantly being asked to negotiate black and white truth narratives. Such rhetoric leaves no room for alternative viewpoints: these rhetorics are often devoid of negotiable spaces. The critical thinker remains suspicious, or is at least accustomed to practicing suspicious thought. Critical thinking cannot take place without questioning positions and acknowledging argumentative viewpoints different from your own. A critical education, therefore, is one that allows students to do more than memorize fact/truth. It forces, for lack of a better term, students to take part in a process of questioning, trying on ideas, and discarding truth that doesn’t seem to fit. This brand of education asks students to consider the speaker, the speaker’s rhetoric, and the technique
by which this rhetoric is delivered to an actual audience. Critical thinking forces us to look at the consequences of truth narratives for all of those involved in the discussion.

Boiled down to its most simplistic definition, critical pedagogy is a style of teaching that promotes critical thinking. It is a student-centered approach to teaching that asks students to critique and analyze academic discourse as well as the habitual everyday aspects of life. Critical pedagogy asks students to consider multiple possibilities and truths. It is, in many ways, an exercise in playing “devil’s advocate.” Critical pedagogy is also liberatory. This does not mean that critical pedagogy helps students become wealthy. Nor am I suggesting critical pedagogy is designed only for economically and socially disadvantaged students. Critical pedagogy can prove beneficial to economically and socially privileged learners as well. It promotes education as a means of improving the intellectual quality one’s life. It is a style of teaching that helps students question socially constructed knowledge. All students, regardless of their social or economic circumstances, need to learn how to think critically about how they see themselves as thinkers and as human beings. The critical pedagogy classroom, therefore, is a place where students are never encouraged to find the easy answer. The critical pedagogy classroom is a space for questioning. The teacher rewards students who are able to think about argument as multi-layered. Thus, the critical pedagogy classroom gives students the opportunity to think critically about the arguments that directly affect their everyday lives. In such a setting, students are essentially being trained to question the habitual everyday aspects of their own lives. From a composition standpoint, such a setting allows
for students to take part in exploratory writing assignments that encourage dialectical thinking and self-exploration.

**Critical Thinking and Rhetorical Awareness**

Although I like to think of myself as a critical educator, I do have problems with a good portion of contemporary critical pedagogy scholarship. One of my major concerns is a relative neglect of issues regarding rhetoric. I believe critical educators should participate in discussions of rhetoric, rhetorical technique, and audience awareness with their students. As an instructor who is dedicated to keeping rhetorical issues at the forefront of classroom conversations, I enjoy teaching professional and technical writing courses because they allow students to focus on issues of discourse community, audience, and persona. Critical thinkers understand how these issues are connected to rhetoric and persuasion. Therefore, critical educators should help their students come to see the role of rhetoric within academic discourse as well as the role of rhetoric within their own day-to-day lives. To think critically is to consider the rhetorical aspect of knowledge and truth: critical thinking is the process of uncovering rhetoric’s connection to truth.

Critical thinking and rhetoric awareness go hand-in-hand. In my *Women and Writing* class at Ohio University, my students explore issues of rhetoric and persuasion that are connected to their own lives. For instance, one visual rhetoric activity asked students to evaluate the “parents page” on the Ohio University website. This activity was in conjunction with the reading of a chapter in Lyn Peril’s *College Girls* about “In Loco Parentis” rules on college campuses in the early 1940s. Focusing on issues of rhetoric, my students uncovered the fact that none of the pictures found on the “parents’ site”
contained young men. In fact, all of the photographs were of mothers and daughters or fathers and daughters. After reading Peril’s chapter on “in loco parentis” rules, some students took on the position that such a site was, in all actuality, designed for the parents of college girls. Others simply contended this occurrence as coincidence or chance. As an instructor, I stress that there was no correct answer in this discussion. Both perspectives are possible. However, when viewed through a rhetorical lens, the “parents site” can be seen as an ideological space. After taking part in small group work activities, my students discussed societal expectations for young women and young men in America. They began to see many of the various contradictions that influence their own habitual activities and social practices. The “parents site” therefore became a reflection of these contradictions and double standards. This exercise is an example of critical pedagogy via rhetorical awareness. I have experienced similar results when asking students to explore the rhetorical messages found in magazine and television advertisements.

As noted in Chapter 3, my experiences as a student in a critical pedagogy classroom forever changed my worldview. Thinking and writing critically about my hometown region gave me the opportunity to more fully understand cyclical poverty in Appalachia. Thinking and writing about the rhetorics that most directly influenced my life allowed me the opportunity to more fully understand my family’s place within these hierarchical systems of cyclical Appalachian poverty. As a critical educator, I encourage composition instructors to make rhetoric a continuing conversation in their classrooms. Teaching rhetoric through the “everyday/habitual” gives students a chance to more fully grasp rhetorical concepts. Ask your students to critique and confront university rhetorics.
Teach your students to more fully evaluate the rhetorics found in popular social media and mass media advertisements. We should do more than ask our students to simply turn to Plato’s Socrates for a definition of rhetoric – although I am certainly not against doing so. The critical educator, like Ira Shor, wants students to practice critical thinking and critical writing as a means of evaluating their everyday lives.

**Dialectical Thinking**

To understand critical pedagogy, one must first come to understand the process and educational aims of dialectical thinking. We get the term “dialectic” from Plato’s Socratic dialogues. In this context, the term is employed to describe the process by which thinkers of opposing viewpoints debate their positions, the end result being progress made toward truth. Dialectical thinking and dialectical methodology reemerges in Hegel, Marx, and later in the work of Freire. Dialectic is also crucial to the work of many contemporary critical educators such as Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux.

Like the Socratic approach, Hegel’s dialectic centers on making verifiable or useful ideas pass through binary argumentation. Hegel’s three-fold dialectic moves us from thesis to antithesis and on to synthesis: The moments of friction between thesis and antithesis thus leads to synthesis. Truth, the concrete/provable, for Hegel, must always pass the antithesis test, so to speak. Hegelian dialect is method for testing ideas via the process of highlighting inherent contradictions. However, Marx, though inspired by Hegel, aims to change the way view dialectic, as a logos barometer. In *Capital Volume 1*, Marx draws a clear distinction between Hegel’s dialectical approach and his own:
My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea,’ he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea.’ With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. (29)

Marxist dialectics focus on highlighting contradiction within class struggle. For Marx, class was the determining factor in one’s political, social, or philosophic life. Our ideas are thus reflections of our class status. The words we speak, the clothes we wear, the beer we drink, or the fact we drink a particular brand of beer, or drink beer at all, is determined by our class. Dialectical thinking, for Marx, is the process by which one calls into question the material contradictions of his or her life, in regard to class-based domination.

Using a Marxist dialectical approach, Freire is concerned with helping the Brazilian peasantry question their connections to a dominant and exploitive social structure. Freire’s pedagogical work aims to “demysticize” reality for learners. It is a pedagogy that moves learners beyond myth and toward material reality. Freire wants to aid his pupils in becoming conscious of their connection to their own societal and economic realities. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire argues “there is no history without humankind, and no history for human beings; there is only history of humanity, made by people and (as Marx pointed out) in turn making them” (130). Dialectical
thinking thus serves as a bridge to critical consciousness, an awareness of one’s place in the world.

The term “dialectic” continues to appear within the work of contemporary critical educators. Joan Wink, for example, posits “dialectic” as a key component of critical pedagogy. Wink’s definition of dialectic reflects the term’s Hegelian, Marxist, and Freirian roots:

A dialectic involves seeing and articulating contradictions; it is the process of learning from the oppositional view. A dialectic brings to light a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple facets of the opposite. As we learn while teaching and teach while learning, we are in a dialectical process (41).

From an educational standpoint, dialectical thinking and learning move us further away from the rote memorization of facts, dates, and statistics and toward questioning, thinking, and contradiction. This viewpoint positions education as more than the process of learning a trade or a set of rigidly defined skills. Education, in this context, is about exposing the limitations of socially constructed truths. It is a pedagogy centered on critical questioning.

Based on my experiences in Appalachia, I can confidently argue that dialectical thinking is a mental practice rarely encouraged in Appalachian public school systems. Because standardized test scores often determine funding, most Appalachian public schools adhere to the teach-to-the-test mentality which plagues American school systems as a whole. The Appalachian learner is often encouraged to get the right answer. Hegemonic small town Appalachian culture often encourages capital T truth and capital
V Appalachian values. These Appalachian students, will little exposure to other cultures or value systems, are constantly being given black and white truth narratives and educational principles. Thus concepts such as “home” and “work” become normalized for Appalachian students. Tag (gifted) programs separate good students from bad students and thus certain career paths become normalized for students. Dialectical thinking gives these students an opportunity to point out the contradictions in these truths and value systems. This, in my opinion, is a skill that assists Appalachian learners in questioning normalcy and social expectation. As a young boy, I learned that “smart” kids were in the “gifted” program. I was not in the “gifted” program, therefore, I was not “smart.” I learned that standardized tests separated the “gifted” from the rest of the pack. My social setting taught me that “men” worked in coalmines. I learned that coalmines make “good” money. Therefore, to me, “good men” worked in coalmines and made “good money.” If you couldn’t be smart, wealthy was the next best option. Training in dialectical thinking would allow for young people, like the younger version of myself, to better complicate such standard Appalachian truth narratives. Exercises in dialectical thinking can help students question gender-specific work expectations, inadequate distributions of wealth, alienated work, and other dominant Appalachian truths. Appalachian students must come to see themselves as intellectuals who have the right to speak their mind. Dialectical thinking provides these students with the necessary tools to argue around and past dominant truth narratives regarding their socially constructed identities.
Reflexive Thinking

Reflexivity, a byproduct of dialectical thinking, is an often-overlooked term in critical pedagogy. Dialectical thinking asks students to set conflicting perspectives into an oppositional framework. This is a method, a pedagogical technique that leads to reflexivity. Reflexive thinkers are critical thinkers who are able to look at difficult issues from a variety of perspectives. The reflexive thinker possesses the ability to see how his or her worldview impacts others. This does not mean that reflexivity is an achievable state of mind. We, as thinkers, never become fully reflexive. This, like Freire’s critical consciousness, is a process. It is a skill that requires patience and practice. The term “reflexivity,” in my opinion, is most eloquently defined by Duncan Carter and Sherrie Gradin in *Writing as Reflective Action*: “reflexivity, then, involves trying on the perspective, the world view of an ‘other’ for long enough to look back critically at ourselves, our ideas, our assumptions, our values” (4). When critical educators ask their students to read or discuss difficult or controversial cultural and ideological perspectives, they are aware that students must practice reflexive thinking in order to avoid broad generalizations and culturally insensitive discourse. I also agree with Carter and Gradin’s assertion that “Learning to see yourself and your culture through the lens of another culture is perhaps the single most important intellectual move you will learn to make in college” (5). The contemporary college-educated individual should be one who possesses the mental capacity to examine and empathize with cultural perspectives that may be different from their own. To lack this particular ability is to go through life expecting others to adhere to your particular values, standards, and beliefs. This is hyperbolic
thinking. It is a false expectation that cannot be met. Before Appalachian students can become critical thinkers in regard to Appalachian rhetorics, they must first become reflexive readers, writers, and thinkers.

**Utopian Thinking**

Critical pedagogy asks students to engage and critically evaluate possibilities. It is a method of teaching that asks students to first recognize and then consider solutions to inequality and injustice. Utopian thinking is therefore necessary in such a setting. In the best-of-all-possible-worlds, how might we, as human beings, overcome racism, homophobia, and patriarchy? If all things were possible, how might the American government provide all citizens with free health care? What steps would need to be taken for women to achieve true equality in the American workplace? How might coalmines treat their workers better and ensure a safer work environment? These are not questions easily answered. Nor are they questions that students will be able to answer in a 10-page essay or 50 minute class discussion. However, utopian thinking does move students away from “common-sense” thinking, a brand of thinking that often promotes a “that’s just the way it is, there is nothing we can do about it,” attitude. Utopian thinking asks students to image solutions and in doing so the actual real-life obstacles to utopian possibilities become easier to see.

Peter McLaren, for example, argues that before critical pedagogy can become a viable method of education within American schools, “teachers must learn to employ critical analysis and utopian thinking” (237). This sentiment is best reflected in Ira Shor’s *When Students Have Power*. Shor’s students participate in a utopian-themed course
where students chose the syllabi, course readings, and controlled the social nature of classroom conversations. This is student-centered democratic pedagogy at its very best.

Shor’s book, in my opinion, is the best example of utopian pedagogy ever published by a U.S. author. It is a testament to the possibilities of utopian pedagogy for economically and socially disadvantaged students. Like Shor’s working-class Long Island students, Appalachian learners often adopt a somewhat fatalistic attitude. Classroom exercises that encourage utopian thinking give Appalachian students a chance to move beyond the “common sense” truths they have been fed their entire lives. The Appalachian learner has been told what career options are realistic. They have been told that they cannot get a job doing that around here. They have been warned about their social and cultural limitations. Utopian thinking exercises allow for them to imagine possibilities as opposed to harsh realities. Appalachian students are told to be realistic far too often in their lives. They deserve the opportunity to imagine a world better than current 21st Century Appalachia. Therefore, they deserve the opportunity to think critically about the social and economic factors that limit some possibilities more than others.

**Dialogue**

Critical educators see dialogue as an interactive process between two mutually contributing individuals via some form of communication system. Dialogue is, therefore, not authoritative. Dialogue, for critical educators, is a democratic process. Authoritarian lecture-style teaching is not dialogic. In this setting, the teacher is the center of attention. The teacher generates the classroom conversation and students are expected to be silent, unless confronted with an issue they do not understand. Most critical educators believe
the classroom space should be one where students are given the chance to speak their minds and generate / dictate classroom conversations. The critical educator believes students and teachers should speak often and honestly to each other. Critical educators believe students must practice speaking to each other in an educated and critical fashion.

I see the rhetoric and composition classroom as a space for sharing ideas. Because our content-based discussions are not bound by a particular subject matter, there is no limit to what can be discussed in such a setting. Because rhetoric is our content, everything is our content: all knowledge is rhetorical. Peter McLaren, for example, argues that “dialogue is one of the most overlooked and undervalued educational tools we have at our disposal” (41). I agree with McLaren in this regard but would like to take this assertion one step further. Good dialogue is the most important educational tool found in the classroom. We, as educators, should not only look to help facilitate good critical discussions in the classroom setting; we should also encourage students to continue these conversations outside the walls of the academy. As suggested by the case study participants in Chapter 4, Appalachian learners might avoid visiting tutoring programs or their professors during office hours: based on my experiences as a first-generation college student from Appalachia, I would also argue it is highly probably that many of these students avoid speaking out in class. To fully meet the educational needs of these students, we must take the time to help these students feel as if they are truly a part of the university community, and the classroom conversation for that matter. Dialogue-based discussion courses give Appalachian students the opportunity to learn how to speak out in class. Instructors should value their opinions and find ways to encourage their interests.
There is no reason the rhetoric and composition classroom cannot be a space for these students to follow their personal and intellectual passions. From my experiences as an instructor, I have found that good discussion often leads to good thinking that in return often leads to good, or at least interesting, writing.

*Critical Pedagogy Doesn’t Promote …*

**Rote Memorization / Mechanized Learning**

Rote memorization is a method of learning that requires the memorization of facts through the process of repetition. In this setting, students are given facts and asked to memorize them. Students are then tested on their ability to recall these facts during some form of timed examination. Class time is spent preparing for this moment of examination as opposed to critical-engagement in the content. Rote memorization promotes answers that are static fixed entities. Class time and free time are spent memorizing “the answers.” Because timed examinations demonstrate one’s knowledge, study sessions (cramming) are a necessity. After the examination, students are ranked according to their scores and the teacher moves on to the next set of answers.

Critical educators recognize that a certain amount of rote memorization and mechanized learning are required for some content areas. However, critical educators also recognize that viewing education through this narrow lens can be extremely problematic for students. Rote memorization does not promote lifelong learning; the answers are easily forgotten after the test. This style of teaching and learning is problematic because it adheres to grading systems that are designed to weed out students based on their score on standardized tests. The timed evaluation separates “qualified”
students from those deemed unworthy to participate in certain career paths. The American educational system, with its capitalist influences, is based upon competition. Standardized tests, which signal an individual’s ability to learn through rote memorization, determine students. These tests limit their educational opportunities. The best test-takers are given privilege over those who do not test well in a timed environment.

**The Banking Method of Education**

The “banking concept of education,” another term coined by Freire, refers to educational praxis that assumes students are empty vessels waiting to be filled by the knowledge of the teacher. This authoritarian method of teaching positions the teacher at the head of the classroom. Students assume a passive role in such a setting. In the authoritarian classroom, students sit at their desks, pencils and paper in hand, waiting to take notes. The banking method of education is a lecture-oriented method of teaching that focuses on the knowledge of the teacher. This pedagogical style positions the teacher as the authority figure and thus privileges authoritative knowledge: “in the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire 72). This student-teacher relationship is not reciprocal. Students have nothing to offer the teacher. The teacher, on the other hand, has complete and total control of the distribution of knowledge and the consequences for not retaining and regurgitating this knowledge. This, in my opinion, is a pedagogy of correct answers. The teacher gives students the
correct answers and students either remember or forget them. In this setting, timed examinations determine the good student from the bad student.

Freire is, of course, not the first or only critical educator who views the banking method of education as inherently flawed. From Swedish-born educational theorist Johann Pestalozzi to pragmatist John Dewey, the “banking method” has long been criticized by progressive educators. Anyone who has worked within the field of education is aware that the contemporary notion that students learn best by doing. Today, hands-on learning is seen as good pedagogy. We, as teachers, are taught to incorporate pedagogical practices that recognize different learning styles. However, the contemporary American education system predominately adheres to a teach-to-the-test mentality. I argue that American educational philosophy promotes progressive education but in praxis, we, as a country, continue to promote the banking method of learning. Joan Wink, for example, argues that President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act is an example of government legislation that supports a banking method of education (32). Although revolutionary figures such as Freire and Dewey have reshaped the way contemporary educators view classroom dynamics, much of the American educational landscape continues to reflect a “banking method” approach to teaching and learning. Students gain access to academia via economic privilege, social privilege, or their ability to perform well on standardized tests. This is not a system that promotes intellectual exploration or lifelong learning. It is a system that rewards memorization as learning and excludes those who come from marginalized backgrounds.
Narration Sickness

Narration sickness, another phrase coined by Freire, describes the ill effects of authoritarian, skill-and-drill, educational practices (i.e. the banking method). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire posits narration sickness as the unfortunate consequence of the banking method:

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are. (72)

This passivity, for Freire, leads to a lack of critical awareness. Students, in this setting, become good memorizers as opposed to good thinkers. Like critical consciousness, narration sickness is a gradual process. An innumerable number of experiences, from kindergarten to college, cause students to gradually form expectations in regard to education, literacy, and their connection to organized learning. Learning becomes sanctioned and knowledge becomes quantified. The Honor Roll student comes to see his or her self as the elite thinker. The “D” student comes to accept the fact the he or she is lacking in regard to knowledge. The teacher, the narrator of educational identity and self worth, has the power to determine one’s place in the American educational hierarchy.

Appalachian learners have been told, far too often, that they are hillbillies, hicks, and a number of other culturally denigrating stereotypes. American educational systems have ranked and evaluated their worth. The critical pedagogy classroom should aim to give
these students a fresh start – an opportunity to be an authority on some rhetorical subject they find interesting. We, as critical educators, should place less emphasis on grades and more emphasis on the process of having students think critically about how their arguments might read to an actual academic audience.

When I pass back graded essays, I write a short letter to students outlining my praise and criticism for each section of the assignment sheet rubric (e.g. organization, expression, etc.). During this process, I make an honest effort to let them know what they are doing well. I also try to provide clear feedback in regard to their academic discourse mistakes or argumentative flaws. After my students read over my in-text comments and typed evaluation sheet, I have students write a letter back to me outlining whether or not my comments made sense or seemed fair. I tell students this is an opportunity to have an honest and frank dialogue about their work. If they are frustrated or confused, this is actually an opportunity to express this frustration. It is a chance for them to pose questions or clarify whether or not they feel they are capable of reshaping the parts of the essay I find less than persuasive. Many students remain passive and agree with my evaluations. Others use this opportunity to create a dialogue with me about my evaluation of their work. I often find that my Appalachian students take advantage of this opportunity. Many of these students express genuine gratitude for the opportunity to defend their work or ask additional questions. Sometimes I realize that my comments have been too harsh in my evaluation of their work and I actually change student grades. However, this is not the point of the exercise. This grading technique is designed to help students think critically about how their arguments influence an actual real-life audience.
For instance, a student in my “Rhetoric(s) of Hip-Hop class” once began a paper with the following sentence: “Have you ever thought about how Hip-Hop influences American students?” When evaluating his essay, I wrote the following comment in the margin: “Yes, I have thought about how Hip-Hop influences American students. I teach a class about Hip-Hop.” When this student wrote back to me in his letter he stated that he wasn’t really writing this opening question to me. I answered back by asking about his intended audience. This led to a great discussion of what I call the “ambiguous you,” – when students write to an imagined audience they have thought very little about. Through this dialogue my student learned to think critically about audience awareness and the rhetorical techniques that support this awareness. This exercise moved my student away from thinking about the letter grade and toward thinking about his writing.

**Critical Educators Discuss …**

*Identity Politics and Concepts of “Other”*

Some scholars argue that critical pedagogy scholarship, as a whole, fails to recognize issues regarding race. For example, in “Inserting the ‘Race’ into Critical Pedagogy: An Analysis of Race-Based Epistemologies,” Marvin Lynn calls for “critical race pedagogy” as a means of filling this potential gap in critical pedagogy theory and praxis. Lynn, like many of critical pedagogy’s detractors, argues that epistemologies such as critical race theory can aid critical pedagogy in more fully addressing issues regarding race. Critical pedagogy scholarship also comes under fire from some feminist critics who feel the tradition ignores feminist scholarship and gender-specific issues regarding power and domination. Although some critical educators, such as Ira Shor, have been accused of
ignoring issues involving members of the LGBT community, I argue that feminist theory, queer theory, and LGBT issues should also be important to critical pedagogy. Issues regarding race and identity should also be at the forefront of critical education. At its core, it is a method of teaching that is designed to address inequality, exploitation, and social injustice. Critical pedagogy, as a tradition, promotes a humanistic philosophy that suggests all human beings have value and are important to the world. Its core pedagogical belief is that learning is an ongoing process that assists humans in recognizing their connection to larger social systems and thus learning has the potential to assist humans in gaining voice and agency in their lives, relationships, and careers.

In the summer of 2010, I was given the opportunity to teach a group of provisionally admitted students at Ohio University: the theme of my course was “Critiquing the Rhetoric(s) of Appalachian Identity.” Many of the students in my course were from rural southeastern towns in Ohio. On the first day of class I asked half of my students to leave the room for 5 minutes; I appointed a group leader to round them up and bring them back to class on time. While this group was out of the room, I asked my remaining students to make a list of any words that come to mind when they hear the term “Hillbilly.” After the first group of students returned, I had the second group leave the classroom. I then repeated the same process but asked these students to make a list of any words that come to mind when they hear the term “Appalachia.” When the entire class returned after this 10 minute free writing session we shared their responses. I was not surprised to find that many of the same terms found their way onto both lists: hillbilly, dirty, inbred, trailer or trailer park, moonshine, red neck, no teeth, bare feet, out
house. After reviewing the full list, I told my students our duty, as a class, was to find out how these persistent identity markers have made their way into the dominant American conversation regarding the region. During the five week summer session, my students watched video clips from many of the Hillbilly-themed movies and television shows outlined in Chapter 2. My students also read essays from *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*. Critiquing the social construction of the Hillbilly gave my students a chance to more fully evaluate rhetoric and stereotypes that influence their everyday lives. These discussions and classroom exercises also led to discussions of the marginalization of other social, racial, and ethnic groups in the United States. I was amazed to watch these so-called “provisionally admitted” students raise questions about the reinforcement of normative perspectives and “othering” of social groups with a less powerful political and economic voices. Giving my Appalachian students the opportunity to critique Hillbilly rhetoric came discussions of class, race, gender, and sexuality. The critical pedagogy classroom gives students a chance to think critically about socially constructed identity.

*Hegemony*

Very few college students arrive on campus with a firm understanding of the term “hegemony.” I often find that students hold strong to the belief that America is truly a melting pot of cultural difference and individuality. This, in my opinion, is a naive perspective. It is wishful thinking to assume that we, as human thinkers, are independent minds free to express our feeling and emotions without consequence. Dominant cultures impose penalties for acting or speaking in a fashion that is deemed inappropriate by those
who hold social and economic privilege. We, as Americans, are never free to express ourselves without consequence. Certain modes of communication, as well as certain dominant perspectives, will always carry the day.

In *Life in Schools*, Peter McLaren defines the process of hegemonic control as follows:

The dominant culture is able to exercise domination over subordinate classes or groups through a process known as hegemony. Hegemony refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family. (202)

Hegemony gives us dominant constructs of “good” and “bad,” “right,” and “wrong.” Hegemony gives us dominant constructs of “beauty,” and “morality.” Hegemonic control shapes contemporary notions of proper behavior. Hegemony is a prerequisite to exploitation, domination, and subordination. This is the ideological process by which we, as a society, justify the shape of American life. No critical pedagogy classroom should be without discussions of hegemonic control. One cannot think reflexively about his or her position in a particular argument without first considering the various social factors that have influenced it. Giving my southeastern Ohio students the opportunity to critique the *Hillbilly* led to very insightful discussions regarding hegemony. Using this particular example helped students understand hegemony before they actually learned the academic term used to describe this process.
Ideology

From my experiences as an educator, I have found that undergraduate students often struggle to define “ideology,” and explain its connection to hegemonic control. In fact, many students do not see themselves as having an ideological point of view. It would benefit these students to think about concepts of ideology and how their own ideological views are shaped by social and economic factors. Hegemony is fueled by ideology, a point made eloquently by Peter McLaren:

Hegemony could not do its work without the support of ideology. Ideology permeates all of social life and does not simply refer to the political ideologies of communism, socialism, anarchism, rationalism, or essentialism. Ideology refers to the production and representation of ideas, values, and beliefs and the manner in which they are expressed and lived out by both individuals and groups. (205)

McLaren’s definition of ideology is important in that it reminds us that ideology encompasses more than one’s religious beliefs or political affiliations. Ideology does not simply exist as an idea. Ideology is action. It is how we spend our time and money. It is the way we dress. It is the words we choose, or refrain from choosing. It is the food we eat. Ideology shows itself in our everyday actions.

I often ask students in my composition courses to write ideology statements. These are low-risk informal writing prompts that ask students to write about their likes, dislikes, beliefs, values, political opinions, etc. After students craft these statements I ask them to write a second prompt outlining the social and economic pressures that have influenced these particular ideological viewpoints. This activity is often in conjunction
with a classroom reading of John Updike’s “On Being a Self Forever.” Educated critical thinkers must possess the courage to examine and recognize the various social and economic factors that influence their willingness to appreciate certain life choices or argumentative viewpoints. Assignments like the one I have just described do not encourage students to name their ideology, as if it were their shoe size. Critical educators want their students to think about ideology as an increasingly complex set of views, opinions, choices, and practices. Critical educators want their students to see how social and economic pressures influence our worldviews.

**Class**

In the opening lines of *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels position the history of humankind as the history of class struggle. Class, in this context, signals one’s place within historical movements. In this Marxist framework, the dominant class, the bourgeoisie elite, controls the economic means of production and exploits the labor of the proletariat, the working class. The fundamental contradiction in this struggle is that the bourgeoisie elite, the numerical minority, enjoys economic and social privileges (i.e. property ownership) over the marginalized working class, the numerical majority. Therefore, class determines how one comes to view work, literacy, life, etc. Class shapes how we view ourselves in relation to others. Our opinions, thoughts, beliefs, and passions are thus tied to our social and economic class. For Marx and Engels, class-consciousness was the first step toward revolution. To recognize one’s place within exploitative social and economic exploitation is to move beyond mystification and see the true nature of social systems.
Today, most critical educators do not see class in quite the same deterministic lens. Post-Marxist critics such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe reject the notion of essentialized class identity. Most contemporary critical educators do not see communism, even in the Marxian definition of the term, as the solution to social and economic equality. In other words, we, as critical educators, do not see capitalism as a bridge to communism. Nor do we see capitalism as inherently evil or wicked. We do, however, focus on the various contradictions within capitalist societies, these being social and economic inequalities. Marxist critique gives use a methodology for discussing class structures and pointing out the various contradictions found within exploitive social and economic systems.

Critical educator Peter McLaren defines class as “the economic, social, and political relationships that govern life in a given social order” (198). Although traditional Marxist views of essentialized class identity have largely fallen out of favor with 21st century thinkers, discussions of class and class-based rhetoric are crucial to the critical pedagogy classroom. Class influences the way we view literacy and the way we view ourselves as writers, as demonstrated by the stories of my case study participants in Chapter 4. For most critical educators, discussions of class-based rhetoric aid students in reflexive thinking and writing. In my composition courses I often ask my students to think about how their social and economic backgrounds play a part in their willingness to subscribe to certain argumentative positions. In regard to Appalachian students, I think discussions of class-based rhetoric are essential to critical learning. One cannot change his or her socioeconomic situation without first taking the time to recognize the factors
that limit the potentialities for change. Reviewing census bureau data for my hometown region in West Virginia opened my eyes to the fact that I was indeed from a poor and economically deprived region – it opened my eyes to the realities of returning to the region, my original plan. I would have returned to the region, settled on the inevitability of my life possibilities, if not for the chance to write critical prose regarding my social class. Appalachian poor or lower middle class people, more often than not, do not see themselves as poor or lower middle class. These are, of course, difficult realities to face. However, recognizing my socioeconomic status assisted me in becoming more critically aware of my connection to a broad range of social practices that were impeding with my intellectual development (e.g. my reluctance to leave my hometown region).

Culture

In Critical Pedagogy, Notes from the Real World, Joan Wink positions culture as a key focus of a critical pedagogy curriculum: “each of us is part of a part of learning a culture, transmitting a culture, and generating a culture in the multiple facets of our daily lives” (39). To understand one’s culture is to understand how one’s own habitual thoughts and social practices are tied to cultural expectations. Therefore, critical evaluations of cultural perspectives and practices are necessary to engage in critical reflection. Critical pedagogy, for me, is both personal and reflexive. It treats students as human beings with life experiences that are valuable to classroom conversations. In my classroom, students are given the opportunity to use personal experience as evidence. Students are given the opportunity to write first-person academic prose. Cultural critique, therefore, is a common goal in my approach to critical pedagogy.
In the fall of 2007, I began teaching a junior-level special topics course at Ohio University titled “Rhetoric(s) of Hip-Hop Culture.” A long-time fan of hip-hop music, I felt this particular theme would lend itself to good cultural critique. This was a composition course designed to both examine and interrogate hip-hop music’s influence on American culture. During the course of the quarter my class focused their attention on some the distinct rhetorics found in hip-hop music, movies, and fashion. In doing so, we were forced to ask ourselves several important questions. For instance, what type of arguments do hip-hop artists make? How are these arguments constructed? What are the cultural implications of these arguments? How do factors such as race, gender, class, and socioeconomic status complicate our understanding of these arguments? In an attempt to answer some of these questions, we read various scholarly insights concerning hip-hop music. We, of course, also listened to groundbreaking works within this musical genre. This means that, at times, my students were asked to listen to songs that contained lyrics deemed violent, vulgar, and sexually explicit by the FCC, RIAA, and mainstream media. The goal of this course was not to justify or defend these lyrics but rather to present hip-hop, in uncensore
d form, to a classroom of students who are willing to think rhetorically about its influence on American culture. In this regard, the course was a ten-week exercise in thinking critically about dominant and marginalized cultural perspectives.

My most successful cultural critique assignment from my “Rhetoric(s) of Hip-Hop Culture Class” was what I referred to as a “Hip-Hop Position Statement.15” This assignment asked students to first choose a hip-hop song that stirs some emotion within

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15 This assignment was inspired by the position statement assignments outlined in Bruce McComiskey’s “Teaching Writing as a Social Process.”
their psyche. Most chose songs they found inspiring, thought-provoking, or unique. However, some chose songs they found particularly appalling; these were often the best papers. After selecting a song, students began focusing on the rhetoric, or rhetorics, found within the song. In doing so, students asked themselves questions such as what type of argument(s) does this song make? How is this argument presented to the reader? How do factors such as race, gender, and class play a part in this argument? After students became familiar with the song’s content and formed a clear argument about the song’s rhetoric, students were then asked to consider how their unique cultural upbringing had influenced their evaluation of the song. Therefore, students had to ask themselves how factors such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, location, religion, and education influenced their understanding and opinion on the song’s overarching argument. This form of reflexive and reflective writing is often referred to as a position statement because it helps the writer become more conscious of why they are taking a specific argumentative position.

My favorite hip-hop position statement came from a student I will call Cindy. From day one, Cindy made it abundantly clear that she did not care for hip-hop music. In fact, Cindy was shocked when our class listened to and read an article about California-based rap group N.W.A’s (Niggaz With Attitudes) controversial song “Fuck the Police.” Why would anyone say such a thing about the police? Because she wanted to express her frustration with the song, she chose to write about it. In her paper, Cindy discussed her resistance to the song and its anti-authority rhetoric. In her neighborhood, Upper Arlington, a well-to-do suburb in Columbus, Ohio, the police were seen as a protective
presence within the community. Police, in her experience, were there to protect and serve the community. Cindy then moved on to discuss her research on racial profiling in Compton, California (the hometown of N.W.A). Cindy also discussed the Rodney King incident in 1993 as well as the ensuing riots and racial tensions in California. In a rhetorically-brilliant fashion, Cindy was able to acknowledge that “Fuck the Police” was in many ways a song that encapsulated the frustrations of a poor and economically disadvantaged community – a community that viewed the police in opposition to the people. Cindy ended her paper not by agreeing with N.W.A’s message. Instead, she acknowledged the roots of this cultural perspective while at the same time disagreeing with the rhetoric of the song. Through this assignment, Cindy came to understand how cultural perspectives are often tied social and economic realities. As a teacher, I couldn’t have been more proud of Cindy’s reflexive thinking.

**Dominant Culture and Subordinate Culture**

Critical educators see culture as more than an easily recognizable set of observable practices. To study culture is more than simply reading about language, art, and fashion. Cultural domination is a key theme for critical educators. Any complex discussion of cultural issues must first distinguish the various ways that dominant cultures impose their values and beliefs upon subordinate cultures. In *Life in Schools* McLaren provides a brilliant distinction between these two concepts:

Dominant culture refers to social practices and representations that affirm the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society. Groups who live out social relations in
subordination to the dominant culture are part of the subordinate culture. Group subcultures may be described as subsets of the two parent cultures (dominant and subordinate). (201)

The critical educator does not assume all cultures are equally valued. Cultural privilege is contextual and tricky to discuss. The critical educator focuses on the consequences of a dominant culture’s imposition upon less-privileged cultural perspectives (e.g. rightwing America’s longstanding attempts to limit the social privileges of those in the LBGT community).

In Chapters 1 and 2, I outlined the various ways that Hillbilly identity has been imposed upon the Appalachian region by dominant cultures, cultures that hold economic, social, and political privilege over those who live within the region. The informal literary tradition, outlined in Chapter 1, and the Hillbilly as monster motif, discussed in Chapter 2, are examples of such cultural domination. A critical pedagogy for Appalachian students should focus classroom discussions on issues regarding mainstream America’s various motivations for marginalizing the public identities of Appalachian people. Exploring these processes via classroom conversation, critical writing, and rhetorical inquiry not only benefits Appalachian students but also students from other social, ethnic, and racial demographics. Taking part in such an exploration gives students the opportunity to more fully understand how dominant cultural practices and perspectives influence those who are members of subordinate cultural backgrounds.
**Cultural Forms / Popular Culture**

Peter McLaren defines cultural forms as “symbols and social practices that express culture, such as those found in music, dress, food, religion, dance, and education” (202). These symbols and social practices are important to the critical educator because they encompass the habitual everyday choices our students make on a daily basis. One cannot think critically about his or her life without addressing the habitual or everyday aspect of life. Therefore, the critical educator does not discard popular culture as low culture. Nor does he or she dismiss popular trends as groupthink or anti-intellectualism. Popular culture, or any discussion of cultural practices, will be of interest to critical educators. Critical educators want to encourage their students to critique their economic choices. Critical educators want students to critique their social practices. Our courses are designed to help students see how these social practices are tied to larger social systems. Critical pedagogy is thus both content and praxis. We want to promote critical thinking and critical analysis beyond the classroom setting. I, personally, want my students to use their newfound rhetorical awareness to critique cultural norms and expectations in their lives and in their communities.

**Discourse Community**

I believe all critical educators should introduce their students to the concepts of discourse community. Academic disciplines, for example, dictate how field-specific information is to be shared, presented, and defended. Academic journals regulate how knowledge is presented and disseminated among the members of a particular field of study. Job sites are also discourse communities. Human resource policies dictate what is
or is not appropriate discourse in the workplace. Local and national communities also
serve as discourse communities. Governmental legislation dictates how people
communicate with each other, this process determines what communication practices are
deemed worthy of expression. And, of course, the classroom is a discourse community.
Student behaviors and social practices are influenced by an innumerable amount of
experiences within “classroom” settings. The critical educator wants his or her students to
recognize the contextual nature of communication and knowledge sharing. An
appropriate place to begin such a discussion is with the concept of discourse community.

**Hidden Curriculum**

Lawrence Cremin’s *The Transformation of the School* and Joel Spring’s *The American School* remind us of the fact that American schools have long supported
ideological agendas that are largely hidden to the public. The hidden curriculum, a term
commonly found in the work of Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux, refers to the
underlying outcomes of the schooling process (i.e. lessons learned in regard to
nationalism and heteronormative values). The hidden curriculum does not appear on a
multiple-choice test or pop quiz. Instead, these are attitudes, values, and assumptions
learned through the process of schooling. For example, I remember each school day
beginning with my entire homeroom class standing and saluting the American flag as our
principal, or some lucky student, recited the pledge of allegiance over the intercom. We,
as students, came to accept this ritual as part of the school day. In taking part in this
process day-in-and-day-out for 13 years, we were being conditioned to believe that one
should stand at attention for “the pledge” and cover his or her heart when saluting the
American flag. We learned that America is good and that we should stand and pay respect by taking part in this process. This was not a negotiable practice. We learned by participating. This act was not a part of our teacher’s lesson plans or educational preparations. We learned by following the example of others. We learned by accepting this practice as normal and good. This is an example of hidden curriculum. American schools attempt to produce American students who value and respect the ideals promoted by the American government. This is why American schools pressure students into saluting the American flag and stating the pledge of allegiance each and every school day.

The concept of hidden curriculum is crucial to critical pedagogy. Critical educators want students to think critically about every aspect of their education. Students need to practice disagreeing with texts, the choices of the teacher, as well as their own assumptions and argumentative positions. American schools are social systems. All social systems produce rhetoric. All rhetorics aim to persuade. Therefore, all schools are ideological spaces. No form of pedagogy is ever neutral or unbiased, nor should educators have to pretend to be neutral or unbiased. Just as McCarthyism found its way into American schools during the Cold War, the hidden curriculum is showing itself in the wake of our country’s recent social and ideological shifts. In 2010, the Texas school board garnered a large amount of criticism by removing certain historical figures from their texts. Also, the state of Arizona recently caused a great deal of media buzz surrounding their attempts to ban multicultural education from Arizona public schools. Until publicly challenged, these were examples of the hidden curriculum. The Texas
school board is, for all intents and purposes, attempting to control knowledge by attempting to exclude historical persons who do not agree with their ideological perspectives. I personally want my students to be critical of their education – to be critical of their textbooks and of the rhetorics they find in mass media. Critical thinkers understand how to dig beneath the surface and critique unstated assumptions.

“The Hillbilly Speaks of Rhetoric” as an act of Critical Pedagogy for Appalachia

After presenting some early-stage portions of this project at the Thomas R. Watson Conference at the University of Louisville, I was asked if I had a remedy or pedagogical solution to the problems of an Appalachian student population. “You must have done something right; you made it out of those conditions,” one audience member stated. “No, I haven’t made it out of there” I replied. I am continually fighting against my cultural conditioning every day. When driving in a large metropolitan city, my Appalachianess comes out. When confronted with individuals who mock my Appalachian accent or make rude Appalachian jokes about my small-town upbringing, I am faced with identity negotiations. My worldview has been shaped by my Appalachian upbringing. Worldviews are not easily discarded. “I do not think critical pedagogy solves the problems of an Appalachian student population,” I reiterated. However, I do think it promotes critical thinking and critical thinking couldn’t hurt. As critical educators, we must be patient. If our students are stopping to consider their culturally constructed believes, this is a sign of critical reflection. If our students learn to question the taken-for-granted views of their parents, family members, and small town communities, we have won. We cannot change student minds. Nor should we try to do so. Instead, we should
give them the tools to question and think critically on their own. If students recognize the maze, as stated earlier in this chapter, they will have an easier time maneuvering through it.

Problem-posing education, another term made famous by Freire, is born out of the constructivist theories of learning made famous by influential thinkers such as Piaget and Dewey. This pedagogical tradition posits knowledge as a product of the lived experiences and socially constructed positions one develops as a result of his or her cultural and environmental conditions. A problem-posing education would therefore be the opposite approach to the banking method of education. This approach focuses on mutual dialogue between student and teacher: a pedagogy of questions and cultural inquiry. The teacher is no longer placed in a position of dominance. Conversations grow organically. Both student and teacher learn from each other. This means that a variety of literacies and perspectives are appreciated and welcomed into the classroom conversation. This is personal pedagogy. I believe a college education should provide students with the opportunity to question and critique their own culturally received beliefs.

A Lesson.

*American political rhetoric. September 2010. The National Republican Senatorial Committee releases a casting call asking for actors who can replicate a “hicky West Virginia look.” The commercial, an endorsement of Republican John Raese, features a group of working-class West Virginians sitting in a small diner talking about Democratic candidate Joe Manchin’s unfortunate connection to Barack Obama. The flannel wearing “hicks” are, of course, actors reading from a script. The commercial shot in Philadelphia. A Lesson in Hillbilly Rhetoric.*

A Test.

*A class trip to the movie theatre. A class trip to the movie theatre for all students who scored in the top 50% percentile on their CTBS Tests. My mother allows me
to stay home from school to avoid the embarrassment of being one of only a hand
full of students from my class who do not get to take the trip. A Lesson in
American Educational Values.

An Education.

*My sister, a freshman at Marshall University, volunteers to go first. She stands in
front of her sociology class. The assignment is to design a poster that
capsulates who she is as a person: her likes, dislikes, passions, experiences,
etc. She speaks of Webster County. Her coalmining father. Her humble
Appalachian background. She then proceeds to sit down and listen to her
classmates talk of trips to Paris, trips to Spain, trips to Italy. Their doctor
parents. Their lawyer fathers. A Lesson in the American Class Structure.*

My English/Education background, experiences as a graduate student administrator,
and experiences as a first-generation college student allow me to see the composition
classroom from multiple perspectives. I have taught first-year composition for provisionally
admitted students, junior and senior-level composition, and have worked as a co-facilitator in
graduate-level writing and rhetoric courses. I have also taught professional and technical
writing, as well as special topics courses such as “Rhetoric(s) of Hip-Hop Culture,” and
“Women in the Academy.” These experiences have taught me to never underestimate the
diverse literacies students bring with them to the composition classroom. My job as an
instructor is to provide students with an educational atmosphere conducive to critical
thinking and self-reflection. For me, the classroom is a transformative space. It is the rare
occasion in which time seems to slow down and we are given the chance to think about the
brutal realities that shape and determine our lives.

*My middle/lower-class Appalachian background, experiences as a first-generation
college student, and experiences as Appalachian educator allow me to see the problems of an
Appalachian student population from multiple perspectives. I understand the struggles these
students face as they attempt to write their way into the academy. I understand the ideological and social effects of economic conditioning. I understand cultural roadblocks to education. With this being said, I also see the potentialities of liberatory teaching. I understand the transformative effect critical literacy can have on these students. This dissertation serves as a testimony to the possibilities of such teaching. The person writing this dissertation was not a valedictorian. Nor was he in the top 20 of his graduating class. He was a trailer park kid: a kid who grew up with the understanding that important things and important people exist elsewhere. I was culturally programmed to fail. I was culturally programmed to believe I am other.

The term critical pedagogy best describes my approach to teaching composition: I aim to teach students how to question the beliefs that may hamper them in their educational pursuits. This is not to say that I support substituting discussions of radical politics and popular culture for those of writing techniques and rhetorical awareness. I believe all students need to understand how to craft thesis-statements, conduct academic research, and follow the various forms of discourse dictated to them by the academy. I see critical pedagogy as a philosophic and pedagogical tradition that aids students in improving their critical thinking skills. My pedagogical approach helps students recognize themselves, and their writing, as part of a larger social and material context. Students who write and read critically can more fully participate in a democratic society, gaining a sense of agency in their writing. Critical pedagogy helps students develop critical thinking skills that will benefit them in the workforce and in their communities.
Regardless of the theme, the goal of each of my composition courses is threefold. First, I want my students to gain a newfound rhetorical awareness. Students should leave my classroom with a clear understanding of how rhetorical techniques influence real-life audiences. Second, I want my students to gain a newfound argumentative awareness rooted in critical-consciousness. My classroom activities help students become aware of how they may be socially or culturally inclined to take on certain argumentative positions. When students begin to think critically about why they are taking an argumentative position they tend to make better rhetorical decisions and write much more persuasive essays. And finally, I want my students to gain a newfound social awareness. Although I realize that many of my students will not leave my class and go out into the world to become social advocates, my objective is to make students aware of the social and dialogic nature of rhetoric and writing.

Early in the semester, I attempt to redefine concepts of rhetoric and text for my students. This three-stage process begins with discussions of an Aristotelian definition of rhetoric (rhetoric being the persuasive element of discourse). The second stage in the process is to define and contextualize concepts of ethos, logos, and pathos for my students. I often bring newspaper editorials, television commercials, magazine advertisements, and new media texts into the classroom. For the first couple of weeks, my students take part in mini-workshops that ask them to conduct rhetorical analysis exercises for these various forms of text. In doing so, students must locate and discuss appeals to ethos, logos, or pathos. After they gain a solid grasp of these concepts and are able to effectively locate these appeals within alternate forms of text, they begin to transfer their newfound rhetorical awareness to the written (traditional) academic essay.
My rhetoric and composition courses ask students to not only consider how they construct arguments but to think about why they are arguing a particular point. I want students to think critically about their willingness to subscribe to certain argumentative positions. A college-educated individual should possess the ability to think critically about how factors such as gender, race, class, religion, and education have influenced his or her understanding of argumentative perspectives. Appalachian students deserve the chance to explore how rhetorical techniques and audience awareness play a part in constructing cultural rhetorics. Taking part in this process also helps students better understand the cultural mindsets of others as well as their own cultural upbringings. My goal is that students often come away from my class with a better understanding of how rhetorics operate within discourse communities. When students are given the chance to write, think, and argue in such an environment they begin to see rhetoric for what it truly is, a collection of persuasive social forces that influence our cultural worldviews.

The work I have done with critical pedagogy for my dissertation builds upon my view of the composition classroom as an appropriate space for rhetoric-based, student-centered, cultural inquiry. My research will continue to focus on critical pedagogy’s potential for both at-risk students as well as upper-level and graduate writers. In the future, I want to explore new and innovative ways to teach students to question their own habits of thoughts and culturally received beliefs. The contemporary college educated individual must be a critical thinker, one that is reflexive in her or his thinking. I do not subscribe to egalitarian myths that suggest all students entering our classrooms are on an equal playing field. Nor do I position students as empty vessels waiting to be filled by the knowledge of the teacher. Students bring
a variety of literacies with them to the classroom. As a teacher, I am working toward crafting a student-centered pedagogy that affords students the opportunity to follow their passions and engage in critical evaluation of their own lives.

“The Hillbilly Speaks of Rhetoric,” is, for me, an act of critical pedagogy. My goal was to expose the rhetorical nature of hillbilly identity and discuss the various ways it has been imposed upon Appalachian learners. I wanted to share my story and the stories of my case study participants as a means of displaying the ideological and cultural roadblocks these students face. As stated earlier in the chapter, critical pedagogy is not a cure of the ills of Appalachian existence. It is, however, a method of teaching, a school of philosophy, that has the potential to change how Appalachian students think about themselves and how they think about their place within American society. I have experienced a radical change in my life as a result of critical education. Therefore, I cannot help but to aspire to radically change the lives of my students. Critical literacy can change the material realities of human learners. My imperfectness, however, will not allow me to craft an infallible critical pedagogy for Appalachian students. Nor do I think such a style of teaching will ever exist. We will never get to the solution to various problems that result from the isolation and poverty found in the region. Perhaps the best I can do is to place critical pedagogy alongside discussions of Appalachian educational issues. In doing so, I hope to establish a conversation. I want critical educators to reconsider their tradition as one that speaks directly to the needs of impoverished urban populations. I want these same educators to stop and reconsider Appalachia as a forgotten student population within this pedagogical tradition. Perhaps the
best I can do is to propose questions. How might the next generation of Appalachian learners come to view the world as a result of critical, democratic, educational practices?

I love teaching, I love Appalachian people, and I hate the way I used to feel about myself. The Hillbilly, for me, is the culturally determined aspect of my personality that I have been running from my whole life. The Hillbilly is self-doubt. The Hillbilly is what we have been told about ourselves by outside forces. It is the little voice in our heads that whispers negativity when things get tough. That I am white trash. That I am a failure. That I will never make something of myself. Boy, you better remember where you come from! We are just good old country folk ... them things ain’t for us! Boy, you’re dreaming too big. You need to learn how to be sensible and settle on the fact that this college stuff might not be for you! When I hear these voices, I often turn to Shakespeare’s often-overlooked line in Measure for Measure: “Our doubts are traitors, that cause us to lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt” (412). Shakespeare’s Lucio had it right. Doubt is the enemy. Fear holds us back. We shouldn’t be afraid of questioning our identities and the various ways they are shaped by our surroundings. We, as Appalachians, must learn how to critically question the realities we face. We must learn to dream big. We must learn how to transform ourselves each day. To think critically is to be more fully human. Critical theory and critical pedagogy give us a framework for doing so. I want my readers to re-imagine Appalachia. I want my students to re-imagine themselves. And, I hope to expose the Hillbilly for what he truly is … Rhetoric.
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