

ABSTRACT

GILLESPIE, JESSICA L. “Loved to Stayed On Like It Once Was”: Southern Appalachian People’s Responses to Socio-Economic Change—The New Deal, the War on Poverty, and the Rise of Tourism. (Under the direction of Dr. Craig Thompson Friend.)

Over the course of the twentieth century, southern Appalachian residents have been defined and described primarily by outside observers: travel writers, benevolent workers, politicians, government bureaucrats, and historians. While these onlookers have filled volumes with accounts of mountain residents, their accounts are often stereotypical: the mountaineer as backward, isolated, fatalistic, acquiescent, atomistic, or poverty-stricken. In all of these portrayals, outsiders defined Appalachia as a region needing to change and fall into line with mainstream America. In order to achieve such change, major efforts to develop Appalachia began in the earliest decades of the twentieth century, comprised of both governmental programs and partnerships between government and private interests.

Government and private developers seldom considered residents’ thoughts or opinions and adopted the pervasive cultural stereotypes as fact, designing projects with such ideas of locals in mind. Historians, too, have often repeated these time-worn stereotypes or overlooked local sentiment on such widespread development efforts. Local residents have often been portrayed as passively adapting to events that affected their lives and as reticent to create or shape their own futures.

Southern Appalachian residents, however, did in fact possess and voice strong feelings on social and economic development programs. This thesis concentrates on the rich variety of local residents’ responses to two New Deal programs—the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Tennessee Valley Authority—as well as President Lyndon Johnson’s War on

Poverty, and the tourism industry that developed over the past two centuries and continues to play a major role in southern Appalachian economics. Such development efforts reshaped the region, affecting individual lives, communities, and the mountain landscape itself.

Locals responded differently to each development effort, based on such variables as individual economic circumstances, social class, location, and occupation. They also voiced their reactions in a myriad of ways. In all instances, locals retained and defined their own identities and ideals through their reactions, openly declaring what was important to them: land and community. In their responses to the New Deal, War on Poverty, and the mountain tourism industry, southern Appalachian residents refuted pervasive stereotypes of the mountaineer while defending their own cultural values. Such engagement demonstrates how mountain residents actively preserved their traditions while shaping their own futures.

“Loved to Stayed On Like It Once Was”: Southern Appalachian
People’s Responses to Socio-Economic Change—
The New Deal, the War on Poverty,
and the Rise of Tourism

by
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DEDICATION

To John, who can finally get a break
from hearing me rant about Appalachia . . . at least for a little while.

BIOGRAPHY

Jessica L. Gillespie is originally from Galax, Virginia. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Virginia and a Masters Degree in Library and Information Science from Long Island University.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the twentieth century, southern Appalachia and its people have been viewed through many lenses. The typical Appalachian resident's personality has been defined and described primarily by outside observers: travel writers, benevolent workers, politicians, government bureaucrats, and historians. Often considered modern Americans' "contemporary ancestors," as William Goodell Frost once described, Appalachian peoples have been portrayed in the media and popular culture as relics of the country's pioneer past—backward, isolated, passively adapting to events that might affect their lives, and reticent to create or shape their own futures.¹ The region has also been portrayed as home to violent and fatalistic clans, and as an atomistic society in which individuals lived side-by-side but feared and avoided any semblance of community, and as a universally poverty-stricken zone where residents were deprived not only of necessities but modern conveniences increasingly deemed essential to life in a modern and prosperous United States.

No matter which of these stereotypical views they presented, outsiders consistently viewed southern Appalachia as a region desperately needing to change, to fix itself, to fall into line with mainstream America. Major efforts to develop the region began in the earliest decades of the twentieth century and ranged from strictly governmental programs, such as those comprising the New Deal and the War on Poverty, to partnerships between government and private interests that contributed to the thriving mountain tourism industry. Although the

¹ William Goodell Frost, "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains," *Atlantic Monthly* 83 (March 1899): 311.

ideologies and methods guiding such efforts differed, all espoused the goal of what historian David E. Whisnant has described as “modernizing the mountaineer.”²

Southern Appalachia often became the target of long-term development projects that varied in nature but seldom considered residents’ thoughts or opinions. Government and private developers wholeheartedly adopted the pervasive cultural stereotypes as fact and designed projects with such ideas of locals in mind. Historians, too, have often repeated these time-worn stereotypes and refused to allow for the possibility that Appalachian residents may not have stood idly by as outsiders remade the region to conform with mainstream American social values. Far too often, historians have neglected to consider the perspectives of the region’s inhabitants who experienced the changes produced by such externally-directed economic and social development efforts.

Southern Appalachian residents, however, did in fact possess and voice strong feelings on development programs designed by outsiders. By focusing closely on specific programs, the rich variety of local responses begins to emerge. This thesis will concentrate on local residents’ responses to two New Deal programs—the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)—as well as President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, and the tourism industry that developed over the past two centuries and continues to play a major role in southern Appalachian economics. These efforts at socially and economically reshaping the region affected individual lives, communities, and the mountain landscape itself. They also altered traditional lifestyles and relationships. Residents reacted accordingly.

² David E. Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

Local Responses to Southern Appalachian Development

Despite commonly-held stereotypes of the mountaineer as fatalistic and acquiescent, southern Appalachian residents took a great interest in determining the directions of their lives and communities. Still, locals responded differently to outside development efforts based on such variables as individual economic circumstances, social class, location, and occupation. They also voiced their reactions in a myriad of ways. Southern Appalachian people employed many of the tactics that anthropologist James C. Scott termed “weapons of the weak.” Scott’s field work, although with Malaysian peasants, provides a useful lens through which to view southern Appalachian reactions to externally-directed development programs. According to Scott, those on the bottom of unbalanced power relationships cannot be expected to react with formal, organized political protest, which could be dangerous and quite possibly fruitless. Instead, the powerless often turn to what Scott terms “*everyday* forms of peasant resistance.” Such resistance can include, as it did in southern Appalachia, letter-writing, anonymous acts of vandalism, feigned compliance, reliance on gossip and the rumor mill, and “foot dragging.” Each required little formal coordination, instead relying on existing relationships and communication between trusted community members. In all instances, locals retained and defined their own identities and cultural values through their reactions.³

The New Deal, which provided the federal government its first wholesale opportunity to modernize Appalachian society, saw local residents reacting to CCC and TVA projects.

Both of these programs brought large numbers of outsiders into the region to labor on and

³ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), xvi, 286.

administer projects, and the results of the programs forever altered the landscape and its people's relationship to the land, as well as longstanding community dynamics. Locals responded to each program differently, and the variety and complexity of responses clearly reveals just how aware locals were about the enduring ways in which New Deal programs would change their lifestyles. Local communities worked to shape their own lives and futures, even in the face of the federal government's seemingly unalterable plans for their region. While they may not have been successful in halting or modifying the federal government's plans, residents gave voice to their concerns by reiterating a strong sense of community and an intimate relationship with the land and environment that they were unwilling to relinquish as easily as the government imagined.

The War on Poverty gave southern Appalachian people another opportunity to voice their concerns on a federal program designed to modernize a region deemed economically and culturally backward. Government officials who designed the antipoverty programs that comprised the War on Poverty and workers who arrived in the region to administer the programs held to the widely disseminated stereotype of the mountaineer as impoverished and atomistic. Locals repeatedly refuted the government's assumptions, arguing that wealth consisted of more than a simple measure of income, and much of their assets lay in a strong sense of Appalachian community that the federal government denied existed. No matter the form of their responses to the War on Poverty, the importance of community lay behind them all, and locals were unwavering in their defense of their community life from outside definition or refashioning.

Unlike the New Deal and the War on Poverty, the southern Appalachian tourism industry's rise was not solely a government-backed endeavor. Instead, state and federal governments and private interests aligned to promote its development to economically benefit and modernize the region. Visitors were fascinated by mountain lifestyles, and travelers arrived in the region expecting to see the backward hillbilly they had encountered in popular literature. Not only did tourists arrive with preconceived notions of southern Appalachian life, but they also drastically changed locals' relationships with their environment by reducing residents' access to land upon which they had relied for generations. While governments and local social and political elites urged tourist development as a step toward modernizing the region, many residents rejected such efforts and tried to retain their traditional lifestyles and cultural values in the face of drastic social change. Through protests and subversive actions, mountain residents called upon and asserted community values that were being misrepresented by popular stereotypes or that tourist development threatened to eradicate. In openly declaring what was important to them—land and community—locals defined their own identities, all while refuting the stereotypes so firmly attached to them.

In their responses to the New Deal, War on Poverty, and the tourism industry, southern Appalachian residents refuted pervasive stereotypes of the mountaineer while defending their own cultural values. Such engagement demonstrates how mountain residents actively preserved their traditions while shaping their own futures. While stereotypes have impeded our hearing of locals speaking for themselves, the following work seeks to provide southern Appalachian peoples with a voice in their own history.

CHAPTER I

By 1933, southern Appalachia and the rest of the nation were deeply entrenched in the Great Depression. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inaugural address laid out plans to combat economic challenges, a series of programs that came to be known as the New Deal. Many impacted southern Appalachia, as one of Roosevelt's chief recovery goals was to "endeavor to provide a better use of the land for those best fitted for the land" and reemploy Americans on the soil through agricultural, conservation, and regional planning programs.¹ Yet, Roosevelt also envisioned his programs as opportunities to bring Americans perceived as backward and isolated, including southern Appalachian peoples, into the modern age. While some programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) did not survive World War II, others like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) remain as vestiges of the national response to the Great Depression. While many historians have explored these programs and their inner workings, few have looked closely at those who experienced the impact of New Deal programs firsthand in southern Appalachia.

Many New Deal programs operated in the region, but few left a lasting impact on the land, its people, and communities like the CCC and the TVA. These two programs brought large numbers of outsiders into the region to labor on and administer projects, and the projects themselves irrevocably altered the southern Appalachian landscape and its people's relationship to the land. The federal government developed the CCC with the dual goals of creating work for thousands of unemployed young men across the nation, while also

¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "First Inaugural Address," http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/froos1.asp (accessed August 12, 2009).

addressing conservation and environmental issues that had come to light after decades of unregulated industrialization, which left forests devastated and soils depleted. The young men of the CCC undertook a number of projects concentrating especially in the national forests of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. The CCC constructed roads and worked to prevent forest fires, while also attending to reforestation and environmental management in the parks.

While the TVA addressed some similar concerns, specifically soil erosion and deforestation that contributed to the flooding in the Tennessee Valley, the TVA Act primarily focused on improving navigation along the region's rivers and producing more affordable electricity. The act also involved the federal government in regional and social planning by providing for industrial and agricultural development in the Tennessee River Valley. During World War II, TVA activities expanded to encompass recreational development, agricultural demonstration programs, urban planning, mass production of fertilizer, and national defense programs. Despite the wide scope of the TVA's activities, dam construction along the Tennessee River and its tributaries arguably had the greatest impact on the southern Appalachians and its people. Beyond producing electricity and controlling flooding, dam construction also created new lakes that drowned out numerous long-established communities, displacing thousands of people and hundreds of families.

While the CCC and the TVA similarly left marks on the landscape and mountain communities, local perceptions of the agencies and their projects were quite different in many ways. Appalachian people have often been portrayed as complacent and willing participants in their own subjugation, but the residents of western North Carolina and eastern

Tennessee were in fact involved and interested in their futures and the federal programs they confronted. The CCC and the TVA broadly impacted the region, and the complexity of local responses reveals just how aware southern Appalachian peoples were about the profound and enduring ways in which New Deal programs would change their lives.

The Great Depression and the New Deal have both been popular subjects for scholarly research, and historians have focused on many of the individual programs, including the CCC and TVA. However, little scholarly attention has been devoted to the impact of these programs on the people of southern Appalachia. That no one has taken on such an exploration leaves the continuing impression of the region's people as stereotypically complacent and compliant, prohibiting a full understanding of southern Appalachian history.

Many historians have looked at the New Deal's national implementation and impact, discussing federal relief and recovery efforts in extremely broad terms. Other scholars have approached the New Deal programs in individual states, or they have looked specifically at individual programs. John L. Bell, Jr., in *Hard Times: Beginnings of the Great Depression in North Carolina 1929-1933* (1982), took the state-level approach. His book, while providing a look at the entire state's economic troubles, introduces a period that was "the worst part of the depression" and "were important years of experimentation with many kinds of solutions to economic problems" that would provide a basis for New Deal legislation.² While Bell provided important background for those wishing to explore the Great Depression and the New Deal in North Carolina, his study largely ignores the experiences of those most affected by the Depression in favor of exploring the state government's response.

² John L. Bell, Jr., *Hard Times: Beginnings of the Great Depression in North Carolina 1929-1933* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1982), i.

Anthony J. Badger's *North Carolina and the New Deal* (1981) takes up the story where Bell left off and similarly provides a state-level focus. Badger's work, which seems to be the most complete portrait of North Carolina's New Deal experience to date, focuses on what he terms the "ambiguity" that ran through the New Deal's implementation in order "to examine the interaction of New Deal policy and local practice."³ However, he only touched on the programs that most impacted the Appalachians in favor of a thorough discussion of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and its tobacco policies that largely affected piedmont and eastern North Carolina. He also examined other programs such as the Works Progress Administration and the Civil Works Administration. Badger's book, like Bell's, neglects to explore the local reactions to New Deal projects in favor of discussing bureaucratic maneuvering and policy implementation.

New Deal historians have also looked at the programs' effects in Tennessee from a variety of standpoints. John Dean Minton, in his book *The New Deal in Tennessee: 1932-1938* (1979), argued that the New Deal had an especially widespread effect on the state through the TVA and a variety of agricultural programs that the federal government put into place. Minton's study documents the tremendous increase in the size and power of the federal government, but he also writes that his work should encourage readers to "consider the tremendous impact which the New Deal's measures had on the political, economic, and social life" of Tennesseans. Yet, despite his stated goal to document the ways in which the New Deal and especially the TVA changed the social structures and lives of the states' residents, Minton only tangentially addressed the ordinary residents of Tennessee and their

³ Anthony J. Badger, *North Carolina and the New Deal* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1981), i.

experiences. He instead looked solely at the state's economic and political elites in order to gauge the opinions of all Tennesseans, and he concluded his discussion of the TVA with the general and overly simplistic statement that, "The Tennessee Valley Authority was enthusiastically launched and received in Tennessee . . . Its program had a wholesome and stimulating effect on the social, economic, and recreational life of the people of Tennessee." While many of the state's residents may have recognized and received some benefits of the New Deal, it is misleading to conflate the experiences of ordinary people with those of the elites discussed in Minton's work.⁴

While Minton, Bell, and Badger studied the New Deal's effects on individual states, some scholars have chosen to look closely at a single program. Although the WPA and CWA have received much scholarly attention, Eric Gorham argued that the CCC, while well known, is under-researched with little scholarship on the program's efforts.⁵ However, one historian has explored CCC activities in North Carolina. Harley E. Jolley's *"That Magnificent Army of Youth and Peace": The Civilian Conservation Corps in North Carolina, 1933-1942* (2007) provides a comprehensive (if somewhat biased) view of the program's activities statewide. Jolley's goal was to not only help the general public understand the CCC as an organization but to place what he called the "unheralded" work of the CCC into the greater context of the Great Depression and the New Deal, "so that readers might better

⁴ John Dean Minton, *The New Deal in Tennessee: 1932-1938* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), vi, 210.

⁵ Eric Gorham, "The Ambiguous Practices of the Civilian Conservation Corps," *Social History* 17, no. 2 (May 1992): 229.

comprehend . . . what it accomplished and what it bequeathed to the state and its citizens.”⁶ Despite Jolley’s distinctly pro-CCC perspective and his uncritical praise for the program as a “vital ingredient in the quality of Tar Heel human life and in the well-being of the state’s resources,” his study relies on a well-chosen collection of primary sources that relate local responses to the camps and those who worked there.⁷ Through his use of newspaper articles and oral history interviews, Jolley provided the best reconstruction of local opinion regarding the CCC in North Carolina that currently exists. However, as local reaction is not the main focus of his study, more work needs to be done.

While the CCC remains understudied, historians have widely studied the TVA, from the Authority’s creation to the controversies that its activities caused in more recent years. Although it is impossible to comprehensively discuss the many ways in which scholars have treated the TVA, it is useful to look closely at a few of the various approaches and representative works. Historians and social scientists began studying the TVA within just a few years of its creation, and these scholars often unequivocally praised the Authority’s efforts. Yet, as anthropologist Willson Whitman acknowledged in her book *God’s Valley: People and Power Along the Tennessee Valley* (1939), some of the region’s residents were not wholly supportive of the Authority’s activities. Relying on the stereotypes of the day that pervaded both scholarly and popular literature on the region, Whitman dismissed these concerns as simply the misunderstandings of an individualistic, backward, and naturally

⁶ Harley E. Jolley, “*That Magnificent Army of Youth and Peace*”: *The Civilian Conservation Corps in North Carolina, 1933-1942* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 2007), xi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

distrustful mountain folk. It would take some time for what Robert Cuff called “the magic of the Roosevelt personality” to release its grip on those writing about the New Deal.⁸

Other scholars have taken a broader look at the TVA, using the Authority’s internal organization and goals as suggested templates for other agencies to follow. James Dahir’s *Region Building: Community Development Lessons from the Tennessee Valley* (1955) is an early major study of the Authority and its regional planning activities. Dahir urged the nation in the post-World War II years to take stock of its communities and suggested “that long-term community development and improvement require a concert of forces with areal and regional interests joined under a noncoercive yet effective sponsorship”—something like the TVA. Though Dahir acknowledged that not everyone is in favor of the TVA’s regional planning activities, he was quite supportive and praised the Authority’s overall efforts, arguing in the end “good communities are made, not born.”⁹

Philip Selznick’s *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (1949) is another work focused on the Authority’s internal organization and “grass roots,” or democratic, operational methods. Selznick took a pessimistic view of the TVA’s actions when compared to the lofty ideology that established the Authority and provided it with the flexibility and initiative of private industry. Selznick argued that the grass roots system was itself an ideology able to selectively incorporate some support among segments of the local population, especially among the Tennessee Valley’s elite. According to Selznick, this approach allowed the TVA to gain the support of powerful local interests,

⁸ Robert Cuff, review of *TVA and the Power Fight, 1933-1939*, *American Historical Review* 79, no. 3 (June 1974): 901.

⁹ James Dahir, *Region Building: Community Development Lessons from the Tennessee Valley* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), xiii, 173.

which in turn allowed the Authority to assert widespread grass roots support. The TVA's claim to popular approval gave the Authority the power to dismiss local criticism as simply single-minded self-interest or a misunderstanding of the program and its goals. While Selznick touched on some local dissent against TVA activities, his primary assumption is that the policy underlying the Authority's creation was sound, but the execution was flawed. The book's focus is on the internal operations of the Authority and the "possible unanticipated consequences which may ensue when positive social policy is coupled with a commitment to democratic procedure."¹⁰ Researched and written in the early 1940s, Selznick's book is still of use to historians and social scientists studying the organization of the TVA. However useful it remains, Selznick's study does not seriously consider or fully address the local concerns surrounding TVA policy, goals, and actions.

Not until North Callahan's *TVA: Bridge Over Troubled Waters* (1980) did an historian attempt a complete history of the TVA. A massive undertaking that Callahan himself called an "immense project," this work seeks to provide an objective look at the Authority, with Callahan having vowed to refrain from "injecting too much of a personal nature into the unfolding story" despite his own familiarity with the TVA and a temptation "to be subjective in its favor." In writing this book, Callahan worked closely with the Authority, which provided "mounds and pounds" of source material. However, Callahan maintained the work's independence from any influence, and the book's extensive bibliography provides a wealth of secondary source material. Yet due to this close cooperation with the TVA and the book's focus on a broad history of the Authority, little

¹⁰ Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 16.

attention is given to any local opinion or dissent. Much of the book is dedicated to the evolution of the TVA's goals and operational methods, with few pages devoted to the social context within which the Authority operated.¹¹

Then there are the TVA studies that examine the program exclusively within the context of Appalachian history. Michael J. McDonald and John Muldowny's *TVA and the Dispossessed* (1982) and David E. Whisnant's *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia* (1980) are two of the most notable. McDonald and Muldowny's book, though quite limited both geographically and temporally, is the one work to look closely at the people removed from their homes by TVA dam construction. The authors relied on both oral history interviews and TVA records to reconstruct the lives of Tennessee Valley residents both prior to and after the construction of Norris Dam in eastern Tennessee. While *TVA and the Dispossessed* primarily attempts to determine the actual outcome of the residents' relocations, as opposed to the lofty government promises prior to removal, the book does include a chapter in which those affected by the Authority's dam construction recount their opinions and attempts to retain their traditional lives, ties to the land, and community. However, as this chapter is only a small section of the overall work and limited in scope to just the Norris project, it cannot be taken as representative of the entirety of local thought regarding the TVA and its activities in the region.

Whisnant's *Modernizing the Mountaineer* covers a wide range of government involvement in Appalachia, and the section on the TVA is only one example of these periodic interventions. However, Whisnant's discussion of the Authority is one of the most

¹¹ North Callahan, *TVA: Bridge Over Troubled Waters* (Cranbury, N.J.: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1980), 13, 14, 366.

thorough and useful in its focus on the TVA's objectives in Appalachia. Whisnant argued that the TVA's history is intimately and inextricably linked to other development efforts in Appalachia and that it can (and should) be seen as a model for all later regional development strategies. According to Whisnant, not only did the TVA attempt to modernize the region through electricity provision and the promotion of improved agricultural techniques, but the Authority also sought to change the characteristics of the populace itself, arguing that such development efforts forced those in the hinterlands to "exchange their culture and lifeways for growth center sewers, roads, and factory jobs." Yet, despite Whisnant's clear disdain for TVA policies and their impact on the region's residents, he himself neglected to provide a real discussion of local dissent and opinion. His discussion of the TVA primarily involves the political, ideological, and policy-making sides to the Authority's activities with respect to other Appalachian development efforts. Though Whisnant's account is laudable and indispensable to scholars researching the TVA in the context of Appalachian history, the absence of any local voices is glaring, and the reader is left to consider what such a response might have been.¹²

Many of the New Deal's programs, including the CCC and TVA, worked to change Appalachia and its people. Working to usher backward and individualistic mountaineers into modern American society, the federal government put programs in place that used the mountains as a site for social experiments and vast public works projects, providing a safety valve and jobs for thousands of the urban unemployed. These programs tried to introduce southern Appalachian residents to modern agricultural and conservation practices,

¹² David E. Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 44, 275.

constructed dams throughout the Tennessee Valley to provide widespread residential and commercial electricity, and worked to change the people of the region. Yet, these programs had the greatest impact on locals' ties to what they valued the most: land and community. New Deal programs interrupted the longstanding, multigenerational relationships that southern Appalachians had developed with their land and their neighbors. Residents of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee recognized these efforts to change them and their way of life, and resisted interventions in a number of ways in order to preserve traditional lifestyles that they valued and considered more important than modernization. Though the region's elites were almost universally supportive of these development programs, ordinary residents freely formed their own opinions, often opposing those of their leaders and expressing them in a number of ways. Southern Appalachian people may not have been successful in halting or modifying the federal government's goals for the region, or even in dispelling stereotypes about their lifestyles, but they did give voice to their concerns by reiterating a strong sense of community and an intimate relationship with the land and environment that they were unwilling to relinquish as easily as the government imagined.

The CCC and Southern Appalachia

In her book *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (2000), historian Margaret Lynn Brown quoted Ernie Dickerman, a local environmental activist, who argued that the CCC "overdid it in the Smokies," as the Corps built too many roads, trails,

and camps through the mountains.¹³ As this is the only local voice present in her account of the CCC's activities, the reader is left with the impression that a vast majority of locals resented the Corps' activities in the area. However, the reality is far more complex. Southern Appalachian peoples were often quite accepting of the CCC's work in the region, yet critical of the workers themselves. As Brown suggested, tensions existed, and there were many who disapproved of the CCC and its methods, workers, and project choices. The varied local reactions all demonstrate concern for and ties to land and community and a continuing desire to preserve these important aspects of life in any way possible. Both positive and negative responses to CCC workers' presence and their activities indicate just what regional natives valued, and this range of reactions provides a valuable contrast to responses against the TVA, which were on the whole much more emphatically negative. A closer look at the varied local concerns and opinions on the CCC provides valuable insights into the close ties southern Appalachian people maintained with both their land and community, and the ways in which the CCC's work affected these ties.

As Harley E. Jolley wrote, upon the CCC's creation, there was intense competition among mountain counties to house the organization's camps. Senators, congressmen, local elites, and common citizens were all interested in receiving the benefits that could come from hosting a CCC camp. Congressman Zebulon Weaver, who represented counties in extreme western North Carolina that were home to the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, argued that his district needed the Corps' services and, at the same time, these parks "were situated reasonably close to large areas of

¹³ Quoted in Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 138.

unemployment in the heavily populated eastern cities and might readily provide instant employment for thousands.” Senator Robert Rice Reynolds, originally from Asheville also fought for western North Carolina to house CCC camps, enumerating the region’s need for the camps, as well as the benefits of housing the Corps in the area—including a friendly climate that would allow workers to labor year-round.¹⁴

Yet, as Jolley made clear, and what becomes clear through a closer examination of sources, is that elite local citizens were also intensely supportive of the CCC and its goals. Those in positions of local power, such as newspaper editors and leaders of civic groups, were proponents of the CCC’s work and were interested in addressing the devastating results of soil erosion, blights, logging, and forest fires that had dramatically altered their landscape. They were also intensely aware of the employment and economic opportunities that the Corps’ presence in the area would bring. Local civic and political leaders in Burke County contacted their representatives, urging them to “exert your influence to have established in Jonas Ridge section of Burke County one of the government Reforestation Camps.”¹⁵ And, these men were not the only ones to make such a plea.

Once CCC camps were established in a location, communities often competed to retain the camps, as sites were often reevaluated in order to move workers to where they were needed most urgently. The editor of *The Cherokee Scout* jealously argued that, when compared to neighboring counties, Cherokee County had “received practically no benefits from the work of the boys,” as “only one camp is located in Cherokee, the largest county in

¹⁴ Jolley, “*That Magnificent Army of Youth and Peace*,” 13-14.

¹⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 14.

North Carolina, while other sections have as high as three or four camps in their localities.”¹⁶ In 1935, as rumors began to circulate that Transylvania County’s CCC camps would be closed, *The Transylvania Times* reassured its readers that “No intimation has been received here that either of the three Civilian Conservation Corps camps in Transylvania county will be abandoned,” and that as the camps continued to do constructive work, they should remain “unmolested for several months to come.”¹⁷ Guy Weaver of Asheville wrote to his cousin Representative Zebulon Weaver of the ongoing need for CCC work in the western part of the state, noting that he had personally observed the Corps’ activities and, while acknowledging that many local people disliked some New Deal programs, suggesting that “most every one agrees that this arm of the service is going to pay large dividends, both in the conservation of natural resources, and also the conservation of youth . . . and I wish to say that I believe that it ought to be . . . made a permanent branch of the Government service.”¹⁸ Representative Weaver agreed with his cousin and continued to fight to maintain the Corps’ presence in his district.¹⁹

Of course, local leaders supported any program that encouraged or made it easier for tourists to visit the area. CCC activities fit into this model of economic development, and newspapers boasted that the Corps had worked to make the region’s beauty more accessible to visitors. *The Cherokee Scout* recorded with great pride that “where exceptional vistas occur, these have been opened up to the view of the motorist,” and miles of “foot trails” for

¹⁶ “More CCC Camps for Cherokee,” *Cherokee Scout*, May 23, 1935.

¹⁷ “C.C.C. Camps Will Not be Abandoned,” *Transylvania Times*, October 24, 1935.

¹⁸ Guy Weaver to Zebulon Weaver, May 2, 1934, Zebulon Weaver Papers, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, N.C.

¹⁹ Zebulon Weaver to Guy Weaver, May 4, 1934.

recreational use had been carved into the area's mountainsides.²⁰ Local elites, already interested in promoting the area's tourism industry, encouraged the CCC's work and touted its benefits for those vacationing in any one of the nearby national parks.

Local residents largely valued the CCC's efforts, at least initially. Many local youths registered for work in the camps, though some boys, like Boone resident Dave Hodges' son "didn't like no part of it" and refused to stay.²¹ Those who did receive positions were extremely grateful for the opportunity, and according to a report in *The Transylvania Times*, all of the local boys sent to the nearby Barnardsville camp expressed "their appreciation to everyone that aided them in getting enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps."²² Many more western North Carolinians registered for CCC positions than were available, leaving thousands of interested locals without a Corps job, exacerbating the region's unemployment problems.²³ The Corps brought thousands of unemployed urban youths into a region where work was already scarce.

Some locals clearly did appreciate the Corps' efforts, even beyond the few employment opportunities. Reforestation, a major project undertaken by the CCC, received favorable attention. The editor of *The Franklin Press* described reforestation work as "the most constructive project launched by the government since the building of the Panama Canal."²⁴ W.A. Allison of Brevard wrote to *The Transylvania Times* and explained why reforestation was so important to the region's agricultural future: "Government is advocating

²⁰ "CCC's Complete 3 Year's Work in Nantahala," *Cherokee Scout*, April 9, 1936.

²¹ Dave Hodges interview by Bill Brinkley, April 4, 1973, Interview 56, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C.

²² Worth L. Franklin, "Camp Life Suiting Local Young Men," *Transylvania Times*, June 22, 1933.

²³ Jolley, "*That Magnificent Army of Youth and Peace*," 17.

²⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 16.

reforestation of the worn-out land, which should be done and these lands could still be used” by private owners for pastureland to feed livestock, as “too much scratching of worn out and washed away soil is not making a quantity of corn.”²⁵

Mountain residents, concerned with access and road construction, also approved of the CCC improving roads and building highways. Sam Horton recalled that the CCC “did a lot in these parts in building roads through the national parks and all and some in [Watauga] county,” which many people believed to improve their quality of life.²⁶ *The Cherokee Scout* praised how CCC road construction had improved school bus, mail, and commercial access to communities that were once completely isolated during winter’s heavy snows, as well as enabled foresters to “quickly reach any point of the forest in the event of fires.”²⁷ The CCC assured locals that improved fire roads with their crushed stone surfaces would be kept open to the public despite the weather.

Despite the Corps’ successes, CCC officials remained conscious of negative perceptions. As a vast majority of CCC workers arrived from urban areas, the Corps established guidelines designed to reduce tensions between camps and local residents. Each camp hired what the Corps termed “local experienced men” (LEMs), who were often locals who resided in their homes, to bridge the gap between the community and the CCC.²⁸ The camps also encouraged social ties between nearby communities and the camps. Newspapers overflowed with announcements for camp social opportunities, inviting all interested locals

²⁵ W.A. Allison, “Work More with Material At Hand and Live Happier Says Mr. Allison,” *Transylvania Times*, January 25, 1934.

²⁶ Sam Horton interview by Carolyn Shelton, July 24, 1973, Interview 150, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

²⁷ “CCC’s Complete 3 Year’s Work in Nantahala,” *Cherokee Scout*, April 9, 1936.

²⁸ Jolley, “*That Magnificent Army of Youth and Peace*,” 22.

to attend. The camps held baseball games, boxing matches, dances, and even checkers tournaments, often while collecting donations for local organizations and charities. Social interactions occasionally ended in marriages between local women and CCC men, further cementing camp/community ties.

In addition to keeping mountain residents informed of CCC goals, activities, and accomplishments, newspapers published encouraging messages from Robert Fechner, the federal Director of Emergency Work, directed toward the young men about to begin the Corps' work. These pieces also served an additional purpose, functioning as public opportunities to convince local residents skeptical that the Corps' work was necessary. One piece published in *The Watauga Democrat* on June 1, 1933, made it clear to all readers that CCC boys were "not the objects of charity, nor are you in any respect a part of the U.S. Army. You have been given jobs by the Federal and State governments to do work that needs to be done. It is an important [sic] work, the results of which should enhance the value of the national and state forests and parks enormously."²⁹ Although "no governmental move in recent years has met with more universal acclaim," the paper pointed out that fewer people were aware of the exact nature of the Corps' work, and discussed in great detail the types of projects the local camp would undertake, enumerating the benefits that would accrue from the Corps' presence and activities.³⁰

²⁹ Robert Fechner, "Jobs in Forests are Worthy Ones," *Watauga Democrat*, June 1, 1933.

³⁰ A.T. Robertson, Jr., "Reforestation Camp Eight Miles from Blowing Rock," *Watauga Democrat*, June 29, 1933.

Newspapers encouraged community members to visit the camps. While “Sunday afternoon is a popular visiting time, . . . there are no restrictions set for visitors.”³¹ Camps were so well-run that supervisors did not fear surprise visits from skeptical residents. Reporters detailed their own visits to the camps, reassuring locals that all was in order, that the camps were functioning well, and that the Corps’ young men were well behaved. A 1936 visit to Brevard’s camp by *Transylvania Times* reporters found that the 175 young men exhibited “excellent behavior,” despite the raucous conversations that took place in the camp’s mess hall during lunchtime.³²

Despite both the CCC’s and local newspapers’ efforts at preempting and addressing local residents’ concerns, tensions did erupt, and locals began to balk at the camps’ presence. In the eyes of many local residents, the Corps’ community impact did not proffer the same positive benefits as did its work on the land. People began to complain about Corpsmen’s behavior, including interactions with the community that locals perceived as disrespectful and a work ethic that many deemed less than committed.

The young men of the CCC, however, faced their own challenges far from the cities they called home. Upon one group’s arrival from urban New York and New Jersey, their new sergeant (himself a New Yorker) greeted them with advice about dealing with mountain folk: “You’re in the Smoky Mountains. These people here don’t take no crap...If you want your throat cut wide open, just mess with these mountain people and they’ll accommodate you.”³³ The words, certainly spoken to control the behavior of these young men in their new

³¹ Ibid.

³² “CCC Boys at P-66 Well Behaved Group,” *Transylvania Times*, January 23, 1936.

³³ Quoted in Jolley, “*That Magnificent Army of Youth and Peace*”, 33.

surroundings, tapped into the tried and true superstitions and stereotypes about Appalachian residents, creating divisions between his Corpsmen and the locals they were there to assist.

Additionally, locals who enrolled in the CCC clearly had an advantage over the urban youths just arriving in the mountains. They knew the wildlife and environment, providing them with opportunities to demonstrate unique skills and understanding. When mountain youths went to the city for training that preceded Corps service, urban young men often taunted them and ridiculed their “backward” ways. Yet, as one Corpman recalled, things changed after the group arrived in the Smoky Mountains: “When the owls hooted at night, and the rattlesnakes and copperhead snakes crawled and the dark closed in and the forest became an eerie, threatening jungle, the city boys cowed, and the mountain boys taunted them and played scary tricks. Now the shoe was on the other foot.”³⁴ Through innocent pranks, local Corpsmen revealed their own specialized, and quite useful, knowledge of the land and environment to those who did not possess comparable awareness. Relationships to the land and environment, a source of ridicule in the city, became valuable sources of pride in the mountains.

Other cultural and behavioral clashes emerged between the local community and the newly arrived CCC boys, despite the Corps’ efforts at outreach and encouraging ties with local residents. As the workers settled into their camps and began earning money for their efforts, the young men sought out entertainment in nearby towns. Mountain residents began to complain of the Corpsmen’s poor manners, despite newspaper articles praising the youths’ well-behaved nature within the camps and abilities on the job. Many in Brevard noted that it

³⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 42.

was “becoming more or less a custom with many of the CCC boys to get ‘lit to the gills’ when they come to town on Saturday nights,” while others complained of the boys’ recklessly fast driving on twisty mountain roads.³⁵

Others, especially local young men, resented the outsiders’ pursuits of eligible young women. One such local bachelor recalled, “we gave them [the CCC boys] a rough time. We didn’t want them dating . . . the girls in the community.”³⁶ Frank C. Davis, a Corpsmen from the Piedmont town of Mebane, recalled quite a bit of local resentment “because [CCC workers] were taking their girlfriends away from them.”³⁷ Davis specifically noted tensions between the local Cherokees and CCC men over women: “those Indian boys didn’t take too kindly to that . . . One of our boys got hurt kind of that way . . . They found him [lying] out in the woods [injured].”³⁸

Local newspapers went out of their way to allay concerns and defend CCC workers from community complaints. In addition to articles updating the stellar behavior of the Corpsmen within camps, reporters defended the youths’ recreational pursuits outside the camps. In fact, newspapers often placed the blame on unsavory community members rather than the impressionable young men of the CCC. As the editor of *The Transylvania Times* put it, “We’re sorry for the boys that have to come into town for recreation and be beset like carrion like we have here . . . it is especially hard for the young fellows who spend month after month in camp to turn a deaf ear to the serpents that crawl around in the grass and beset

³⁵ “Don’t Blame the CCC Boys,” *Transylvania Times*, September 28, 1933.

³⁶ Quoted in Jolley, “*That Magnificent Army of Youth and Peace*,” 55.

³⁷ Frank C. Davis interview by Vikki Genger, June 28, 1986, Tape 2, transcript, Thomas G. Burton Collection, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tenn.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

the boys with their devilish wares [illegal liquor] in order to make a little money.”³⁹ The same newspaper printed another such piece by Pisgah National Forest Ranger T.G. Miller, reminding community members that these young men, though they may be from other places, “are just boys, they are just like many of our boys that are away in Camp, full of life and pep.”⁴⁰ By addressing community concerns in this manner—by placing blame on the community itself and drawing comparisons between local boys and CCC boys—the newspapers separated themselves from the wider community that clearly felt the negative consequences of the camps and their inhabitants. Desiring any sort of development in such economically uncertain times, local elites (newspaper editors included) did anything necessary to retain the financial benefits that the CCC brought to their region, including denigrating their own neighbors’ very legitimate concerns.

Cultural tensions were not the only concerns faced by the CCC. There were also practical economic concerns. One of the earliest questioners of CCC policies of importing young urban men to work in southern Appalachian forests was the editorialist for *The Waynesville Mountaineer*. On April 13, 1933, only one month after the Corps’ creation, “Is It Selfishness?” appeared in the newspaper. His critique was multifaceted: not only had western North Carolinians given up taxable property in order to create the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Nantahala, and Pisgah National Forests, but federal officials overlooked the region’s own unemployed in order to provide urban youths with jobs. The editorialist continued, “Perhaps it is selfishness on our part to even look at the matter in that light,” but “to have men from other sections of the nation sent in to do the work is rather hard.” Despite

³⁹ “Don’t Blame the CCC Boys,” *Transylvania Times*, September 28, 1933.

⁴⁰ “Miller Says CCC Boys Pretty Fair,” *Transylvania Times*, August 17, 1933.

the very relevant criticisms, the piece ends on a conciliatory note, suggesting that locals would enter into the situation with a spirit of cooperation and “friendly feeling toward our unfortunate fellowmen.”⁴¹ And, from that point on, no newspaper editor even remotely questioned the efforts or activities of the CCC, preferring instead to praise the Corps’ work without question.

As time wore on, such concerns instead emanated from local opinion. Mountain residents became less forgiving of the outsiders working in their midst. Perhaps because so many workers were outsiders, some locals deemed the CCC’s work unimportant, trivializing it or questioning the Corpsmen’s dedication to work. Blanche Combs recalled how most Corpsmen “planted trees ‘n cleared, ‘n one thing and another. It was just make work fer, so these young fellows could make some money.” By portraying CCC projects as merely “make work,” Combs suggested the work was both unnecessary and undertaken purely as a means to provide a handout for unemployed young men, as, in her words, “there wasn’t a thang, anyway they could make a living [doing].”⁴² Other locals thought the young men’s work ethic was lacking, that they were disinterested in their work, simply looking for the easiest and fastest ways to complete assigned projects and not truly concerned with improving the landscape or the local environment. Ed and Maude Hamby recalled that rather than removing invasive gooseberry bushes from the forests, many CCC men “cut down all your gooseberry bushes if you’d let ‘em. When they were supposed to go to the woods and get the wild

⁴¹ “Is It Selfishness?” *Waynesville Mountaineer*, April 13, 1933.

⁴² Blanche Combs interview, transcript, Miscellaneous Oral History Collection, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection.

gooseberry bushes.”⁴³ Foresters had informed the Corpsmen that gooseberries were carriers of a fungus that could cause blight in white pines, and the bushes needed to be removed to protect the native species. However, Corps workers disregarded the negative effects the gooseberry bushes had on indigenous trees and preferred to complete their assigned duties in any manner necessary. This criticism demonstrates locals’ concern for their native landscape and desire to see it improved and conserved. To the Hambys, Corpsmen were those from outside the region with little real concern for or investment in the local environment, and, as such, these men were willing to sacrifice the land’s well-being in order to simply check a task off their to-do lists.

While many historians have characterized the CCC’s efforts in southern Appalachia with near-unequivocal praise, the reality among locals was much more complex. Newspapers and CCC officials acknowledged and worked diligently to combat any tensions that erupted, and even tried to preemptively combat potential tensions. Still, conflicts did arise between workers sent in to improve the landscape and the communities that should have benefited from these efforts. Local elites and the region’s governmental representatives observed only the positive effects of the CCC—the economic, environmental, and employment benefits. Local communities observed and experienced the effects of hundreds of young men with little knowledge of the landscape or local communities.

⁴³ Ed and Maude Hamby interview by Alex Greene, January 23, 1973, Interview 3, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

The Tennessee Valley Authority

While many historians have provided in-depth discussions of the internal maneuverings of the TVA's bureaucracy and goals for social and economic reorganization, few have endeavored to determine just how Tennessee Valley communities received the Authority's efforts. Michael J. McDonald and John Muldowny's *TVA and the Dispossessed* does try to uncover some local reactions, the work's focus is quite limited and does not reach beyond the Norris Dam project and its outcome. As with reactions to the CCC and its projects, locals' reactions to the Authority's programs displayed deep connections to their land and communities. But the TVA elicited methods of response that demonstrated a kind of protest not recognized by many historians who have studied the TVA's impact on residents of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. Many readers of the current scholarship may conclude that the Valley's residents gladly and quietly left their farmhouses in exchange for more modern lives that the TVA promised them. This was certainly not the case.

The TVA's immediate goals were flood control and soil stabilization, but there were other, more socially-oriented goals as well. The Authority wished to modernize the Tennessee Valley in order to counter what the rest of the nation perceived as the region's economic and social backwardness. In 1934, President Franklin Roosevelt redefined the TVA's social goals, and remaking Appalachia was first among them. Roosevelt painted a portrait of the mountains as home to men, women, and children who, though of "fine stock," were "completely uneducated" and left out of the steady American march toward progress.⁴⁴ The only solution, he argued, was for government agencies like the TVA to "bring [the

⁴⁴ Quoted in McDonald and Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed*, 263.

mountain man] some of the things he needs, like schools, electric lights, and so on. We are going to try to prevent soil erosion, and grow trees, and try to bring in industries . . . As an incident to that it is necessary to build some dams . . . We are going to try to use that water power to its best advantage.”⁴⁵ Such language justified the TVA, as historian David E. Whisnant explained, “through a systematic denigration of . . . their ‘target populations.’ The people must first be shown to be desperately in need of help and helpless.”⁴⁶ Stereotypical portrayals of the valley’s residents’ lifestyles can be seen in periodic Authority reports, as well as opinions and statements recorded by TVA interviewers as they traveled the region speaking with residents whose homes were soon to be flooded by dam construction.

The response, at least in many regional newspapers, was neutrality, writing, as Tennessee’s *Elizabethton Daily Star* did in 1941, “we can truthfully say that we are not biased in our opinion, either one way or the other,” and *The Cherokee Scout* of Murphy promised to print readers’ letters on all sides of the dam issue, while remaining impartial.⁴⁷ However, these newspapers almost immediately reneged on such promises—the *Daily Star* soon began actively promoting the TVA’s plans, and the *Scout* printed only letters that were favorable to the Authority and then adamantly worked to mobilize popular support to bring the dam to Murphy. Nearly all major local media outlets eventually became active advocates for dam construction and often bickered with one another (in print) over which town wanted the dams more, or which locality was most “fairly” competing for the dams without resorting

⁴⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 263-264.

⁴⁶ Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*, 273.

⁴⁷ “To Dam or Not to Dam,” *Elizabethton Daily Star*, October 25, 1941; “Local Action Aimed at TVA Dam Program,” *Cherokee Scout*, June 15, 1934.

to sneaky “political efforts” which would only serve to prohibit towns from “shar[ing] in the righteousness of the TVA.”⁴⁸

While regional newspapers extolled the many virtues the TVA would bring to the Valley, they were intently focused on the economic and business advantages the Authority would bring to the area in the forms of increased spending by TVA personnel, a number of proposed industrial developments, and the potential for tourism surrounding the lakes the dams created. Newspaper editors argued that these benefits far outweighed the potentially negative consequences felt by the dispossessed. Articles and editorials often disparaged or trivialized dam opponents’ concerns and universally dismissed lands within the proposed flood zones as useless or inferior, neglecting to consider the hundreds of large and small family farms situated on those lands. When newspapers did acknowledge their neighbors’ dispossession, it was to declare them “patriots” of the homefront in World War II. According to a 1942 article in the *Elizabethton Daily Star*, there was no greater sacrifice than relinquishing “the sanctity of the home . . . and other sacred rights in order that we may fully, as a nation, preserve our security and the American way of living.”⁴⁹

Regional newspapers, run by trusted locals, served as the perfect voice for the Authority’s message and created division among local groups, effectively dividing the population between those who would be directly affected by the Authority’s activities and those who would only realize the broader, and perhaps more positive, economic effects. Through the local media, the TVA attempted to demonstrate to its target population the need for Authority reforms. Indeed, newspapers even began to reflect TVA language and repeat

⁴⁸ “The Knoxville Meeting,” *Cherokee Scout*, October 5, 1934.

⁴⁹ “Home Owners in Watauga Dam Area Real Patriots,” *Elizabethton Daily Star*, May 23, 1942.

stereotypes of the region's people and lifestyles, when this practice would have been unthinkable in any other context. A *Cherokee Scout* editorialist, during the debate surrounding the construction of the nearby Hiwassee Dam, admitted that even though outsiders' portrayals of the region as "backward makes us indignant, we must, in a measure, admit it's true," and argued that the TVA would "develop resources that . . . will put drought-stricken, poverty-ridden wretches in a position where they'll live again and want to live, as human people, happy."⁵⁰ A few months later, the newspaper argued that "we will reap plentifully of what the Tennessee Valley has sown—progress to the people of this section."⁵¹

Both local newspapers and TVA officials defined progress as industrial development rather than continued reliance on family farming. Arthur Morgan, Chairman of the TVA, suggested that the Tennessee Valley was home to "many more people engaged in agriculture than are needed in that pursuit," and that a population adjustment would relocate rural agriculturalists displaced by dam construction and the creation of national forests into cities to work in industrial jobs.⁵² Western North Carolina's *Franklin Press* echoed these ideas, asking readers to "picture yourself a country dotted with modern industrial plants, large and small, affording employment for thousands . . . Imagine, if you can, a country where there are plenty of jobs for those willing to work; good wages and short hours."⁵³ In both scenarios, the TVA provided the solution to local ills and guided mountain residents into the modern era.

⁵⁰ "Debunking the TVA"—Bosh," *Cherokee Scout*, January 24, 1934; "Little Dam, What Now?" *Cherokee Scout*, June 15, 1934.

⁵¹ "The Knoxville Meeting," *Cherokee Scout*, October 5, 1934.

⁵² Quoted in "TVA Plans Change in Life of District," *New York Times*, May 11, 1934.

⁵³ "A Brighter Day Looms," *Franklin Press and the Highlands Maconian*, September 21, 1933.

Despite local newspaper editors' efforts to frame the TVA dam construction argument, local residents formed their own opinions. Unable in most cases to publicly voice their opinions on the TVA, locals instead expressed their displeasure through rumor and silence. When locals did speak, their concerns reflected deeply-held community and landed values. Although only a few people publicly expressed their concerns through letters and actions, TVA fieldworkers, typically supportive local schoolteachers, traveled the Valley and interviewed representatives from each family to be removed.⁵⁴ What they discovered was that the rumor mill moved more quickly than they could. They also provide historians with a valuable record of residents' personal thoughts and concerns in the days, and sometimes years, prior to their removal.

So many of the Valley's residents employed the power of the rumor mill that both TVA workers and the local media took note and addressed the gossip that had taken hold across the region. TVA workers interviewing Valley residents prior to the construction of the South Holston and Watauga dams remarked on the effectiveness of rumor in influencing the locals. One woman residing near Bristol "was very inquisitive," asking "numerous questions that did not have very much bearing on her relocation problems. Her inquisitive nature was due to some rumors she had heard from neighbors or people passing by who knew comparatively nothing in regard to the program of the TVA."⁵⁵ Other rumors addressed residents' concerns regarding limits on the kinds and locations of property that the Authority planned to purchase. Many of the region's newspapers worked to delegitimize such rumors.

⁵⁴ McDonald and Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed*, 89.

⁵⁵ South Holston Dam Project files, TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records, Records of the Tennessee Valley Authority, National Archives and Records Administration, Atlanta.

The *Elizabethton Daily Star*, prior to the construction of the Watauga Dam, assured readers that “we shall not be a party to misleading our readers by publishing statements which are only rumors,” while *The Cherokee Scout*, years after the construction of the Hiwassee Dam, confronted rampant rumors of the TVA’s plans to build additional dams near Murphy by contacting the Authority and reprinting their promises: “We can only reassure you . . . [that the] Authority plans no dam above Murphy and that the rumors are without foundation.”⁵⁶

That TVA interviewers and local media recognized the Valley’s rumor mill indicates the power inherent in rumor. Rumor serves an important function for any subjugated people denied a voice in their own futures as political scientist James C. Scott theorized, and it flourishes “in situations in which events of vital importance to people’s interests are occurring and in which no reliable information—or only ambiguous information—is available.” Rumor allows the transmission of anonymous information that helps to solidify a collective experience, and the natural elaboration that occurs as rumors are spread helps to bring information more closely into alignment with the group’s worldview, while clearly illustrating the group’s fears. For the people of the Tennessee Valley, rumor provided an opportunity for anonymous communication of fears and anxieties that were difficult to express openly against a federal governmental agency that clearly had the power in the relationship. Rumor provided local residents with a potent and influential means of communication that even those in power were forced to recognize and address.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ “To Dam or Not to Dam,” *Elizabethton Daily Star*, October 25, 1941; “No More Dams above Murphy Says TVA Report,” *Cherokee Scout*, May 21, 1942.

⁵⁷ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 144-45.

TVA interviewers also encountered another form of subversion as they canvassed the Tennessee Valley prior to dam construction. TVA workers were dismayed by the large number of residents with relocation plans deemed “vague,” “not definitely decided,” “unsure,” or who “made little or no effort toward removal,” refused to look for a new home, and “naturally does not have removal plans.”⁵⁸ Some residents refused to answer interviewers’ questions or did so with indefinite or intentionally vague answers, often misleading the Authority with their responses. By refusing to answer questions, make plans, or reveal plans that had already been decided, residents retained a bit of power over their lives and situations, as the Authority could not continue its construction as long as families remained in the area. A form of what James Scott calls “hidden transcripts,” such acts of denial or silence critique those in power through a system of actions less likely to be understood as dissent than would collective organized protest.⁵⁹ By concealing their disapproval behind small acts of resistance, the Valley’s residents maintained an outward appearance of acquiescence, while at the same time complicating the TVA’s plans for their region, even if only temporarily.

Though the Valley’s residents’ rumors and silence spoke volumes more than it initially appears, indicating what they found objectionable about TVA policy, they also spoke out publicly on these issues as well. In interviews with TVA personnel, and occasionally through written correspondence with their elected representatives, locals expressed their own values. Two of the most common themes that reappeared both in interviews with TVA

⁵⁸ Cherokee Dam Project files, Hiwassee Dam Project files, South Holston Dam Project files, Watauga Dam Project files, all in TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

⁵⁹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, xii.

workers and in correspondence were the high values placed on land and community. Valley residents' most pressing concerns when faced with relocation were preserving ties to their friends, relatives, and neighbors, and their suspicions that they would never be able to recreate the relationships they currently had with their physical environment. While some responses were wistful, others were angry, but all indicated a strong sense of place both within human and physical environments that the TVA did not consider or acknowledge.

Many of the Valley's families felt that the Authority undervalued their land—both in monetary and emotional terms. As one resident of White Pine recalled, the flood zone was home to mostly family farms, both large and small. “[It was] just a farming section through here . . . It was fine land, good farming land. Just a farming section. They wasn't much going on except farmers.”⁶⁰ The TVA interview files evidenced the vast majority of residents engaged in farming not only food crops but also small amounts of cash crops such as tobacco. Though the TVA and local media argued that the land to be flooded was rocky, infertile, and unsuitable for farmland with no value save for the timber that could be found on it, residents disagreed. Many farmers informed TVA interviewers that their particular piece of farmland was the best that could be found in the area, with residents telling workers that they had “the best farm in the reservoir area,” or their farm was “one of the best farms on the river, [I'd] hate to leave it,” or just made clear that they were “extra-well satisfied” with their “very good land.”⁶¹ Others, however, spoke of just how difficult they believed it would be to find a comparable piece of land: one farmer resigned, “I know I won't get as good a place as

⁶⁰ Edgar Wice interview by Michael Montgomery, 1978, Tape 10.2, transcript, Michael Montgomery Collection, Archives of Appalachia.

⁶¹ Watauga Dam Project files, photocopy, Russ Calhoun Collection, Archives of Appalachia.; Hiwassee Dam Project files, TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

this no matter where I go,” while another farmer spoke for his wife’s particular devotion to their land, saying it “will be hard to find another farm which will satisfy . . . she do like it here.”⁶²

Perhaps because they valued land and the act of farming so highly, many Valley residents refused to apply for jobs working with the TVA. As one of the Authority’s goals was to modernize the Tennessee Valley through industrialization, TVA workers, as they interviewed residents in preparation for removal, often broached the subject of employment with reservoir clearance crews or the dam construction division. However, farmers often rejected such opportunities, either because they disapproved of the TVA’s programs or because they preferred to retain ties to the land through traditional agricultural pursuits. One man from eastern Tennessee told the TVA interviewer, when approached on the subject of employment, “that he felt it would be better for him to give his entire time to work on the farm.” Another farmer informed the interviewer that he “was not about to work for people who makes slaves out of workers” and refused to discuss the issue further.⁶³ Residents’ ties to land were strong and they took pride in their own independence and self-reliance. After removal, many former farmers relocated to towns such as Elizabethton or Knoxville, Tennessee or Bristol, Virginia to find employment in factories, thus severing their traditional ties to land and place and, in the process, fulfilling the TVA’s goals of industrialization, modernization, and reducing the number of the region’s residents dependent on agriculture.

⁶² Hiwassee Dam Project files, TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

⁶³ Watauga Dam Project files, photocopy, Russ Calhoun Collection; South Holston Dam Project files, TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

Not only were Valley residents convinced of the superiority of their particular plot of land for farming, and often preferred agriculture to industrial work, but they also valued their land in monetary terms. When it became clear that TVA activities required residents to relinquish their claims to private property, local newspapers such as *The Cherokee Scout* assured those in the flood zone that the government always bargained fairly in its acquisitions, and as a result, “the farm owners are not one whit discomfited. Quite the reverse indeed.”⁶⁴

Although TVA policy required fair market price be paid for property, the Authority itself determined that price, and residents had no ability to negotiate higher prices. If residents rejected an offer, the Authority had the power to initiate condemnation proceedings. These factors made it difficult to determine what exactly constituted a fair price.⁶⁵

A number of landowners in both eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina rejected TVA offers for their property. Many farmers believed that the Authority deliberately undervalued their land, offering to pay much less than fair market price. A TVA interviewer described one farmer as “disgusted with the appraisal value of his farm,” but the interviewer dismissed him as “simple minded. He . . . lacks mental facility to take advantage of opportunities.” Other farmers, however, similarly expressed dissatisfaction with the TVA’s appraisals, and the Authority often made note that they were “inclined to overrate the value of any property” they owned.⁶⁶ In response, a number of families refused to sign contracts and demanded adjustments be made to the offered price, while others circulated petitions and

⁶⁴ “Murphy People are Optimistic over Outlook,” *Cherokee Scout*, May 26, 1933.

⁶⁵ McDonald and Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed*, 65.

⁶⁶ Cherokee Dam Project files, Hiwassee Dam Project files, South Holston Dam Project files, Watauga Dam Project files, all in TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

contacted their elected officials. One man from Bryson City, in danger of losing his home, wrote to Senator Josiah William Bailey that the TVA had “Run the Citizens Off” their land at a price “they cant get Another Home For and they air Still Hunting For a home.” Another resident of western North Carolina contacted Senator Bailey, arguing, “the T.V.A. does not need this land. I, therefore, cannot see how they can force us to sell at their price. I do not think they can take it under the law of Eminent Domain.”⁶⁷ In reality, as the Authority was not required to negotiate price, disputes occasionally did end in condemnation proceedings.

Even *The Cherokee Scout* acknowledged that protest against the TVA’s land buying policies permeated the Valley. By 1937, the Authority experienced “some difficulty in purchasing the necessary tracts of land in the basin,” and the paper communicated the message that “TVA officials are of the opinion that the landowner profits best by selling his land at the figure the TVA land buyer offers him—the figure that has been set by the TVA’s land appraisal group.”⁶⁸ The editor ended his piece by reminding residents that they had no power to negotiate with the Authority, and the best course of action was to sell quickly and quietly in order to relocate as soon as possible.

Perhaps running even deeper than the discontent Valley residents felt over being forced to leave their farmland for less than satisfactory prices were the strong emotional and multigenerational ties they felt to the physical place of their residence. Both TVA interviewers and the residents remarked on the length of time that many of the Valley’s families had been settled in the region. One family’s ancestors “came into this section of the

⁶⁷ Constituents to Josiah William Bailey, September 3, 1943, and March 18, 1944, Josiah William Bailey Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

⁶⁸ “Buying Land in the Basin,” *Cherokee Scout*, April 8, 1937.

country about one hundred years ago,” while another was a “descendent of a pioneer family in this community,” and yet another family dated their home to 1792, when their ancestors settled land “acquired from a Revolutionary War grant.” Many referred to their property as the “old home” or “old homeplace,” indicating the multigenerational nature of their connections. Other residents, many of them elderly, noted that they had lived in the Valley—and often on the same piece of land—for decades. One man from Bryson City wrote that he had lived in his “Home . . . For Fifty Years and Made a comfortable Living” there, while yet another informed a TVA interviewer that “the Authority should pay him for the fact that he has lived in this area for twenty years, and that there is some monetary value attached to his sentiment for his home.” An older couple, living in the Holly Springs community of eastern Tennessee, informed a TVA worker that their old home, was built “by the side of a holly tree and spring from which the name ‘Holly Springs’ was given to this locality.”⁶⁹ For Valley residents, the TVA dam projects threatened to flood not only their livelihoods but lands associated with family, ancestry, and local history.

The land acquisition process often took months or years to complete, and once it became clear that the TVA would in fact force those living within the flood zone to relocate, some families attempted to negotiate in hopes of retaining at least a part of their land, at least for a time. Many residents stressed to TVA workers their need to complete the current agricultural season, promising to relocate peacefully once the harvest came in. Others requested that the Authority allow their families to remain on a small portion of land. One

⁶⁹ Watauga Dam Project files, photocopy, Russ Calhoun Collection; Cherokee Dam Project files, Hiwassee Dam Project files, and South Holston Dam Project files, all in TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records; Constituent to Bailey, March 18, 1944.

western North Carolinian told a TVA interviewer that he was “trying to arrange with TVA not to buy all [of the] tract but to leave part of [the] upland [section] so they can build” a new home that would still be near family and “old haunts.”⁷⁰ Other families appealed to higher authorities. Another man from western North Carolina wrote to Walter J. Arrants of the TVA Family Removal division that he “wood like to live on here this year [as] there is no other Place I can get here . . . please let me no at once if I can stay here this year ore not fore there is no vacant house in this section at presant.”⁷¹ One woman petitioned directly to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, writing “if we haft to leave our home and job what we’ll do[?] We can build here on one end of our lot and stay here and hold our job if they let us. I would like to stay here if thayd let me.”⁷² Her appeal was successful, as the TVA reserved a small tract of land on which her family rebuilt their home.

Clearly resigned to the fact that the TVA would completely alter their lives, families demonstrated deep connections to land, place, old homeplaces and old haunts.

Anthropologist George L. Hicks, who worked in and studied western North Carolina, found that many people defined their attachments to ancestral lands through residence in homes constructed by parents and grandparents. Despite the monetary value of the land, many people believed that they had “a moral obligation to keep [the property] intact for their heirs,” even if they no longer lived in the original houses.⁷³ The TVA disrupted traditional

⁷⁰ Hiwassee Dam Project files, TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

⁷¹ Resident to Walter J. Arrants, February 5, 1937, Hiwassee Dam Project files, TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

⁷² Constituent to Eleanor Roosevelt, Cherokee Dam Project files, TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

⁷³ George L. Hicks, *Appalachian Valley* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 61.

means of land inheritance, distribution, and valuation, angering Valley residents and motivating many of them to resist the Authority's efforts.

As anthropologist Hicks wrote, "holding legal title to land, while it is important to the residents of the valley, is only part of their attachment. . . . Far more significant, it appears is their sense of the valley as a matrix for their lives."⁷⁴ For residents, the Valley was both a physical space, the place where they lived and farmed, but it was also a community. Deep attachments to neighbors and social institutions defined locals' lives, and this sense of community accompanied residents even as they left the Tennessee Valley. "One point which seemed to persist in nearly every direction was the sense of community togetherness and the high value which inhabitants placed upon it," wrote historians Michael J. McDonald and John Muldowny, and the rapid and radical nature of the TVA relocation program "brought closer to the surface the deep feelings and depth of emotional attachment" many people felt to their neighbors and their community.⁷⁵ TVA interviewers often remarked on residents' wishes to retain connections with and close proximity to friends and neighbors they had known, relied upon, and aided for years. Despite the prevailing stereotype of the mountaineer as a lone individualist incapable of creating and sustaining ties with human beings other than immediate family, the Authority recognized the deep sense of community that prevailed in the Valley. TVA workers recognized how certain individuals were influential in their neighborhoods, and either counted on such individuals to effect a speedy removal or dreaded their influence in opposing the Authority's programs. Either way, TVA workers, by recording the various ways in which community played important roles in the current lives of

⁷⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁵ McDonald and Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed*, 37, 67.

Valley residents and corresponding concerns for the future of their communities, inadvertently discredited the stereotype of the individuated, atomistic mountain man and woman, an image the TVA counted on to further its reforms of the region.

Community relationships were very important to residents of the Tennessee Valley, and at least one family felt that “the program of the TVA [was] just a means of breaking up the community.” Even as residents were aware that relocation was imminent they continued to communicate the importance of community connections. Locals with longstanding ties to the area informed TVA interviewers that they “were quite attached to not only the[ir] family and friends but to the church, the store . . . and other neighborhood land marks.” The Valley’s elderly residents particularly felt the impact of the Authority’s relocation program, and TVA workers were surprised by the number of residents who, “despite their age . . . keep in touch with their neighbors and members of the family” and who were “so firmly bound [to their community] by family ties and associations.” In some cases, the sick and the elderly depended on neighbors for assistance in heavy farm labor, food provision, or simply for socialization. The strength of such relationships even forced those who initially refused to sell their land to the TVA to reconsider; one family resisting the Cherokee Dam in western North Carolina held their ground until all their neighbors had moved out of the area and they began “to feel quite alone.” The family soon relocated.⁷⁶

The TVA’s programs also occasionally created tensions and divisions within a previously strong and cohesive community. When a group of residents of Butler authored a

⁷⁶ Cherokee Dam Project files, Hiwassee Dam Project files, and South Holston Dam Project files, all in TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records; Watauga Dam Project files, photocopy, Russ Calhoun Collection.

petition denouncing the dam and removal policies, they approached one man who refused to sign. As a result, the man claimed he was ostracized from the community and “was not too well liked by many of his neighbors.” This man and his family, now outsiders in their own community and lacking the connections so important for daily life, informed the TVA that they were “very glad to have their land appraised,” as they desired “to leave this particular locality” and all associations with these neighbors.⁷⁷

For most of the Valley’s families the prospect of leaving their homes, neighbors, and long-established communities was a dreadful one. Many were concerned with the future of their communities and determined to retain as many old contacts as possible. Some residents who sold their land to the Authority did so on the condition that they be resettled in a location “near some of [their] old neighbors or relatives,” and one man was quite specific when he stated that he would “not be at all satisfied in any community in which at least one or two of his old neighbors are not located.”⁷⁸ A reverend from one of the Valley’s many churches was “interested in holding as many of his group together as he can, and in forming a new church with a number of the old members as a nucleus. He does not like the idea of breaking all community ties and friendships.”⁷⁹ The pastor’s concern for his congregation demonstrates that the church was important in assuring community cohesion and played a role in a number of aspects of community life, providing a location for religious worship, socialization,

⁷⁷ Watauga Dam Project files, photocopy, Russ Calhoun Collection.

⁷⁸ Hiwassee Dam Project files, Cherokee Dam Project files, all in TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

⁷⁹ Watauga Dam Project files, photocopy, Russ Calhoun Collection.

recreation, and education.⁸⁰ By attempting to keep at least a portion of his congregation intact, the reverend looked to preserve community ties through church functions.

Not all of the Valley's residents were so optimistic. Many locals feared the dissolution of community relationships after relocation. One woman from western North Carolina agreed to "move almost anywhere...since she has to leave [her current] neighborhood," while another family of invalids worried that their "isolation will make it hard for them to get acquainted" with new people.⁸¹ Many such concerns were well-founded. One former Butler resident regretfully recalled that her family's worst fears were realized when her close-knit group of brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles dispersed across Tennessee and Virginia once they left their homes.⁸²

The same sense of community that united Valley residents around their land, families, neighbors, and social institutions transferred into a local concern with TVA employment. The federal government promised that a majority of those hired by the TVA would be natives of the Tennessee Valley, fulfilling the mission of economic improvement and industrialization. While many locals refused work on TVA projects, others appreciated the employment opportunities and rushed to apply for jobs with the Authority. However, as work on a number of dams progressed, locals complained that a majority of those hired were outsiders, and in reality, the Authority preferred to import labor rather than employ local residents. In 1937, during the construction of the Hiwassee Dam, *The Cherokee Scout* emphatically addressed

⁸⁰ McDonald and Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed*, 43.

⁸¹ Cherokee Dam Project files, South Holston Dam Project files, all in TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

⁸² E. Slemp interview by Gretta Tolley, April 7, 1996, Tape 30, Charles Gunter, Jr. Collection, Archives of Appalachia.

these complaints, declaring “OUT OF LESS THAN A TOTAL OF 400 PERSONS EMPLOYED ON THE HIWASSEE PROJECT AT THIS TIME, MORE THAN 200 OF THEM WERE LOCAL PEOPLE.” The newspaper felt that “false and unfounded” allegations were “due to the fact that no large number of workmen have yet been hired at the dam as the work there is still in its preliminary stages.”⁸³

Yet the complaints did not subside as construction proceeded; in fact, grievances escalated into violent conflict. In November 1940, a group of unemployed local men assembled at the construction site, protesting the TVA’s hiring policies and the use of “northern” or “imported” labor rather than local labor. As one supervisor explained to the demonstrators that workers possessed skills not found locally, protestors responded with threats and eventually seized the supervisor and tossed him into the river. The unrest did not end there. In the coming weeks, fights erupted between workers, local men patrolled the roads looking for “foreign” license plates, and locals distributed handbills calling for a meeting “to drive the Northerners out,” leaving vacant positions for locals. Although northerners were the first group targeted, protesters eventually refused to allow anyone other than residents of Tennessee or North Carolina to work on the dam, pressing many outside workers to relinquish their jobs “and leave this section.” Workers who agreed were allowed to depart unharmed, but those who resisted were beaten or thrown into the river—or both.⁸⁴

This instance, perhaps the most violent conflict that occurred over imported labor, was only one response to a situation that arose frequently in the Valley. One resident in the South Holston Dam’s flood zone handled his discontent in another way. This man decried the

⁸³ “Cherokee Workman Getting Their Share of Jobs on the Dam,” *Cherokee Scout*, April 15, 1937.

⁸⁴ “Dam ‘Feud’ Extended to Westerners,” *Cherokee Scout*, November 21, 1940.

TVA's "partiality in employment," and in retaliation refused to sell his land as a demonstration that he "could not be pushed around."⁸⁵ In addition to forcing people to find new means of survival by removing them from their farmland, importing labor when employment was scarce in the region was yet another insult to the local community. Individual and collective responses to these insults demonstrate the community solidarity and a strong regional identity extending beyond one's own family. Once again local residents undermined the stereotype of the mountaineer as individualistic and atomistic that was so important to the TVA and its programs.

As the number of planned dams and their construction greatly increased in the early 1940s, at a time when the United States was preparing to enter World War II, it became clear to the federal government how useful the TVA might be in the defense effort. During the war years, the Authority produced electricity for the federal government, and TVA Chairman Arthur Morgan considered an adequate supply of energy crucial to the war effort—both for civilians and to power many of the industrial facilities that produced equipment for the armed forces. And, of course, as TVA interviewers canvassed the Valley's countryside in the family removal effort, the Authority's role in national defense became one of their best weapons to achieve an effectively swift relocation. A number of farmers in eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina who were initially reluctant to sell their property to the Authority became much more compliant when informed that the TVA would be deeply involved in the war effort. TVA interviewers served not only to collect information from the Valley's residents, but they also used their contacts with individual families to advocate for the TVA's

⁸⁵ South Holston Dam Project files, TVA Family Removal and Population Adjustment Records.

mission, especially as US involvement in World War II became a reality. One TVA worker noted that “after explaining some of the principals of the TVA program,” one elderly man who was reluctant to leave his “old home” finally agreed to cooperate, as “it was for the defense of the country.” This man’s experience was not unique. A number of families during this period agreed that if the government needed their land for the war, it should take it. One man stated, “if they needed his little hillside to win the war, he would be glad to give it to them,” while another farmer who “regretted to move” noted that “if it took readjustment of his home and farm to win the war . . . he was willing to cooperate.” Residents’ reluctance to leave ancestral farmlands clashed with their national patriotism throughout the TVA interview files. Again, their responses demonstrate how Valley residents’ sense of place had to be contextualized within their connection to broader America. Many in the federal government and in the popular press refused to believe such a relationship existed in Appalachia. In fact, this sense of patriotism was the one thing that consistently moved locals to sell their property to the Authority. TVA interviewers recognized this loyalty and used it to their advantage in the acquisition process.⁸⁶

The Great Depression afforded the federal government its first wholesale opportunity to modernize Appalachian society through a variety of New Deal programs. In the end, both the TVA and the CCC worked to change locals’ relationships to the land, while introducing new people and projects, creating situations that changed longstanding community relationships and dynamics. Although TVA projects clearly created the greatest changes in Appalachian life, both New Deal programs effected change in a region deemed backward and

⁸⁶ Ibid.

in need of modernization. Residents' dissent did not often take the form of active organized protests, as many felt the federal government's plans were unchangeable, but they did speak their mind both publicly and privately, and at times, refused to capitulate to TVA demands. In so doing, locals communicated their values to those who had only viewed the region through stereotyped lenses. Although Appalachian voices did not eradicate or diminish these stereotypes, in their responses to the New Deal programs that most affected their communities the people of the southern Appalachians revealed that they were not passive bystanders in their own lives and futures.

CHAPTER II

“Because it is right, because it is wise, and because, for the first time in our history, it is possible to conquer poverty, I submit, for the consideration of the Congress and the country, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.”¹ With these words, President Lyndon B. Johnson set in motion the massive undertaking of eradicating poverty across the country. Johnson’s War on Poverty grew in part out of President John F. Kennedy’s 1960 campaign sojourn through West Virginia, which splashed photographs of impoverished mountaineers across television screens and newspapers, confirming in the public mind the image of Appalachia as a region inhabited solely by the poor and backward. Johnson envisioned and enacted his war as a series of programs designed to achieve “maximum feasible participation” by those in poverty and focusing a great deal of funding and media attention on the Appalachian Mountains. Although some of the programs realized varying degrees of success, critics attacked the War on Poverty as wasteful welfare spending. Eventually, and especially under the succeeding Richard Nixon administration, the federal government phased out many of Johnson’s programs. Today, the War on Poverty is often viewed as a failure, and poverty remains a problem both in American society as a whole and in Appalachia. However, the war’s five years of activity left a lasting, though often unexplored, imprint on the lives of those intended to receive and benefit from the extensive federal aid package.

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Proposal for a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty, Special Message to Congress, March 16, 1964,” Modern History Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1964johnson-warpoverty.html> (accessed February 27, 2009).

The War on Poverty manifested itself in many ways across the Appalachian region. Kentuckians and West Virginians found their communities inundated with “domestic Peace Corps” workers under the auspices of the Appalachian Volunteers (AVs) and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Most were middle-class college students who often became involved in radical and sometimes-violent protests against coal companies and strip-mining in Kentucky and West Virginia. In western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, the War on Poverty consisted mostly of educational programs, vocational training facilities, and most visibly, the creation of umbrella community action groups, such as the four-county WAMY group (named for Watauga, Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties), that administrated a variety of anti-poverty efforts using federal funds.

While much has been written about the War on Poverty, few historians have focused specifically on the Appalachian incarnations of its programs. When scholars have discussed Appalachia, none have examined or sought to recount how its residents experienced and responded to the programs the War on Poverty. This scholarly neglect leaves the people of Appalachia without a voice in their own history.

Scholars have most frequently written about the War on Poverty in national terms, focusing on the overall implementation of its programs and their respective successes or failures. The people of Appalachia are rarely considered. For example, Robert F. Clark wrote *The War on Poverty* (2002) to address the fact that, at the time, “no updated history of the War on Poverty and its programs had been published.”² In his work, which seeks to provide an overview of the war’s programs and impact, Clark argued that “the early antipoverty

² Robert F. Clark, *The War on Poverty: History, Selected Programs and Ongoing Impact* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2002), viii.

programs perpetuate war on poverty and continue to meet human needs.”³ Frank Stricker, on the other hand, wrote a history of the fight against poverty in the United States over the past sixty years that arrives at the opposite conclusion. In *Why America Lost the War on Poverty* (2007), Stricker concluded that Johnson’s War on Poverty neglected to address the underlying problems facing the poor and instead tried to correct “the attitudes and skills of poor people and community institutions.”⁴ Although Clark and Stricker arrived at markedly different conclusions, their approaches are similar. Clark and Stricker relied almost exclusively on statistics and monetary figures to construct their arguments. The effects of these programs on the lives of actual recipients are left largely unexplored, and this neglect is clearly noticeable throughout both works. Clark’s and Stricker’s economics-based approaches are typical of other works on the subject, leaving the people of Appalachia absent from their own history.

In the 1960s, the War on Poverty gave scholars a new lens through which to view the region. Early interpretations of Appalachia as a backward, traditionalist folk culture combined with Kennedy’s and Johnson’s rhetoric about poverty to create a literary trope—the subculture of poverty. This model is exemplified by Jack Weller’s *Yesterday’s People* (1965), which argues that both physical and mental “isolation” held mountaineers back, but eventually the “effect of conditions thus [became] a new cause of conditions, but the cause is now an attitude not a mountain.”⁵ The culture of poverty paradigm is deeply flawed, as it

³ Ibid.

⁴ Frank Stricker, *Why America Lost the War on Poverty—And How to Win It* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36.

⁵ Jack E. Weller, *Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), vii.

actively promotes stereotypical images of mountain people and, as Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee chastised, it “hinges on a faulty view of culture . . . as a collection of traits that are settled, nonnegotiable, and fixed.”⁶ However, this paradigm does acknowledge structural and systemic problems of poverty in the region, which accounts for its longevity, dominating Appalachian studies until the new social historians began to challenge its assumptions in the 1970s.

Ronald D. Eller countered the idea of the subculture of poverty model in *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers* (1982), arguing that the model of colonialism best explains the region’s persistent poverty. He contended that industrialization, brought about by large corporations owned by absentee East Coast businessmen, transformed Appalachian society from a self-sufficient, individualistic society to “dependence on a system beyond their control,” which created the conditions that the culture of poverty theorists observed.⁷ However, Eller did not elaborate on the enduring connections between industrialization and the socioeconomic conditions that came to define Appalachia, nor did he closely look at the changes as experienced by those who lived through them. While Eller sought to explain the process through which widespread poverty in Appalachia emerged, he neglected to describe the power relationships essential to any society’s transformation. Through his disregard for the Appalachian people’s roles in and experiences of these social changes, Eller ignored the fact that larger political, economic, and social phenomena are experienced on individual levels.

⁶ Dwight B. Billings and Kathleen M. Blee, *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12.

⁷ Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the American South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 227.

While a number of historians have written about the War on Poverty in Appalachia, Ronald D. Eller and David E. Whisnant have written the most thorough accounts. However, even these discussions have focused almost exclusively on the programs themselves and their subsequent failures. Whisnant, in his influential work *Modernizing the Mountaineer* (1980), provided an indispensable and comprehensive discussion of the process through which many programs were enacted, and he detailed many of the problems encountered upon their implementations. Whisnant argued that the War on Poverty “has become a synonym for failure” and concluded that it neglected to address “the structural and systemic basis of poverty in Appalachia.”⁸ Eller built upon his earlier work in *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (2008), which looks extensively at the War on Poverty in Appalachia. Unfortunately, as he and Whisnant had done in the 1980s, Eller restricted his most recent discussion to an overarching review the programs’ specifics, their lack of success, and the reasons behind their failures.

To their credit, Whisnant and Eller extended their focuses to selected community-based programs and their performances. Still, despite this useful more localized focus, both overlooked the region’s residents and their views on these programs. Whisnant focused mainly on the political and policy-making sides of the war, and did not explore the region’s cultural response to these vast pieces of legislation. Though clearly writing in defense of a region and its people who had been the recipients of “shallow symbolic ‘helping’ gestures where structural reforms were called for,” Whisnant denied his subjects’ agency and

⁸ David E. Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 92, 119.

neglected to note their active participation, both in support of and in resistance to the war.⁹ Similarly, Eller chose to look more closely at the stories told by the outsiders who arrived in the mountains as volunteers. While it is valuable to understand the roles played by volunteers who participated in the War on Poverty, Eller omitted the voices of the natives who came into contact with these volunteers but were not active implementers of the programs. Eller explained that “Appalachia became a pawn in a great national experiment that sought to eradicate poverty,” thereby denying mountain residents any response or creativity in their own alternatives.¹⁰

Although each of these works succeeds in providing a greater historical understanding of the War on Poverty, these scholars have left unexamined the ways in which the residents of Appalachia experienced and responded to the War on Poverty, silencing a historically significant community worthy of scholarly attention and stereotyping them as “quiescent people who are complicit in their own oppression.”¹¹ Nevertheless, ordinary residents of Appalachia did have voices and did respond to the War on Poverty in a variety of ways that call for examination by historians. As Robin D. G. Kelly noted about working-class blacks, one can see that “beneath the veil of consent lies a hidden history of unorganized, everyday conflict,” carried out by an exploited and oppressed people.¹² The same is true for the people of Appalachia. Even small reactions and acts of resistance were

⁹ Ibid., xxx.

¹⁰ Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 93.

¹¹ Stephen L. Fisher, ed., *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 1.

¹² Robin D. G. Kelly, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History*, 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 76.

significant and should be recognized as valid responses to the War on Poverty as a program of power. In order to fully understand the War on Poverty, both sides of the relevant power structure must be explored, or the historical record will continue to represent no more than a partial sketch.

While it could be argued that western North Carolina experienced less invasive or less extensive programs than Kentucky or West Virginia, the area's residents would not have agreed. Federal programs affected the lives of all residents, and they responded to these programs in a variety of ways. However, their responses almost never manifested as active, organized protests. Rather than through radical action, residents registered dissent through official channels, particularly by writing to their government representatives. In fact, one woman began her letter to Congressman Charles Raper Jonas in March 1964 with the words, "I know you get sick of all my letter writing but. . .," indicating the frequency with which she and others undertook their form of protest.¹³ Although officials that western North Carolinians chose to contact *were* in fact members of the federal government—congressmen and senators—they were also regional natives and, as such, trusted members of the community. Through correspondence, western North Carolinians expressed dissent and believed they had been at least partially effectual because, no matter the issue, they always received responses from their representatives. Although their complaints were not always resolved, the act of writing itself represented individual action and protest, and a response was assured.

¹³ Constituent to Charles Raper Jonas, March 19, 1964, Charles Raper Jonas Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Mountain newspapers also played an important role in facilitating protest. Newspapers printed letters from concerned citizens, and the media also participated in community discussions through editorials, opinion pieces, regular columns, and general reporting. Conversations, taking place through official channels and in the shared venue of the local newspaper, became important means of uniting the community by providing a setting for western North Carolinians to openly profess common values and pronounce objections to the War on Poverty in culturally relevant ways.

Although some western North Carolinians praised the work being done by the War on Poverty's programs, many others reacted negatively to the changes workers and programs brought to the area. Despite these seemingly different reactions, all of these responses to the War on Poverty shared a sentiment that the federal government, in developing and exporting antipoverty programs, did not understand Appalachia's people. On some level, nearly all of those reactions that can be recovered indicate some level of dissatisfaction with the War on Poverty programs or their results, a sense that the programs were not achieving their stated goals. Yet, beyond the locals' concern with simple success or failure of the federal antipoverty programs, western North Carolinians' disapproval also can be linked to a long-term disconnect between the realities of Appalachian life and external attitudes toward the region and its people.

The War on Poverty in western North Carolina can be viewed today, as it was viewed by many at the time, as another manifestation of the region's long-term subjugation. For decades, popular authors, politicians, and scholars had all misrepresented and misunderstood Appalachia, portraying the region as impoverished and atomistic. These widely disseminated

accounts of the region's economic and cultural backwardness served only to leave Appalachia's people stereotyped and the region's needs unrecognized and unmet. In 1964, when the federal government began to develop antipoverty programs, the perceived needs it chose to confront were based on longstanding stereotypes. Government officials who designed the antipoverty efforts and workers brought into the region to administer these programs tried to extend their own versions of community and organization to a region and its people who already possessed a culture and a sense of community. Western North Carolinians repeatedly refuted the government's assumptions, arguing that they were neither poverty-stricken nor without community. In fact, reactions against the new antipoverty programs rested on a shared belief that wealth consisted of more than a simple measure of income, and much of their "wealth" lay in a strong sense of Appalachian community that the federal government denied existed. Locals fought battles against the Appalachian War on Poverty by refuting stereotypes promulgated by federal officials, but confrontations also took place on the ground against individual antipoverty workers sent into the area from outside the region. Cultural misunderstandings and misrepresentations prevailed, and western North Carolinians often reacted against what they perceived to be federal antipoverty workers' condescending and superior attitudes—attitudes that did not match their conception of community. Of course not everyone in western North Carolina explicitly criticized the War on Poverty's programs, and some locals praised aspects of the new antipoverty efforts, especially programs that could be integrated into the region's own conceptions of community and that involved dedicated and familiar groups of local people. No matter their reactions to

the War on Poverty, however, residents of North Carolina's mountains consistently reacted by calling upon a sense of community that they all recognized as supremely important.

“Their ‘communities’ are in many cases not communities at all”

Popular writers, scholars, and politicians have all portrayed Appalachia as an isolated and undeveloped region filled with “uncivilized, backward, barbaric or degenerate” people who needed to be integrated into modern life.¹⁴ This characterization rested on the contention that the region's physical isolation prevented the emergence of a sense of community among the area's residents, creating a culture that was “in but not of America.”¹⁵ In fact, as Ronald Eller described, “for over a hundred years observers of mountain life...denied the existence of ‘community’ altogether” in Appalachia.¹⁶ Emma Bell Miles, an artist who moved into the region, wrote in her *The Spirit of the Mountains* (1905), that “there is no such thing as a community of mountaineers. They are knit together, man to man, as friends, but not as a body of men.”¹⁷ Throughout the early twentieth century, northern benevolent associations working to bring educational and religious institutions to the mountains attributed the lack of Appalachian community not only to the absence of communal institutions but also to the lack of “institutions which created community, especially a public consciousness of the advantages of cooperation and a public conscience which ranked altruism above egotism.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Ron D. Eller, “The Search for Community in Appalachia,” in *Appalachia: Social Context Past and Present*, ed. Bruce Ergood and Bruce E. Kuhre, 3rd ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1991), 149.

¹⁵ Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 18.

¹⁶ Eller, “The Search for Community in Appalachia,” 149.

¹⁷ Emma Bell Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 71.

¹⁸ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 151.

By suggesting that no sense of community existed in Appalachia, authors and relief workers found a way of conceptualizing Appalachian exceptionalism in order to define the region as outside of American mainstream life and in need of religious, cultural, and economic development. Appalachia became “the other,” a concept that guided relief efforts in the mountains in the early twentieth century as workers sought to create a sense of community that, because it differed from their own, they believed was absent.

This perception of an individually-centered and isolated mountain culture persisted well into the twentieth century. Jack Weller wrote in his influential book, *Yesterday's People* (1965), that mountaineers “have no community life as such or life outside their very limited family group.”¹⁹ In the 1960s, antipoverty workers still relied on the concept of the otherness of Appalachia, feeling the need to impose what they considered a civilized and modern sense of organization and community on the region as a major, if unstated, objective of the War on Poverty work. Social scientists and policymakers fretted over the individualism and independent nature of the mountaineer. A report produced by the National Institute of Mental Health in 1966, which served to guide on-going antipoverty efforts in the region, reflected this stereotype of Appalachian residents as a people without a sense of community, lamenting the West Virginian, eastern Kentuckian, and western North Carolinian “tradition of individual independence,” which was exhibited “by withdrawal and by rejection of situations which he feels would make him one of the mass. . . . He shrinks from education and employment although they would, in fact, enhance his capabilities as an individual.”²⁰

¹⁹ Weller, *Yesterday's People*, 88.

²⁰ Quoted in Ben A. Franklin, “Mental Aid Held Appalachia Need,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1966.

Although official reports served to support and promote stereotypes of mountain residents, antipoverty workers also played a role in perpetuating negative images of the region and its people. As government agencies developed antipoverty programs in Appalachia, workers arrived from across the country to aid in the region's recovery. War on Poverty efforts in western North Carolina brought in a number of outsiders who knew little about Appalachia. To guide them, supervisors provided Jack Weller's *Yesterday's People*.²¹ As a major promoter of the culture of poverty and the absence of community theses, *Yesterday's People* became an unofficial field guide to the Appalachian people, which legitimized and perpetuated longstanding regional stereotypes. As a result, cultural misunderstandings and conflicts ensued between War on Poverty workers and locals, resulting in critiques of Appalachia that ranged from somewhat harmless comical incidents recounted in newspapers to outright critiques of Appalachian culture promulgated in official antipoverty publications.

In addition to a lack of familiarity with the Appalachian region as a whole, federal antipoverty workers assumed, as anthropologist George L. Hicks explained, "that traditions of cooperation and collective organization are absent, [and] the community organizers sought to impose on mountain people an urban form of association."²² In an internal document produced by a community action group based in western North Carolina, later uncovered and published in *The Watauga Democrat*, the group's officials stereotypically referred to the area's "low-income residents" as having "developed psychological characteristics consistent

²¹ Alan Banks, Dwight Billings, and Karen Tice, "Appalachian Studies, Resistance, and Postmodernism," in Fisher, ed., *Fighting Back in Appalachia*, 284.

²² George L. Hicks, *Appalachian Valley* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 105.

with their physical location. . . . Their history shows few examples of collective endeavor. . . . Their ‘communities’ are in many cases not communities at all, but merely clusters of interrelated families, fractured by generations-old feuds.”²³ Just as they guided educational and religious benevolent workers decades prior, these assumptions guided the efforts of federal antipoverty workers in western North Carolina who felt they had “spent two frustrating years of attempting, with small success, to create the group spirit, the feeling of self-confidence and self-importance, the hope and aspiration that individuals must have before concerted community effort for improvement is possible.”²⁴

However, as the basis for antipoverty work in this area of the North Carolina mountains, these sentiments overlooked the deep and intense community bonds already in place in Appalachia. According to anthropologist Patricia Duane Beaver, there were several types of communal relationships in western North Carolina prior to the War on Poverty, and all were based on a concept of kinship. “Kinship is more than biological or genealogical connectedness,” she explained, “it is a cultural idea through which relationships are expressed and from which community homogeneity is derived.” The language of kinship provided community members a “personal identity through the expression of common roots, common ancestry, shared experience, and shared values.” Rather than binding together only biological relatives, kinship-based community extended to unrelated community members through civic, religious, and work groups. Often mountain residents applied the language of kinship—brother, sister—to fellow members of these groups, which served “to incorporate both kin and nonkin into close kin categories.” Appalachian community also depended upon

²³ “We Found Out,” *Watauga Democrat*, May 11, 1967.

²⁴ Quoted in Hicks, *Appalachian Valley*, 103.

“cooperation among residents . . . achieved through mutual aid, and egalitarianism, despite obvious socioeconomic differences.” An egalitarian spirit was idealized and reinforced through focus on common ancestry and shared experience, and both concepts were rooted in the importance of shared ties to environment and human community.²⁵

Scholars, policymakers, and antipoverty workers chose to simply ignore the existence of a wide range of educational, social, and occupational groups that could commonly be found across the region. The existence and prevalence of such groups in western North Carolina and across Appalachia countered claims of individualism and isolationism. In fact, as Ronald Eller conceded, mountain residents viewed these associations as means through which to demonstrate dedication to land, family, tradition, God, and social justice. Simultaneously, associations sustained “public vitality and egalitarian spirit.”²⁶ In their conception of community and its importance, Appalachian residents differed very little from other Americans; yet, their reliance on what Beaver calls the “idiom of kinship” did distinguish them from an increasingly atomistic mainstream America, and western North Carolinians noted and appreciated this distinction. As government officials and antipoverty workers compared Appalachia to mainstream urban America, they noted the discrepancies and labeled the mountains deviant, deficient, and devoid of the community to which they were accustomed.

However, locals easily and quickly recognized the disconnect between reality and antipoverty workers’ condescending attitudes and cultural misrepresentations. Mountain

²⁵ Patricia Duane Beaver, *Rural Community in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 3, 56, 57, 60.

²⁶ Eller, “The Search for Community in Appalachia,” 150, 151.

newspapers related stories that clearly marked those unfamiliar with the region as outsiders. One humorous incident, recounted in an article in *The Transylvania Times*, described a Las Vegas-born Job Corpsman's introduction to local wildlife. While working, Larry Wiard "picked up a furry little animal" and brought it back to the Job Corps headquarters, where he "and his little friend made a big hit with everybody until someone startled his little furry animal who then filled the air with the darndest smelling perfume most of the Corpsmen had ever smelled!" The animal was a skunk, and, as the reporter wrote, the experience left "everybody much the wiser." Though the incident does not reflect hostile criticism of outsiders, it exemplified the ways in which western North Carolinians highlighted their own sense of community while, at the same time, making light of a frustrating situation. Placing this kind of emphasis on cultural misunderstandings allowed for a shared laugh among mountain residents at the expense of the supposedly superior and more sophisticated urbanites who entered their midst. This account and others like it permitted readers to share in the realization that mountaineers may have experiences and knowledge unique to their region, fueling regional pride or at least an awareness of unifying characteristics.²⁷

"This poverty business is greatly exaggerated in N.C. anyway."

The War on Poverty delivered different services and workers to different parts of Appalachia. The Job Corps and community action groups were the most prevalently implemented programs in western North Carolina, and these programs had the greatest impact. War on Poverty officials established several Job Corps training camps that removed

²⁷ "Interesting Activities At Schenck Job Corps Center," *Transylvania Times*, September 1, 1965.

young adults from their communities, and the negative influences they might encounter there, and brought them to live in residential camps to receive basic education and vocational training. These camps brought staff and at-risk youth from across the country into the region and set them to work on a variety of projects, including forestry work in nearby national forests and parks beautification efforts.

In addition to the Job Corps facilities, one of the most visible components of antipoverty programs in western North Carolina was the community action group. Government planners intended community action groups such as WAMY to assess local needs, raise and distribute funds, and administer a variety of antipoverty programs to their local communities. In western North Carolina these groups oversaw a variety of programs, including crafts cooperatives intended to provide jobs for the elderly, Operation Head Start for lower-income preschoolers, and the Neighborhood Youth Corps to offer part-time summer work for local teenagers who pledged to stay in school. Originally, War on Poverty officials proposed that these agencies be run and controlled by poor people in order to provide jobs, better and more equitable services to their peers, and as an additional tool in breaking the cycle of poverty. However, as was the case with WAMY, the poor never really gained substantial control over these agencies, and antipoverty efforts generally remained under the supervision of well-paid governmental workers.

Before any antipoverty efforts began in Appalachia or anywhere else in the country, the federal government sought to determine who would be eligible to receive aid, and the government's War on Poverty planners labeled any family with an annual income below

\$3,000 as impoverished, despite the criticisms of scholars, politicians, and residents.²⁸

Although the federal government could have applied more accurate definitions of poverty, adjusting for local differences in costs of living, this \$3,000 income level became a universally applied and static measurement to designate poverty nationwide. As historian Walter Precourt has argued, in the War on Poverty in Appalachia, “ideas about poverty deal as much with ideology as they do with material wealth. That is, while physical needs are often considered, cultural values and beliefs are equally significant.”²⁹ These ideological concerns are reflected in the language of the Equal Opportunity Act (EOA) that established the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), charged with the administration of the War on Poverty programs. The act reads, in part, “too many of our citizens . . . live outside the mainstream of American society. . . . The greatest domestic challenge before the Nation is to accentuate and extend the vast successes of our system.”³⁰

However, Appalachia’s image as a zone of intense poverty outside the American mainstream was not new in the 1960s, and the EOA’s goal of spreading mainstream American values was not only a government invention. Both concepts predate the War on Poverty. Appalachia as an especially impoverished region, like other popular images of Appalachia, has a long history. Walter Precourt wrote that the image of Appalachian poverty emerged between 1880 and 1930, at a time when “the precapitalistic subsistence-oriented economy came under extensive influence and scrutiny by industrial and political agencies of

²⁸ The median family income for 1964, the year the War on Poverty began, was \$6,569, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/f07ar.html>.

²⁹ Walter Precourt, “The Image of Appalachian Poverty,” in *Appalachia and America: Autonomy and Regional Dependence*, ed. Allen Batteau (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 88.

³⁰ Quoted in Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*, 101.

the capitalist system.”³¹ Appalachia was home to the country’s greatest percentage of self-sufficient farmers, with motivation to work based not on wages or a market economy, but on “the family and community-based networks of mutual aid.”³² As Appalachia became more and more integrated into the national economy, “the material aspects of [mountain residents’] way of life were evaluated by a new set of standards, which was based on the ideology of a self-regulating market system.”³³ Those viewing Appalachia in the context of a market economy understood its residents’ relative lack of material wealth as poverty.

Yet, outside observers have always considered Appalachians the deserving poor. William Gooddell Frost, third president of Berea College in Kentucky and an early promoter of the image of Appalachian poverty, characterized mountain residents as impoverished yet morally decent, which made them worthy of the charitable efforts undertaken by such institutions as Berea and northern benevolent associations that were at work in the region.³⁴ Portrayals such as Frost’s served to define and emphasize the otherness of the region, and over time these portrayals overcame mountain residents’ own conceptions of themselves. In 1960, when John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign stopped in West Virginia, cameras returned images of poverty-stricken mountaineers to televisions across the country, renewing popular interest in the idea of the region’s imagined universal poverty. And, as Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty geared up in 1964, sociologists and policymakers connected these images, and the poverty underlying them, to a regionwide subculture of poverty. In the minds of its proponents, a mountainous terrain and the traditionalist attitudes of the regions’

³¹ Precourt, “The Image of Appalachian Poverty,” 99.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Billings and Blee, *The Road to Poverty*, 9.

residents underlay the subculture of poverty. As sociologist Rupert Vance wrote in the 1960s, the only solution to the region's social ills was "to change the mountain personality."³⁵ This is what the War on Poverty attempted to achieve.

Residents of western North Carolina recognized this wider ideological goal of changing the Appalachian region by spreading middle-class American values to a region often portrayed as outside the mainstream. In a number of ways, the area's residents disputed the government's underlying definition of poverty as simply another way of accentuating the otherness of the Appalachian region. By comparing the economics of Appalachia to that of the rest of America, developers of federal antipoverty programs barred a discussion of Appalachia on the region's own terms. As a result of defining poverty in stark economic terms, the government overlooked, or dismissed, what mountain residents thought to be the region's true wealth: deep-rooted kinship and community ties. Calling attention to economic disparities also called into question the idealized egalitarianism upon which Appalachian community supposedly rested. Western North Carolinians protested the government's portrayal of their communities as economically impoverished and emphasized alternative, often immeasurable, sources of wealth that antipoverty officials ignored. Through their protests, Appalachian North Carolinians tried to define community on their own terms and sought to minimize economic differences in order to maintain community ties.

Many western North Carolinians resented the portrayal of their region as universally poverty-stricken and openly expressed disapproval throughout the War on Poverty's existence. As early as March 1964, only two months after President Johnson spoke of his

³⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 11.

plan to fight a war on poverty, residents of western North Carolina began registering dissent.

One woman voiced her displeasure to her congressman with overt sarcasm.

I am flabbergasted, Im shocked, Im confused, I never knew until now that this country is in a terrible state of grinding, filthy poverty...but Doctor Sargent Shriver [director of the OEO] is going to cure it with Kennedy's Mixture and Johnson's band aids, even Terry Sanford and Dan Moore [state politicians] are fussing over who can find the most poverty in North Carolina...Doctor Shriver say's we are Ignorant filthy and live in squalor.³⁶

As late as 1967, Appalachian North Carolinians were voicing displeasure at the persistent poverty label. One Banner Elk resident wrote to Congressman James Broyhill, "this poverty business is greatly exaggerated in N.C. anyway," while a resident of nearby Newland wrote, "I am sick and tired of hearing the stories of how poverty stricken we are."³⁷ The letter writers shared anger with federal intervention in local affairs, but they also objected to what they considered an ill-informed portrayal of the region by those unfamiliar with their society and lifestyle. As anthropologist George L. Hicks wrote, the people "prosperous and poor alike" resented the fact that the government and other organizations "broadcast pictures of the worst houses, the most ragged and sickly children, and the most pitiable households as representative of the entire region."³⁸ Duke Power Company's Vice President, C.S. Chuck Reed, composed a poem about the federal government's definition of poverty, demonstrating that all social classes resented the image of poverty upon which the government relied. He wrote:

³⁶ Constituent to Charles Raper Jonas, March 19, 1964.

³⁷ Constituents to James T. Broyhill, May, 1967, James Thomas Broyhill Papers, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C.

³⁸ Hicks, *Appalachian Valley*, 103.

The Commerce Department says that we are poor.
 But don't let statistics drive you to drink.
 We may not have riches like some Yankees for sure
 But we ain't near as poor as they think.³⁹

By highlighting socioeconomic inequities, the government threatened to upset the idealized egalitarian nature upon which western North Carolinians' sense of community was based. The sweeping generalizations with which the federal government and other antipoverty organizations portrayed Appalachia led area residents to resent the War on Poverty as a whole and view with suspicion efforts to change their communities' ways of life, even if these efforts were well-intentioned. As the Newland resident wrote, "The people would like to be left alone I believe."⁴⁰

Western North Carolina's newspaper editorialists also understood the problematic way in which the federal government defined poverty, and they wrote extensively on the subject. Beginning in March 1964, editorials began to appear in regional newspapers discussing the proposed War on Poverty and its implications for their communities. All noted that the programs had potential benefits for the region, but they also universally, and repeatedly, questioned the wisdom of the \$3,000 yearly income designation of poverty.

Weimar Jones of *The Franklin Press* wrote in the March 5, 1964 edition of the newspaper:

There are a lot of us in this mountain region whose earnings are less than that. And while we may not be able to buy everything we desire, may even have to pinch our pennies, it had never occurred to us, until now, that we are deprived. Yet, if we're told, often enough, that we're living in poverty, the time is

³⁹ Jock Lauterer, "Duke Power Company Speaker Tells Rosman Lions, 'We Ain't So Poor,'" *Transylvania Times*, July 29, 1965.

⁴⁰ Constituent to James T. Broyhill, May 1967.

likely to come when most of us will start being sorry for ourselves. Then we'll really be poor!⁴¹

Despite their lack of wealth, Jones and his neighbors took pride in the fact that they did not think they were poor and lived their lives independently. But Jones also recognized what Walter Precourt called the stigma that accompanies the poverty label. When the poverty label becomes a part of official policy, as it did in the War on Poverty, it carries “far-reaching emotional, psychological, and social consequences.”⁴² Without actually using the term stigma, this is exactly how Jones characterized the label of poverty under which the federal government had blanketed the Appalachian region.

The stigma of Appalachian poverty denied the character, community, spirit, or other varieties of wealth that could be found in the mountains. In May 1968, editors of *The Watauga Democrat*, even after four years of antipoverty programs, were still asking the question, “What Is Poverty?” While they acknowledged real pockets of poverty in North Carolina that required aid, the editors were still debating the \$3,000 yearly income stipulation. Taking pride in “a hardy breed of people who are not destitute and take no stock in the arbitrary” income rule, they rebuked outside antipoverty workers who “think [mountain residents] live on corn pone and fatback [and] have never had a dinner in a mountain home where the food is real and the \$3000 cash income doesn’t mean a thing!”⁴³ The editorial objected to three assumptions implicit in the federal government’s income designation: First, it celebrated the nature of their community as strong, resilient, “hardy,” and self-reliant. Second, it argued that monetary wealth was not as valued as “real” food,

⁴¹ Editorial, *Franklin Press and The Highlands Maconian*, March 5, 1964.

⁴² Precourt, “The Image of Appalachian Poverty,” 106.

⁴³ “What Is Poverty?” *Watauga Democrat*, May 16, 1968.

culture, and community, and federal officials had not factored these intangibles into their conception of poverty. Third, the piece pointedly noted that outsiders who thought they knew the region after four years of antipoverty work still, in fact, misunderstood the character of the region and its people. These newspaper pieces, as well as local residents' individual writings and opinions, served to undermine the foundation of the War on Poverty—the government's very definition of poverty.

The characterization of the Appalachian region as universally impoverished was a major factor in the passage of the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965, a component of the War on Poverty meant to address “poverty, lack of social services, out-migration, environmental damage, and regressive policies.”⁴⁴ Again, western North Carolinians refused the assumptions underlying the act. An editorial in Macon County's *The Franklin Press* questioned the very definition of Appalachia that the act established, which included Forsyth County, home of Winston-Salem and more traditionally considered in the state's Piedmont region. Mockingly, the writer declared, “Forsyth County, one of the richest in the state, is in the Appalachian Mountains the same way that Macon County is on the Atlantic Ocean!”⁴⁵

While the editor of *The Franklin Press* questioned the federal definition of Appalachia, a regular column that ran in *The Watauga Democrat*, “Uncle Pinkney: His Palaverin's,” appropriated the Appalachian stereotype in order to register dissent with the program and its assumptions. Throughout late 1965, just after the passage of the Appalachian Redevelopment Act, a series of “Uncle Pinkney” columns satirically criticized the program.

⁴⁴ Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*, 126.

⁴⁵ “Aiding the ‘Poor,’” *Franklin Press and The Highlands Maconian*, December 2, 1965.

Regular characters Zeke Grubb and Ed Doolittle debate over what they call “that Appalachia money,” agreeing that “ever patriotic citizen should now be lamenting about how pore and decayed the community was, and how they wasn’t much hope fer survival unless the Great Society stepped in with a heap of that Appalachia money and saved the situation.”

Addressing the editor of *The Watauga Democrat* directly, Uncle Pinkney passes along a warning from his friend Bug that “your newspaper might git into the hands of one of them Appalachia doctors in Washington and Bug said you had ought to be mighty careful not to put too much frosting on the cake in civic matters.”⁴⁶

In taking on the characteristics of the stereotypical mountaineer as backward, naïve, and poorly educated, the Uncle Pinkney columns said much more than they appeared. As “hidden transcripts,” they were a form of protest against the Appalachian stereotype. According to political scientist James C. Scott, “the hidden transcript is typically expressed openly—albeit in disguised form,” and cultural expressions like Uncle Pinkney’s Palaverins served as “vehicles by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct.” The Uncle Pinkney columns did both. Written under a pseudonym and in the character of the stereotypical hillbilly, Uncle Pinkney provided a critique of government and society that was perceived as harmless by those in positions of power. Community insiders who read the columns presumably shared in the critique. Writer and readers could “create and defend a social space in which offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations may be

⁴⁶ “Uncle Pinkney: His Palaverin’s,” *Watauga Democrat*, July 1, 1965.

voiced.” Through these hidden transcripts, western North Carolinians pronounced their objections to externally imposed definitions in culturally relevant ways.⁴⁷

“Welfare can be handled on the local level very simply and to those really in need.”

The War on Poverty was not the first time the area’s residents had dealt with federal efforts to bring Appalachia into the modern age. Having a familiarity with the Tennessee Valley Authority work projects and Civilian Conservation Corps camps of the New Deal, western North Carolinians recalled these interventions, as a reference point for their concerns regarding the antipoverty programs of the 1960s. Many locals associated the War on Poverty with their previous interactions with federal power, transferring often negative experiences over to the impending federal antipoverty program. Many western North Carolinians registered displeasure by expressing their concerns that the federal government’s involvement could only interfere with their lives and local matters. As one Wilkesboro resident wrote, “government funds bring controls, conditions, and close surveillance as we all know.”⁴⁸

Complaints also arose from a sense of community that area residents felt the federal government had dismissed or denied. Locals’ negative responses to the antipoverty programs combined their displeasure with potential federal intervention with indignation over what they viewed as condemnation of their local community, often resulting in proclamations that localized efforts could best achieve the goals of eradicating poverty.

⁴⁷ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), xi, xii.

⁴⁸ Arthur Z. Shumate to the editor, *Watauga Democrat*, May 11, 1967.

Many residents of western North Carolina voiced their belief that federal antipoverty efforts were wasteful, many duplicating services that existing organizations or local government offices handled. As one resident of Franklin wrote to Congressman Basil Whitener, “the whole OEO should be wiped out lock, stock and barrell,” as “welfare can be handled on the local level very simply and to those really in need.”⁴⁹ Newspaper editorials reinforced the localist approach to solving social problems. A piece entitled “Job For the ‘Localists’” appeared in *The Transylvania Times* on November 11, 1965, arguing that “when government assumes the responsibility for local problems it takes something vital out of the American character.”⁵⁰ And, as *The Transylvania Times* editorialist noted, reliance on federal government efforts would only sacrifice regional differences and homogenize the country. Although the War on Poverty’s goal was to spread middle-class mainstream values to all corners of the nation, Appalachian North Carolinians had no desire to abandon their own cultural standards despite the fact that the government had deemed them outside the mainstream. As the editorial shows, western North Carolinians argued that they *were* a fundamental part of American society, and federal intervention would only serve to make them less so. Local efforts, undertaken by members of the community, could put federal money to better use than distantly coordinated, highly standardized programs. As one local expressed, “if so much money is going to be spent it should be done through organizations

⁴⁹ Constituent to Basil Whitener, May 8, 1967, Basil Lee Whitener Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁵⁰ “Job for the ‘Localists,’” *Transylvania Times*, November 11, 1965.

and units of government already existing,” noting that “the State-Welfare and employment offices are already set up.”⁵¹

However, federal government officials did hear from many who considered themselves in need and elected to bypass local officials in favor of higher-level representatives. Seeing the War on Poverty as an opportunity, many people wrote very personal and poignant letters to their representatives pleading for assistance with basic needs. One Wilkesboro woman wrote to Senator Sam Ervin that she had been reading about the antipoverty efforts and wondered how she and her two elderly sisters could get desperately needed help, as

Neither one [of us is] able to work on a public job and At our age we couldn't git a job...I have High Blood Pressure and my heart Bothers me to and my Sisters has Arthritis and Bursitis but we cant git any help for any thing not Even Medical help and if we don't git some help Soon we Just might Lose our home...I am making a personal appeal to you to help us we aren't able to buy Medicine and Seeds to plant our garden this year I don't really no what we are going to do.⁵²

Official responses to letters like this one often directed the writers to local welfare departments, not to one of the newer federal antipoverty programs. Local welfare officers to whom the needy were referred could have been potential allies for federal antipoverty workers. However, local workers distrusted the federal government in forming a partnership to fight poverty, and they thought their work suffered under the War on Poverty's approach. Local social workers echoed the thoughts of private citizens who were concerned about both federal intervention and the government's rejection of community support. Though their

⁵¹ Constituent to Sam Ervin, May 15, 1964, Sam J. Ervin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁵² Constituent to Sam Ervin, April 13, 1965.

concerns could be dismissed as purely jurisdictional battles, the social workers who recorded their thoughts appeared genuinely concerned over the way in which antipoverty work proceeded in their areas. In April 1967, after three years of federal efforts in the country, officials from the Transylvania County Welfare Department wrote of being “concerned about the duplication and overlapping services” the EOA provided that were already being addressed through local “welfare departments, health departments, farm agents, FHA, schools, employment agencies and vocational rehabilitation.” They could not “find many original services these programs are giving unless it is arranging ‘social recreation activities,’” and they suggested “more money could be channeled through the old existing agencies, which have been giving the same services except on a limited basis due to the lack of money.” Their complaint, though in a more official capacity, echoed similar complaints registered by private individuals. While expressing frustration with misplaced federal intervention, their primary concern was over what they perceived to be the government’s lack of faith in the community’s capacity to handle local problems. By listing the number and variety of local organizations staffed by locals and designed to care for the needy, Transylvania County Welfare Department officials asserted the ability of mountain residents to identify and address social problems without federal intervention.⁵³

Sentiments against federal efforts at antipoverty work became even more crystallized as the public became aware of the large salaries awarded to those overseeing the programs. WAMY’s “well-paid director,” supervised VISTA workers and “wrote progress reports, and applied for financial grants,” and locals often directed criticism toward his high salary, while

⁵³ Constituents to Sam Ervin, April 5, 1967.

newspapers constantly reported on problems in the distribution of funds or even the misappropriation of federal funds.⁵⁴ Locals wrote representatives complaining of the “fantastic salaries [awarded] only to distribute money,” describing these officials as people who “hardly have enough sense to get out of the rain” and detailing the injustice of having local working- class “clerks, etc. . . . paying taxes toward these high salaries!!”⁵⁵ Western North Carolinians also felt that “if people were really concerned they would work cheaper and what money was set aside for this project would do some good.”⁵⁶

Anger over the salaries paid to federal antipoverty workers reflected the stress that the War on Poverty placed on the community’s belief in egalitarianism. As newspapers learned of the large salaries, they published the information for the entire community to see. An article, appearing on the front page of the April 14, 1966 edition of *The Watauga Democrat* with the headline “WAMY Salaries Total Hundreds of Thousands,” claimed that the group’s executive and administrative personnel earned between \$9,000 and \$13,000 annually, while administrative personnel earned from \$4,800 to \$8,000 annually, dollar amounts much greater than the \$3,000 annual income labeling families impoverished.⁵⁷ Such “big salaries, all around,” as *The Watauga Democrat* called them, shed light on the differences between outsiders’ expectations of fair compensation for their work and locals’ belief that “status competition based on wealth” should be avoided in order to maintain “equality and stability in its relationships.”⁵⁸ By importing workers and paying them far greater amounts than the

⁵⁴ Hicks, *Appalachian Valley*, 103.

⁵⁵ Constituents to Sam Ervin, March 1965 and August 8, 1966.

⁵⁶ Constituents to James T. Broyhill, May 1967.

⁵⁷ “WAMY Salaries Total Hundreds of Thousands,” *Watauga Democrat*, April 14, 1966.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*; Beaver, *Rural Community in the Appalachian South*, 161.

average local could hope to earn, the federal government upset the myth of egalitarianism under which western North Carolinians lived. As locals highlighted and condemned this disparity, they reclaimed a sense of equality by arguing that antipoverty work should be undertaken out of a sense of duty and neighborly reciprocity rather than monetary compensation: “if people were really concerned they would work cheaper,” thus freeing up more of the federal funds to relieve the poverty-stricken.⁵⁹ More importantly, as western North Carolinians defined their cultural values of reciprocity and equality, they clearly situated antipoverty workers, interested only in the financial rewards, as outside of their community.

Sentiments against federal efforts at antipoverty work further hardened when an outside worker with little experience and higher pay displaced a local resident. The Transylvania County Welfare Department acutely felt this problem, and workers wrote Senator Sam Ervin:

Our Director of Public Welfare has had 19 years of experience in social work and directs the main agency in the county working with poverty families; yet the Assistant Director of the Community Action Program who has no experience in this type of work has a higher salary. Then they request the welfare department to supervise the social services in their program on a volunteer basis. We do not think this is fair. If the Federal Government can put the whole amount into salaries for the community Action Program, it would seem they might be able to put more in administration for public welfare.⁶⁰

Local residents interpreted federal actions as a devaluation of local efforts and a waste of resources. Instead of working with North Carolina mountaineers on their own terms,

⁵⁹ Constituents to James T. Broyhill, May 1967.

⁶⁰ Constituents to Sam Ervin, April 5, 1967.

federal antipoverty workers set about trying to organize local residents in preconceived ways, which led to tensions between workers and locals. This air of mutual mistrust and misunderstanding led one newspaper reporter to conclude that “whatever the successes [in the War on Poverty], we feel they can be attributed only to local people who have joined the program. We know many of them, and we know their honest efforts to do something for their fellowmen.”⁶¹ Like many of the area’s writers, this writer did not completely deny the existence of social problems. However, she and numerous other writers emphasized the importance of community and relevant cultural knowledge to addressing Appalachia’s problems in constructive and effective ways.

Though local officials, such as the Transylvania County Welfare Department workers, acknowledged that some real needs were being addressed by War on Poverty programs—just redundantly—many western North Carolinians disagreed. Believing the antipoverty programs addressed a completely wrong set of social problems, and they often suggested other ways to channel antipoverty funds and efforts. As anthropologist George L. Hicks wrote, “many [western North Carolinians] see as self-evident the problems to be solved to bring about increased affluence,” and these problems were not those addressed by the antipoverty programs. Hicks continues, when people “are asked what they consider the . . . main barriers to economic success, they invariably point to the need for improvements in the local schools, primarily in the direction of making them more like urban schools, and in the local highway system.”⁶² While the federal government did provide western North Carolina with highway funds (with \$26 million appropriated for roads in 1966), Operation

⁶¹ Rachel Rivers, “Faith In WAMY Falls Flat,” *Watauga Democrat*, May 11, 1967.

⁶² Hicks, *Appalachian Valley*, 105.

Head Start represented the only significant educational program. Rather than address the schools' needs, the War on Poverty in western North Carolina emphasized vocational training programs, a majority of which "consisted of agriculture and home economics—areas in which there were almost no job openings."⁶³ These programs also reinforced stereotypes of the region as a traditionalist society unable and unwilling to modernize. Local residents recognized the problematic nature of many of the programs and voiced concerns that few would successfully eradicate poverty.

Often writers suggested solutions they thought would better benefit their community. Residents who fell under the aegis of the WAMY community action group seemed nearly unanimous in opposing a free weekly newspaper designed to circulate among the poor. In addition to freedom of the press concerns raised by area residents, they also voiced concerns that a newspaper would do nothing to alleviate poverty. As one Lenoir resident wrote, "our government would be too ridiculous trying to provide such a costly 'frill,'" and the money could better be used to "remodel the old schoolhouse . . . into a much-needed Recreation Center . . . [and] a Day Care Center for mothers who would then be able to go to work to supplement their family incomes." While a Hendersonville resident added that "health guidance, job training skills, and better housing" would more effectively address poverty, rather than "a newspaper of the poor, by the poor, and for the poor [that] would not necessarily improve their status." Others complained that the local Youth Corps, designed to provide summer employment for impoverished at-risk youth, did not do enough to achieve its

⁶³ James G. Branscome, "Annihilating the Hillbilly: The Appalachians' Struggle with America's Institutions," in *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, ed. Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Don Askins (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978), 219.

goals, as they “plant a few trees, but are usually seen standing around.” Another suggested that the poor should be encouraged to grow their own food since “you don’t have to have much education to raise food.”⁶⁴

Each letter indicated a concern that War on Poverty programs were doing little “in our mountain region . . . [to] help to break the cycle of poverty.”⁶⁵ Efforts such as newspapers for the poor and parks beautification did not figure into local conceptions of poverty relief, and the protests they elicited reflected contrasting values between western North Carolinians and antipoverty workers. Growing one’s own food, as one local suggested, would allow for a certain degree of self-sufficiency and personal autonomy, and encouraging agricultural skills would also provide material support for those in need. Complainants also felt they knew their communities best and believed they were more than qualified to offer up suggestions that would better suit local needs. The fact that a large majority of western North Carolinians felt the War on Poverty addressed a completely irrelevant set of needs led anthropologist Hicks to conclude that “the agencies of change in large part are industrial employment, improved highways, and television, not the poverty program.”⁶⁶

Yet, while negative responses to War on Poverty programs abounded in western North Carolina, there were those who wrote in defense of certain programs or who were just thankful that Appalachia had finally begun to receive political or media attention. This was especially the case early in the War on Poverty when W. Curtis Russ, editor of *The Waynesville Mountaineer* remarked, “it seems that both the state and federal governments at

⁶⁴ Constituents to James T. Broyhill, May 7, 1967, May 10, 1967, May 11, 1967, and May 1967.

⁶⁵ Constituent to Sam Ervin, April 5, 1967.

⁶⁶ Hicks, *Appalachian Valley*, 107.

last realize that the mountain areas have been neglected too long, and hence the all-out program designed to bring about a more wholesome economy.”⁶⁷

Although the promises of the program were only partially fulfilled, locals did find aspects of the War on Poverty to praise. The programs that received the warmest reception were those that were decidedly community-based and relied on local residents for support and success, directly challenging external antipoverty workers’ beliefs about the region and the longstanding stereotype of an absence of Appalachian community. Antipoverty efforts such as adult education programs, foster grandparent programs, and crafts cooperatives allowed for western North Carolinians to assemble in groups that stressed common values and a shared history. The opportunity to express these commonalities through local group and kinship ties compelled western North Carolinians to come together for federally funded antipoverty efforts, and many residents agreed that these programs were the most helpful in addressing local needs on common terms and among neighbors and peers. As one student of the adult education program in Wilkesboro wrote, “I think it is the most helpful thing that could have happened to me. I stopped school when I was in the sixth grade and have always wanted to go back to finish high school. However, had it not been for the Adult Education Program, I would have not been able to do so.”⁶⁸ The Morganton Foster Grandparent Program received numerous letters of support from elderly community members who felt that this program benefited both them and the children with whom they worked. One participant wrote, “I do not have too much income and this helps me meet my financial

⁶⁷ W. Curtis Russ, “LBJ’s Appalachia Program Offers Benefits To Haywood,” *Waynesville Mountaineer*, May 7, 1964.

⁶⁸ Constituent to Sam Ervin, January 17, 1966.

kneed. I feel like we are help to the children they come to you and want you to love them . . . a widow need's work as the younger people does."⁶⁹ A program to encourage older western North Carolinians to make handcrafts also received widespread praise, both by participants and the community as a whole. One grateful woman from Banner Elk wrote that since she became involved in the crafts program she had been "living more comfortable and keep my bills paid. There are many people that have better home, better Roads. They are making a good living & off welfare."⁷⁰

The successful programs all have several things in common. They were successful primarily because they involved the local community, providing actual jobs and education for the economically disadvantaged, but they also reinforced existing kinship and community ties. Neighborhood-based efforts sustained a sense of community important to Appalachian residents through cooperatives and intergenerational family-centered activities. Programs such as the Morganton Foster Grandparent Program focused on family ties by uniting the needy through the language of kinship, while crafts cooperatives brought locals together in what anthropologist Patricia Duane Beaver termed "activity groups."⁷¹ In western North Carolina, activity groups were traditionally composed of families and neighbors who engaged in seasonal activities, such as farming, clearing land, or food storage. Although in a different context and for different reasons, the War on Poverty's crafts cooperatives accomplished a similar goal of uniting individuals for mutually beneficial work that allowed opportunities for socialization. Fostering community, though certainly not a primary goal of

⁶⁹ Constituent to James T. Broyhill, 1966.

⁷⁰ Constituent to James T. Broyhill, November 6, 1967.

⁷¹ Beaver, *Rural Community in the Appalachian South*, 62.

the War on Poverty programs, was of equal value to western North Carolinians as monetary funding in achieving success.

Proponents of each of these successful programs voiced very real concerns that funding for them would be cut in the near future. Writing to their representatives, western North Carolinians expressed personal success stories, but they also appealed for the continuation of these efforts to aid their fellow community members who could still benefit. Residents asked representatives to approve additional funding and, as the woman from Banner Elk wrote, to “keep politics out of this [crafts] program—and give full support to this worthwhile program. We here in the mountains are depending on you.”⁷² When the Morganton Foster Grandparent Program came under threat of funding cuts, letters barraged both Senator Sam Ervin’s and Congressman James Broyhill’s offices requesting that the program be continued, as they believed that it was doing a great deal of good. Writing to a government official constituted an act of individual agency that had the potential to obtain results that would benefit the community as a whole.

Government officials who developed the War on Poverty and its programs based them on their own middle-class lifestyles and values, as well as their longstanding assumptions about Appalachia, which prevented these officials from dealing with the region on its own terms. As a community center worker in Sugar Grove wrote, “much of the work of the Poverty Program has been the struggle to become established in a doubting community . . . great strides have been made to make the public aware of the need [for] the program.”⁷³

His statement hints at two objections western North Carolinians harbored toward federal

⁷² Constituent to James T. Broyhill, November 6, 1967.

⁷³ Constituent to James T. Broyhill, November 8, 1967.

antipoverty efforts. First, residents of the North Carolina mountains did not feel that they were poor. The community center worker's account illustrates how the community had to be convinced that the program was useful, as their definition of poverty differed so greatly from the federal government's. Secondly, community in Appalachia, which relied on kinship ties and idealized egalitarian values, was of great importance, and the programs that the federal government imported to the region ignored this foundation. Although longstanding stereotypes defined Appalachia as a region characterized by universal poverty and an absence of community, Appalachian residents themselves refused to accept these representations. Throughout the War on Poverty, western North Carolinians were unafraid to dispute the federal government's assumptions about the mountains when they conflicted with locals' sense of themselves and their region. However, when federal antipoverty efforts *could* be reconciled with Appalachian community, locals enthusiastically adopted them and viewed them as positive additions to their lives. Though they may have seen different things when they encountered the War on Poverty's programs, western North Carolinians did not remain silent.

CHAPTER III

“The Carolina mountains have a character all their own,” wrote traveler Horace Kephart in 1913’s *Our Southern Highlanders*. A St. Louis librarian who abandoned his family to explore the mountains of western North Carolina, Kephart declared “the richness of the Great Smoky forest has been the wonder and the admiration of everyone who has traversed it.” He was not alone in praising southern Appalachia’s landscape, nor was he the first traveler to record the region’s beauty and wildness. Mountain resorts had been fashionable travel and vacation destinations for decades. Visitors were fascinated by mountain lifestyles, viewed as living relics of the nation’s pioneer past, and many travelers recorded interactions with locals in the popular press. Magazine articles and travel writing like Kephart’s book not only developed and sustained emerging stereotypes of the backward mountaineer, but they also drew ever-increasing numbers of tourists to the region. Over time, with the assistance of both private and government funding, tourism developed into a major industry in Appalachia. Although tourism economically benefited some Appalachian residents, it also had a major impact on the land and its people.¹

Despite tourism’s important place in southern Appalachia’s history, few historians have looked closely at its impact on the land and people. Only C. Brenden Martin’s recent *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (2007) offers a broad study of tourism’s significance to Appalachia’s development throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Acknowledging that his study is only an initial inquiry and not a comprehensive

¹ Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing Publishing, 1913), 50, 53.

history, Martin provided a well-researched history of tourism's evolution in the southern mountains. However, he did not allow many mountain residents to speak for themselves. Martin looked closely at the economic, social, and environmental change that tourism thrust upon many mountain communities, and he repeatedly contended that "the tourist industry developed with the acquiescence and participation of many southern highlanders," many of whom willingly appropriated the hillbilly stereotype to satisfy tourists' expectations.² Yet Martin's evidence is lacking. While he provided examples of local sentiments and actions from those actively involved in the tourist industry, Martin allowed few residents without a stake in tourism to speak for themselves, a striking omission in an otherwise successful work.

Richard D. Starnes's *Creating the Land of the Sky* (2005) addresses similar subjects with a focus on western North Carolina. Like Martin, Starnes traced the tourist trade's development since the early nineteenth century, focusing on the industry's rapid expansion after the Civil War. Starnes sought "to understand how a region develops as a tourist destination and how that process shapes the lives of the people who live there." While providing a valuable and detailed history of tourism's growth in western North Carolina, Starnes looked most closely at health spas, religious retreats, urban development, and environmental tourism, taking note of their impacts on land and social structures. However, his discussion too lacks the voice of the local resident. While Starnes did note that "not all residents were pleased with the roles tourism played within the region," he cited few locals.

² C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), xv.

He instead focused more on the roles that local developers played in attracting visitors to the southern mountains and the social and environmental consequences of these activities.³

Although Martin's and Starnes's works are the broadest of studies, historians have also looked closely at specific development projects, especially the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. While some historians have considered the local response, others have ignored or downplayed any criticisms the region's residents may have had.

Early Blue Ridge Parkway historians wrote primarily for a public readership, especially prospective tourists, and thus crafted universally positive accounts highlighting the project's successes. Harley Jolley's *The Blue Ridge Parkway* (1969) is an enduring example of this type of work. Jolley portrayed the Parkway's construction as a gift to a region suffering under the grip of the Great Depression, and he described local sentiment as unanimously supportive of the effort. Promoted by the Blue Ridge Parkway itself, Jolley's book did not provide a complete portrait of the park's development or the struggles over land that accompanied its creation.

Later historians began to look more closely at the ways in which park officials portrayed mountain residents. Phil Noblitt, in his essay "The Blue Ridge Parkway and Myths of the Pioneer" (1994), noted how few park visitors realized that officials carefully crafted the image of the Parkway's landscape. Rather than embracing the local culture and presenting it as firmly integrated into broader American culture, park officials chose to perpetuate the myth of the idyllic pioneer, suggesting that "the regional landscape was, and

³ Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 8.

is, devoid of conflict or tension.” Although Noblitt acknowledged that conflict and tension surrounded the construction of the Parkway, he did not discuss how, why, and which groups were involved. Noblitt’s essay marks an important point in the historiography of the Blue Ridge Parkway, as it suggests that important contests over land and image were hidden from public view for decades, but Noblitt still left much work to be done.⁴

Ann Mitchell Whisnant’s *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (2006) offers the best and most thorough discussion of the Blue Ridge Parkway to date. Whisnant argued that although authors like Jolley have written popular Parkway histories, which have “achieved virtually canonical status,” no scholar had ever sufficiently endeavored to write a complete history of the road’s conception, development, and construction. Whisnant’s work considers all of these factors, and unlike earlier Parkway historians, she looks closely at the local response to the park, noting that “its creation required the arbitration of many significant disputes over substantial issues across boundaries of power.” Whisnant also explored how local responses were not uniform and that people’s views changed over time and within the contexts of culture, class, and location. She recognized the important role that locals played in contests over the development, construction, and maintenance of the park and devotes a significant portion of her work to the local response. This work is an excellent synthesis of both the political and cultural histories of the Blue

⁴ Phil Noblitt, “The Blue Ridge Parkway and Myths of the Pioneer,” *Appalachia Journal*, 21, no. 4 (1994): 394, 406.

Ridge Parkway and could serve as a model for those wishing to write histories of other southern Appalachian tourist destinations.⁵

Even more than the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park has been the subject of a wide variety of historical interpretations. While each author had his or her specific interests, they all were forced to confront the issue of the area's human population. Although many families were displaced once the park became a reality, many early studies largely ignored dispossessed residents' reactions, while later studies have tried to rectify this omission.

Laura Thornborough, author of *The Great Smoky Mountains* (1937), was one of the first historians to undertake a study of the park's history. Thornborough, herself a tourist in the mountains, argued that the park's arrival was an opportunity for all residents within the park's boundaries, allowing them to sell their marginally productive land and relocate closer to cities or purchase better farmland. She cited as evidence a single farmer who said, "the Park sure helped me. I've got a farm now that I can plow and raise more and get better prices. . . . Why farming is a pure pleasure." Thornborough did not allow any deviation from such positive sentiments. Relying on popular stereotypes, her "land-poor" mountain farmer was much better off for having been removed from his backward and unproductive home and exposed to the benefits of city living and richer valley farmland.⁶

In the 1960s, a number of scholars reexamined the park's history, including Carlos Campbell in *The Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains* (1960) and Michael

⁵ Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 4.

⁶ Laura Thornborough, *The Great Smoky Mountains* (New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1937), 154, 155.

Frome in *Strangers in High Places* (1966). The authors acknowledged some of the struggles between park officials and local landowners, but neither thoroughly evaluated local responses. Campbell, who was active in the campaign to bring a national park to the region, provided a detailed account of the park's creation but was clearly writing in the park's defense. While he noted that there were in fact those who opposed the park, he argued that opposition was sporadic and temporary. Campbell concluded his discussion by comparing locals' sacrifices to those of residents forced to relocate as a consequence of TVA dam construction. Exclusively emphasizing the benefits of such an undertaking, he argued that a large scale project inevitably and "unavoidably imposes on a few for the benefit to the whole public."⁷

Frome's *Strangers in High Places* is a wide-ranging history of the Smoky Mountains. As a conservationist, Frome was largely concerned with the park's role in environmental preservation, but he also devoted many pages to discussions of the region's human inhabitants. Relying largely on popular stereotypes of the mountaineer, Frome related humorous stories of moonshiners, hunters, and other representations of "the mountain breed," but he also considered the park's impact on local residents. To his credit, he noted that reactions among locals were mixed, but he, like Campbell, downplayed the significant lifestyle changes the park forced upon residents. While Frome cited some residents as being grateful that the park provided "the chance to move and buy better land near roads and towns for their children," he dismissively mentioned that other residents felt the park was a "plumb

⁷ Carlos Campbell, *The Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains: An Unprecedented Crusade which Created, as a Gift of the People, the Nation's Most Popular Park* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1960), 99.

foolish'...playground for rich people." In trivializing natives' negative responses while highlighting more positive ones, Frome denied locals an opportunity to reveal the full range of their experiences.⁸

Two new important histories of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, emerged in 2000: Margaret Brown's *The Wild East* and Daniel S. Pierce's *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park*. Both Brown and Pierce sought to uncover the relationship between human activity and the landscape of the Smoky Mountains, and both devoted many pages to the ways in which locals viewed the park's creation. Brown argued that people and land were inextricably connected in the Smokies, and their "history bound them with a particular place on earth," a connection that was disrupted and denied as social and political elites and park officials worked to maintain "a myth of a pristine Wild East [that] has been costly to people and the environment."⁹ While the history Pierce wrote is largely a political one, he, like Brown, examined "what *people* have done in the mountains and to them," while acknowledging that "this story would be incomplete without telling the tragic tale of the thousands of individuals who called the Smokies home before the coming of the park."¹⁰ Both historians have diligently uncovered and recorded the many and varied local reactions to the national park and have contributed greatly to the historiography of tourism in southern Appalachia.

⁸ Michael Frome, *Strangers in High Places: The Story of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1966), 145, 195.

⁹ Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), 5, 351.

¹⁰ Daniel S. Pierce, *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), xiv, xviii.

Yet, while Brown's and Pierce's works on the Smokies and Whisnant's work on the Blue Ridge Parkway provide a good foundation for those wishing to uncover the variety of local reactions to tourism and projects designed to attract tourists to the region, these works only scratch the surface. In addition to national parks and forests, other tourist venues like summer camps, resorts, religious retreats, and vacation home subdivisions can all be found clustered throughout the southern mountains. No work has yet addressed southern Appalachian residents' responses to the full range of tourist enterprises found in eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina, and no historian has attempted to reveal just how local residents perceived the changes these "outsiders" inevitably brought with them. Suggesting, as Martin did, that locals were largely complicit in the process, or as Thornborough, Campbell, and Frome did, that mountain residents were grateful for development reduces a wide variety of reactions to caricatures of the acquiescent and backward mountaineer waiting patiently for civilization to sweep him or her along. This image does not hold up under closer scrutiny.

Locals had strong feelings about all of these enterprises—including the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Mountain residents resented tourists who injected themselves and their different values into local communities, while exhibiting little regard for locals' own ways of life. In response, locals called upon and asserted community values that were being misrepresented by popular stereotypes or that tourist development threatened to eradicate. Even in the face of drastic changes, locals retained and defined their own identities and cultural values through protests and subversive actions.

Tourism and Southern Appalachia: A Long-Term Association

Southern Appalachia's popularity as a tourist destination dates to the early nineteenth century when wealthy lowland planters sought a cool mountain escape from heat and disease-ridden southern summers. Wealthy northerners also traveled to the region to take advantage of the mountains' abundant natural springs with their well-publicized healing properties and clean mountain air thought beneficial for tuberculosis patients. A number of lavish spas and sanitariums sprouted up in the mountains catering to well-heeled travelers. Such initial developments provided a basis for tourism's expansion after the Civil War when railroads finally made their way through the mountains, providing wider access to the region.

By the early twentieth century, the expansion of the American automobile culture and the national park movement helped drive tourism to even greater levels. As C. Brenden Martin argued, as train travel gave way to widespread personal automobile travel, a "clientele transition" took place in the southern mountains.¹¹ Rather than catering exclusively to wealthy travelers, new resort communities emerged catering to new tourists—middle- and working-class families who stayed for shorter periods of time and valued affordability over lavish accommodations. The newly emerging car culture and increased roles of federal and state intervention in developing parks such as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway—intended to benefit all Americans—served to democratize tourism in the region. Naturally, as more and more people began to visit southern Appalachia (the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is currently the country's most visited national park),

¹¹ Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*, 105.

new resort communities emerged to accommodate the increased numbers of visitors.¹² As a result, localities most affected by the tourist trade experienced rapid growth and social change.

While local entrepreneurs owned and operated many early southern Appalachian tourist accommodations, as the tourist trade became more lucrative and attracted a more varied clientele investors from outside the region came to control a vast number of the larger attractions, hotels, and restaurants. As absentee investors purchased much of the land in popular tourist areas and land values and taxes increased, local residents were no longer able to retain ownership and control of land once used for agriculture. Losing their farmland forced most local residents to turn to non-agricultural work, often relying on seasonal jobs related to the tourist trade and the relatively low wages jobs such establishments provided. Today, tourism is a multibillion-dollar industry in the southern mountains, providing a huge economic boost to absentee corporations that control the largest developments. However, many local residents still realize little of those benefits.

Another legacy of more than a century of tourism in the mountains is the enduring image of the stereotypical mountaineer or hillbilly. At the same time nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travelers discovered the scenic wonders and health benefits of the southern Appalachian Mountains, they also took note of the local residents and recorded their impressions. As historian Henry D. Shapiro has argued, late-nineteenth century travel and local color writers popularly defined Appalachia as “a strange land inhabited by a peculiar

¹² “Great Smoky Mountains National Park,” <http://www.nps.gov/grsm/index.htm> (accessed December 22, 2009).

people, and hence an exception to . . . the new rule of national unity and homogeneity.”¹³

Historians C. Brenden Martin and Richard D. Starnes extended Shapiro’s argument, contending that tourism helped form and perpetuate the popular idea that the Appalachian mountaineer was distinctly different from other Americans.¹⁴ As many local color writers visited the region as tourists and interacted with locals in that capacity, they and their writings set the tone for what a traveler might reasonably expect from his or her mountaineer hosts.

Visiting travel and local color writers published often-fictionalized accounts of interactions with isolated and backward mountaineers, portraying locals as uncivilized relics of the country’s pioneer past. As a result, hordes of tourists arrived expecting to see the stereotypes they encountered in the pages of books and magazines. Ironically, the tourist industry’s growth and the changes it brought helped make the “primitive” local lifestyle a thing of the past. Fearing disappointed visitors, private investors, federal and state governments, and locals with a stake in tourism appropriated the hillbilly stereotype to promote regional tourist attractions. As the number of mountaineer- and hillbilly-themed attractions proliferated, the stereotype of the backward, isolated, and feuding moonshiner remained an important marketing tool for the mountain tourist industry, but it also perpetuated the image of the Appalachian resident already firmly planted in the American consciousness. Though historian C. Brenden Martin suggests that many local residents were

¹³ Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), xiii.

¹⁴ Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*, 45; Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 36.

acquiescent or even willing participants in the process, there were many more residents who quietly resented the influx of tourists and their perceptions about mountain life.

Mountain Newspapers and Tourism

Although the national park movement resulted in a clientele shift, resorts, summer camps, and vacation homes did not disappear after the parks were established. As older resort communities were forced to adapt to changing tourism patterns, newer communities sprung up to cater to the greater number of visitors. In the first half of the twentieth century, years of rapid growth in the tourist industry, newspapers and local elites encouraged regional growth through tourism and worked to attract visitors through any means available to them.

Many local newspapers advocated highway construction and road improvements as keys to attracting more visitors. Mountain businessmen, politicians, and social elites heartily embraced the “good roads movement,” a progressive interest group encouraging state-funded road construction to spur economic growth and development. In addition to increased economic opportunities, good roads could also open up rural areas to tourism and modernization. Local newspaper publishers echoed this sentiment. In 1923, at the height of the movement, *The Cherokee Scout*’s editor suggested that “the highways, which are fast being opened up, are destined to bring more and more people into the southwestern part of the State into the land of unrealized possibilities, and as they come the more likelihood will there be of developments in this section.” To indicate just how much promise the mountains held for attracting tourists, the article quoted one visitor as saying, “You can have all the

plains and lowland you want . . . but for my part I will take this mountain section of western North Carolina.”¹⁵

At the same time, even enthusiastic newspapers were forced to confront the problems created by new roads that encouraged ever-increasing numbers of tourists to visit the mountains. The May 14, 1926 edition of *The Cherokee Scout* ran a cartoon on its front page entitled “Blossom Time Along the Concrete,” which both criticized the increased traffic and made light of the tourist mentality. The cartoon depicts a two-way bumper-to-bumper traffic jam on a newly-paved road, but the tourists do not seem to mind: as they see the blossoming trees lining the roadway, riders in each car exclaim “OH!” All of this takes place under the watchful eyes of bemused locals who go about their business on their porches or in their yards. The cartoonist captured the new problem of traffic congestion, but he also gently critiqued the mindset of the urban tourists who came to the mountains to escape the pressures of city life only to find they brought urban problems along for the ride. In this cartoon, the tourists do not realize the irony; they can only see the blossoms.¹⁶

Throughout this period, as the tourist industry flourished, newspapers printed articles, editorials, and letters extolling the local environment’s virtues, encouraging further development, or urging local investment in the tourist business. *The Waynesville Mountaineer-Courier* printed a letter written by “a visitor from Kansas” who reproached locals who valued land only for its agricultural and industrial uses. According to him, farmers refused to appreciate the beautiful mountain scenery because “why that’s always been here, just that way.” The visitor continues to enumerate the mountain environment’s benefits: “In

¹⁵ “Western Section Being Developed,” *Cherokee Scout*, July 27, 1923.

¹⁶ “Blossom Time Along the Concrete,” *Cherokee Scout*, May 14, 1926.

such a beauty spot as Waynesville the heart should beat with gladness, the soul be edified and the poor be content in the mere joy of living. Where nature rejoices mankind should sing in ecstasy.”¹⁷ Although such opinions noted the beauty of the mountains, they also legitimized only certain uses for the landscape, prioritizing its value to leisurely visitors while subordinating locals’ traditional ways of utilizing the environment. Officially emphasizing the point, Boone’s newspaper, *The Watauga Democrat*, printed a Forestry Service threat for locals to “stop their ruthless policy of timber destruction,” or their privately-owned land would be taken under “public ownership.”¹⁸ Although conservation was an admirable goal, government and private entities dismissed mountain residents’ need for resources and farmland, thus favoring leisurely interests over local subsistence and tradition.

At the same time, newspapers were urging locals “to look upon the summer visitor as he really is, a gold mine.” This suggestion appeared in an article run by both *The Asheville Citizen* and *The Cherokee Scout* in 1926. The article advised locals that getting their share of tourist dollars would be easy: locals could “equip their homes as summer boarding houses at very little cost. They can make a good profit from the business, since they can get much of the necessary food from their gardens.” The author also suggested that “thousands of families” earned enough income from the summer tourist season to support themselves for the remainder of the year. Not only was it possible for the average citizen to benefit from tourism, but it was easy and “the sort of thing we want here in Western North Carolina.”

Articles such as this served several purposes for mountain elites. First, it tried to make

¹⁷ A Visitor from Kansas, “Scenic Waynesville,” *Waynesville Mountaineer-Courier*, October 8, 1917.

¹⁸ *Watauga Democrat*, November 1, 1934.

average citizens stakeholders in the tourist trade, thus reducing criticisms directed toward visitors and wealthy resort owners. Secondly, moving locals away from traditional agricultural pursuits and into the service industry served the progressive purpose of economic modernization that developers and local elites—especially in wealthy and urban Asheville—pursued for the region. According to their thinking, “farmers and other home owners in the country districts,” should rely only on their gardens to feed tourists and support themselves on wages earned through increased tourist dollars. An improved and more modern local economy would be a beneficial by-product of such a shift.¹⁹

Naturally, as the movements to establish the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and construct the Blue Ridge Parkway got underway, newspapers in nearby towns weighed in on the process. Editors consistently supported the developers’ efforts and urged locals to do the same. As Great Smoky Mountains National Park promoters produced literature to address locals’ questions and concerns on the park’s nature, newspapers dutifully ran their key points.²⁰ Printed as a series of questions and answers, such articles emphasized the park’s conservation, economic, and recreational benefits, while overlooking the fact that the park would disrupt locals’ lives in negative ways, as well.

Newspaper editors did not rely solely on official publications to make their case for the national park. They also relied on elite members of the local community to advocate the park to their neighbors. In 1925, as fundraising for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was underway, *The Cherokee Scout* published a letter from Dr. H. N. Wells, “one of the

¹⁹ “The Tourist Business,” *Cherokee Scout*, August 13, 1926.

²⁰ “Booklet Tells the ‘Whys’ of a National Park: Questions Arising in Public Mind Answered by Park Commission,” *Cherokee Scout*, January 29, 1926.

outstanding citizens of Cherokee County,” who appealed to locals’ regional pride and deeply-held religious beliefs. Wells wrote that he, like many readers, had been born in “the shadow of some of these blue peaks . . . [and] learned to love them while young.” He continued, “God has lavished so much primeval beauty and grandeur [on the mountain region] . . . we of one accord should combine our efforts to keep it so.” However, Wells did not just urge locals to support the park movement, he argued that they should change their entire relationships with the landscape: “the woodman must lay down his axe, the pot hunter and fisher must set aside his gun and rod, and all join with one accord not to invade this land of primitive beauty except to admire and love it.” Wells’s argument asked much of the average local. Not only did he encourage them to support a movement that would bring untold numbers of visitors into their backyards (and eventually displace those who lived within the park boundary), but Wells and park developers also placed the scenic value of the landscape over the more traditional and practical uses residents had for the land and still relied upon for subsistence or economic survival. Yet, many locals did not abandon these practices quite as easily as Wells and park officials hoped.²¹

The Blue Ridge Parkway also received its share of coverage in local newspapers. While Asheville’s press worked overtime to bring the Parkway to the city’s doorstep, other smaller communities heavily invested in attracting the roadway.²² Brevard’s town leaders were especially enthusiastic over the Parkway’s possible benefits for their town. In the December 27, 1934 edition of *The Transylvania Times*, the editor thanked Santa Claus for the

²¹ H. N. Wells, “One of Cherokee’s Citizens Strong for National Park,” *The Cherokee Scout*, September 18, 1925.

²² Whisnant’s *Super-Scenic Motorway* provides an excellent overview of Asheville’s economic and political involvement in bringing the Blue Ridge Parkway to western North Carolina; see pages 53-107.

gift of the Blue Ridge Parkway: “running by our very doors, this great scenic road is destined to bring us thousands of people annually, and with many fine people will naturally come better business and better conditions in every way.”²³ Yet, the newspaper’s editors were not satisfied with the Parkway alone and considered it only the first of many possible tourist opportunities for Brevard and Transylvania County. The editor asked his readers, “why should we sit supinely by and take one egg from the nest when there will be dozens laid?”²⁴ According to him, Transylvania’s geographic location allowed one to imagine a variety of other ways to attract tourists, which would provide the county with additional economic benefits beyond what the Parkway alone could provide. The editorialist offered locals a choice: they could either “‘drag along’ with the natural benefits that will come to all of Western North Carolina, or we can join the parade and get what a wide-awake community should have.”²⁵

Locals and Tourists

Although newspapers and the business community stood firmly behind efforts to attract tourists to the mountains, it became clear that not everyone viewed increased tourism as desirable or beneficial. The ordinary residents of these resort communities adapted their lifestyles as increased numbers of visitors arrived, bringing different values and ideas of what constituted appropriate land use. Rather than quietly acquiescing to such changes, mountain residents often became deeply troubled with the ways in which increased tourism changed

²³ “Santa Claus Has Been Good to People of Transylvania County,” *Transylvania Times*, December 27, 1934.

²⁴ “Let’s Work for Most Out of the Scenic Roadway,” *Transylvania Times*, November 15, 1934.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

their region. While they rarely voiced such concerns in organized protests, many expressed displeasure through words and actions.

Asheville's Fred Seely, Jr., son of the luxurious Grove Park Inn's proprietor, recalled that many locals did not appreciate the tourism industry's impact on their town: "it took quite a bit of education to cause the local people to accept the tourists. . . . They resented these Northerners coming in here: they were strange people, they didn't speak like they spoke, and they didn't dress like they dressed. They looked on it sort of as an invasion."²⁶ Blowing Rock resident Judy Burns opined that it was "our 'mountain' background and the many other elements we have in common is different from those of the visitors. . . . It's just that they are different."²⁷ Another resident agreed, "We are not comfortable with some of the summer people, because they are different. . . . Even though we may be able to afford the things they think important, we just have no desire for them. . . . It is just that we have different values."²⁸ In defining such differences and embracing their own "mountain" values, locals developed and maintained community identity by rejecting visitors' values. As Judy Burns put it, she eagerly anticipated the winter season when "we could 'take back' OUR town. . . . We were close knit, cohesive, genuinely interested in each other," unlike the tourists who dominated the town during the summer seasons.²⁹

For many mountain residents, tensions went beyond differing values, dress, and speech. Class differences between summer tourists and the locals who served them were

²⁶ Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg, eds., *Our Appalachia: An Oral History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 171-72.

²⁷ Bud Altmeyer, ed., *As I Recall Old Blowing Rock, North Carolina* (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 1991), 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, 3.

obvious. Mary Frances Shuford, whose mother ran a boardinghouse in Asheville, recalled how “People who stayed here through the winter were usually business people [and] schoolteachers. The people who came from the outside . . . were more affluent and they could afford a summer’s vacation. There was a big difference in the purse.”³⁰ With a difference in purse came perceived differences in behavior. Some locals resented visitors’ conspicuous leisurely pursuits, while financial necessity forced them to work year-round. Ira Donald Shull, a local farmer, recalled how the summer people “la[id] around in the shade mostly and watch[ed] the rest of us work, make a living.”³¹ Frank Klutz of Blowing Rock agreed: “we worked awfully hard in the summer, farming a little and taking care of summer houses. . . . My family got along all right but I don’t see how some families did.”³² Especially as tourism became the major industry, more and more locals began to work, as Judy Burns recalled, “long and hard during the summer and saved and stored to carry them through the winter.”³³ Such economic dependency weighed heavily on locals’ minds.

As tourists made class and regional differences abundantly clear, locals often felt that their visitors treated them with condescension. Richard Jackson, who grew up near a Hendersonville summer camp, recalled the condescending treatment he received at the hands of a visiting Florida family: “[They] sort of adopted us as a family. They were very pleasant and considerate, but the curious thing as I recall it now was that we were sort of always on the receiving end,” as the visiting family never called on or socialized with Jackson’s

³⁰ Shackelford and Weinberg, eds., *Our Appalachia*, 176.

³¹ Ira Donald Shull interview by Jane Hallstrom, March 27, 1973, Interview 49-50, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C.

³² Altmeyer, ed., *As I Recall Old Blowing Rock*, 123.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

family.³⁴ Visitors also brought their beliefs in regional stereotypes with them. One woman noted that “when some visitors hear my accent, they look down on me, or at least become patronizing.”³⁵ Blowing Rock resident Steve Sudderth recalled that as early as 1913 his grandfather, the town’s mayor, began warning locals “to be careful when they talked to strangers, because though most of them were honest people, there were those that came into the mountains, made out as though they were friends, then went back north and wrote articles about the dumb hillbillies.”³⁶ Beulah Coffey, who answered visitors’ questions at Blowing Rock’s Chamber of Commerce, recalled one letter from a prospective northern tourist asking, “my first important question is, Do you have inside bath rooms in the mountains?”³⁷ Tourists did not hide their preconceived notions of mountain residents and their behavior, and these opinions were clear to locals, creating an additional source of tension. According to Richard Jackson, such treatment “programmed [him] to be skeptical about tourism”—a sentiment that “held on pretty well” throughout his adulthood.³⁸

Other residents disliked the types of people drawn to the area by its tourist attractions. Stanley Hicks of Beech Mountain complained of visitors’ carelessness and disrespect. He recalled that prior to widespread tourist development, the area had few problems with litter or pollution: “before the tourist and stuff come in, we had no stuff thrown all over everything. We had our places all, you didn’t see cans and this here, all this stuff thrown over everything.

³⁴ Richard Jackson interview by Pat Morgan. July 1, 1975, Interview 319, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

³⁵ Altmeyer, ed., *As I Recall Old Blowing Rock*, 203.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁸ Richard Jackson Interview.

[The tourists] will just throw it out and go on.”³⁹ He regretfully noted that mountain people could do little to stop it, as tourists outnumbered concerned locals who had a full-time investment in their communities. Ed Hamby noted his fears of “outlaws” who caused problems for local residents, acknowledging that tourism “brings a lot of money to the county” but that the “people who come from one place to another . . . steal everything they can get their hands on. And go and rob people and kill people and this, that and the other . . . I think that it’s because they got so many more people, and more people come in and get by with it.”⁴⁰

Whether or not this was actually the case, Hamby’s sentiments reflect the tensions that existed between local communities and tourists. As Richard Jackson noted, “if the early tourists who came into the area as summer-home people had learned and been able to adopt some of the values they encountered in the mountains we might not be in the mess we’re in right now. Instead, they brought in values and viewpoints and imposed them.”⁴¹ By refusing to interact with mountain residents on their own terms, tourists set up an antagonistic relationship that pitted their own expectations against reality, and locals resented the imposition.

However, locals found a variety of ways to deal with outsiders’ insults and condescension. Some preferred to ignore the tourists. Mary Frances Shuford, whose mother ran an Asheville boardinghouse, remembered how her father was less than thrilled by

³⁹ Stanley Hicks interview by Brenda Hicks, July 28, 1975, Interview 322, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

⁴⁰ Ed and Maude Hamby interview by Alex Greene, January 23, 1973, Interview 3, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

⁴¹ Shackelford and Weinberg, eds., *Our Appalachia*, 373.

tourists' presence in his home. Working downtown, he never failed to arrive home after dinner had already been served. "As I think of it now," Shuford recalled, "I think he was always late on purpose. Mother would serve dinner on time. All the boarders would eat, they'd go to their rooms . . . do what they wanted to do. Then Daddy would come in and look around surprised [and ask] 'Dinner ready?'"⁴² By avoiding the tourists who disrupted his routine, Shuford's father made a conscious silent statement of his displeasure. Even Ed Hamby, who feared "outlaws," admitted that he had "never been bothered and I don't bother other people."⁴³ Richard Jackson explained that people also tended to "go internal and lie a lot. . . . If you walk into a garage or a grocery store . . . and start talking to people about development . . . you can come out of there thinking that they're all in favor of development," but conversations such as these often did not indicate locals' true sentiments.⁴⁴

Historian Richard Starnes argued that locals felt obligated to remain silent in their criticisms of tourists, since "tourism depends on hospitality, even in the face of rudeness and insults aimed at locals and their culture. Natives walk a fine line between asserting their displeasure at visitor attitudes and economic preservation."⁴⁵ Feeling the need to embody hospitality was surely part of locals' motivations. However, by internalizing criticisms, locals refused to interact with those deemed disruptive or unwilling to adapt themselves to new environments. Such tendencies to "go internal" and avoid interactions with outsiders evidenced what political scientist James C. Scott terms "weapons of the weak." Scott argued

⁴² Ibid., 176.

⁴³ Hamby interview.

⁴⁴ Jackson interview.

⁴⁵ Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 183.

that in unbalanced power relationships, “the *normal* tendency will be for the dependent individual to reveal only that . . . [which] is both safe and appropriate to reveal,” while true thoughts and feelings are reserved for communication between trusted community members.⁴⁶ Such outward appearances of conformity allowed locals to maintain their own private space in the face of external social pressures and threats.

In addition to such silent forms of protest, many mountain residents found other more vocal ways to express their shared complaints. Richard Jackson noted that groups of locals often found themselves “swapping stories about summer folks,” and these stories often featured negative portrayals of outsiders. Jackson recounted the story of a local acquaintance who, during tourist season, went into town for supplies for his apple orchard:

He had to wait, so he walked uptown in his smelly, yellow, spray-spattered overalls and sat down on one of those long, green benches which lined the sidewalks of the summer resort town. Two matron-type ladies from Florida occupied the other end of the bench . . . One of the ladies sniffed critically and remarked that mountain towns certainly had some dirty, undesirable people in them. The orchard man turned, looked at them carefully, and agreed with the lady’s observation. He added, “one nice thing about it, tho’—come frost and they all go back home.”⁴⁷

Such folk anecdotes demonstrate the tensions between locals and tourists, but they also allowed the mountain resident the upper hand. They drew distinct class divisions between the working-class mountaineer and the upper-class “matron-type ladies” who had the luxury of taking extended vacations. Yet they laid clear claim to the land—it had been the local’s home, and it would continue to be his home long after the frost drove tourists back to the

⁴⁶ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 286.

⁴⁷ Shackelford and Weinberg, eds., *Our Appalachia*, 373.

cities. Finally, Jackson's story allowed the dirty and undesirable orchard worker to outfox the wealthy tourists through clever use of words as he turned the intended insult back on its speaker. The story provides an opportunity for a shared laugh among insiders at the expense of an ordinarily more powerful group, but it also made it clear to whom the town really belongs.

Mountain residents gave tourists nicknames and developed their own regional stereotypes of tourists. One common joke shared among locals was, "What do you get when you cross a Floridian and a moron?" The correct response is a "Floron." Some residents described South Carolinians as the worst variety of tourists, because they "leave home wearing a clean white shirt and carrying a twenty dollar bill, and they don't change either until they get back home." Acutely aware of the condescending manner with which tourists approached them, locals shared jokes about tourists to reinforce their own collective identity. In developing their own stereotypes of the outsiders, residents created their own insider culture, defining tourists as unintelligent, uncivilized, or cheap. In this way, they combated stereotypes that they knew tourists held about them and reinforced their own communal ties.⁴⁸

Locals, Tourism, and the Land

Although locals reacted against tourists' condescending and culturally inappropriate actions, mountain residents also resented the ways in which tourism changed traditional relationships to the landscape and natural environment. As developers built more resorts and

⁴⁸ Quoted in Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 182.

as more wealthy visitors purchased land for summer homes, less land was available for traditional and communal uses. Historically, Appalachia's citizens commonly understood that neighbors could hunt and collect ginseng, firewood, wild berries, or galax leaves on privately-owned but undeveloped land. Tourists did not share these same values, often denying locals use of land they had purchased or developing property in ways that no longer allowed for traditional patterns of use.

National parks and forests contributed to changing traditional relationships to the land, as they purchased and governed hundreds of thousands of acres of formerly private property. Once land came under federal ownership, new regulations governed land use, often favoring visitors at locals' expense. At the same time, national parks were different from other tourist destinations. The National Park Service had the power to forcibly remove people from their homes, legally changing locals' relationships to and uses for the land. Local people resented the changes that both private and government development introduced. Many were deeply concerned over the tourism industry's tendency to raise land prices. Local governments viewed increased property values as an economic boon and a means of collecting additional tax revenue, but higher land prices naturally favored large developers and wealthy second-home owners who had enough capital to buy property and pay higher taxes. For many locals, inflated land prices put land ownership out of reach. When questioned about tourism's impact in and around Boone, an overwhelming number of responders mentioned land prices and the difficulty experienced in acquiring property or maintaining control over land they already owned. Charles Thompson recalled a friend's remark that "if we allow those damned Floridians to come here they're going to take our

country.”⁴⁹ William C. Brinkley noted how many people resented the resort areas and ski lodges because “they’ve made land go sky high, and it’s gotten where it’s even hard to buy a piece of land now in Avery County unless you pay an exorbitant price for it. . . . In that respect it’s hurt us. Course they’s a few fairly big land holders in the county, but the land isn’t for sale.”⁵⁰

Then there were locals like Stanley Hicks. Residing near Beech Mountain, a major resort area, Hicks lamented the changes tourism brought, but he also distinguished between individual purchasers and larger development firms. He argued that building a home, though it irreparably altered the landscape, differed from large corporate developers’ actions: “they come and buy it and then they resell it to make [more] money off it and it’s all done away with, why it makes it bad for the people that’s in the mountains that was born and raised here, you know. . . . And that’s the way that a lot of it is getting more and more everyday.” Hicks angrily described the tactics developers used to encourage locals to sell their land and relocate.

There’s an old feller not too far from here. . . . He had a little place . . . and he didn’t want to sell it, you know, they tried to buy it and offered him [a lot of money] . . . but see he’s been there all of his life and didn’t want to sell it. So they just put all this stuff around him and all . . . so he had to get out and leave. Well, that makes it bad on us folks, that has been here all our life.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Charles Thompson interview by Cathy Norman, February 4, 1973, Interview 17, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

⁵⁰ William C. Brinkley interview by Lester Harmon, February 8, 1973, Interview 26-27, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

⁵¹ Hicks interview.

As a result of higher land prices and increased tourism development, locals lamented the decline of agriculture and resulting out-migration. As Stanley Hicks noted, the older generations “sold their land out from under [their children] and now their own young-uns have to leave the mountains and go somewhere to try to find a place to live.”⁵² Ray Moretz agreed: “most jobs people used to have were farming or closely related to the land and that’s no longer the case . . . people couldn’t make a living that way [anymore] and there is very little other type of industry in the area and the people couldn’t get a job and make a living at.”⁵³ Moretz acknowledged that the tourist industry provided jobs for displaced agricultural workers, but they were “marginal jobs unstable type jobs” that could not replace the livelihoods farmers were forced to abandon.⁵⁴

Tourism also changed the character and appearance of the mountain landscape that many locals had appreciated throughout their lives. Hicks recalled camping and fishing in the forests as a youth and lamented how development had “built it up and the water is all about dry. . . . It’s really . . . destroyed the views of the mountains and stuff like that, that we would have loved to kept and loved to stayed on like it once was.”⁵⁵ George L. Hicks, an anthropologist who worked in and studied western North Carolina, recorded locals’ concerns. Tensions surfaced between tourists and locals as tourists imported different expectations for seasonal sites for resorts and summer homes than locals’ ideas about year-round residences and land use. Because seasonal visitors did not have to consider heavy mountain snow, ice, or wind in selecting where to build, they elected to position their homes “in areas that have

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ray Moretz, Interview 341, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Hicks interview.

long been clear of homes, high on the shoulders of the mountains and even, in a few cases, atop the peaks themselves” to get the best views of surrounding mountain ranges.⁵⁶ Locals deplored such new construction and the deforestation of mountainsides, fondly recalling the days when, as Arnold Church stated, “you could hunt anyplace you and your dogs wanted to go. You didn’t run into summer homes like you do now.”⁵⁷ As another local man said, “Used to be, you could walk up there on the Big Ridge from one end to the other and not see mor’n two or three houses. Hell, you can’t walk or rabbit-hunt up there no more.”⁵⁸

Yet it was not just increased development that prevented locals from freely walking or hunting in the mountains. Wealthy summer home owners and resort developers often erected fences and posted “no trespassing signs,” preventing access to mountain properties. As anthropologist Hicks recorded, mountain residents’ traditional relationships to the land were central to their livelihoods and identities. Traditional patterns of land use allowed anyone to use streams for fishing or forests for hunting and gathering firewood, roots, galax leaves, or fruits to sell, all of which were important components of the traditional economy. The rabbit hunter heatedly continued, “These Floridy people come in here and buy a little patch of land and stick no trespassing signs all over it. This country [valley] used to belong to ever’body. Why a man didn’t care at all to have people walking through his woods and hunting on his land. That just ain’t the way it is, no more, though.”⁵⁹ A local elderly woman stated that, “the way I look at hit, the good Lord put this land here for all of us to use and ain’t nobody got no right to fence it off and try to tell people they can’t pull galax on hit

⁵⁶ George L. Hicks, *Appalachian Valley* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 52-3.

⁵⁷ Altmeyer, ed., *As I Recall Old Blowing Rock*, 40.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Hicks *Appalachian Valley*, 53.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

nowheres.”⁶⁰ Blowing Rock resident Richard Jackson, who grew up near a summer camp, remembered being prohibited from using the camp’s facilities—even during the off-season: “the place wasn’t available to us. . . . Of course, I went over there and went fishing and all that kind of stuff, but had to sneak to do it, and occasionally we’d get caught. Plus that and chased away by the caretaker during the off-season time.” Jackson angrily decried outsiders’ needs for fences and walls. Connecting ideas of restricted access and privacy, wealth and privilege, and regional stereotypes, he argued that someone should

get the idea across to the group at GFCo or Hounds Ears or Sugar or Beech [all major resort communities]. “There’s not a damn thing in there I want.” . . . Privacy is an OK thing in our culture if you can afford it. If you can’t then you’re exposed to the kind of steady stream of traffic on Sunday afternoon . . . saying “God, ma, look at them, ain’t they weird?” People in the suburbs would get upset if you did that to them.⁶¹

In addition to private development, government projects such as the Blue Ridge Parkway and national parks and forests necessitated state and federal laws that strictly regulated land use and prohibited hunting, gathering, and other activities that would disturb or remove natural resources. Granville Liles, the Blue Ridge Parkway’s first superintendent, recalled that local hunters regularly “complained that they were unable to reach the good hunting grounds because the Parkway had . . . intersected their lands.”⁶² One elderly woman who lived near a national forest complained, “why, anymore, they won’t even let a young’un fish less he’s got a license.”⁶³ Some local residents wrote their government representatives

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Jackson interview.

⁶² Granville Liles interview by Jane Efird and Marlene Deaton, July 17, 1975. Interview 302, transcript, Appalachian Oral History Project.

⁶³ Quoted in Hicks, *Appalachian Valley*, 53.

requesting access to park lands. A Newdale resident near the Pisgah National Forest wrote to Senator Josiah William Bailey in 1932 pleading for a permit to collect ginseng in the forest. He noted that “times are so hard here I can not get any work to do and if I could get a Permit to dig ginseng in Pisgah forest I could make a little money.” Assuring Senator Bailey that he “would not damage anything as it is a small Plant and Deer eats the top of it” anyway, the man hoped to resume traditional means of survival during difficult economic times.⁶⁴ His plea did not receive a response, suggesting the priority government officials placed on developing tourism at the expense of local residents’ needs and concerns.

Despite attempts to sever locals’ connections to the land, a number of incidents demonstrate ways in which residents remained faithful to traditional land uses. Officials reported persisting problems with locals seeding and plowing public lands that they had once owned. They continued gathering plants and harvesting trees, even on federal park lands. Anthropologist George Hicks recognized that, unlike the man pleading for a permit to harvest ginseng, most locals blatantly ignored the regulations and avoided forest rangers in a sort of game. Even when locals were apprehended, they often did not consider their offenses to be serious. One man, arrested for cutting a Christmas tree on federal land, casually defended himself in court, saying “I was just getting a little bit of my part of them woods, judge.”⁶⁵

At the same time, other defiant locals vandalized park lands in protest. A fire prevention officer in the 1930s complained to North Carolina Governor J. C. B. Ehringhaus of an arsonist who repeatedly set fires in the scenic Nantahala National Forest, but there was

⁶⁴ Constituent to Josiah William Bailey, July 9, 1932, Josiah William Bailey Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Hicks, *Appalachian Valley*, 53.

little government could do if “a man makes up his mind for any reason that he is going to burn up the country.” Even so, the officer resorted to timeworn stereotypes to dismiss locals’ concerns and protests when he suggested using bloodhounds to locate potential arsonists, as “these ‘hill billys’ are afraid of bloodhounds.” In the end he was forced to concede that “when it comes to placing one man’s cunning against that of these natives it is an impossibility to get results.”⁶⁶

Park officials constantly discovered illegally-carved roads and evidence of unlawful logging, which was especially infuriating since such activities disturbed the pristine environment and scenery that the parks cultivated. Although residents considered logging a way to gain some final profit from land purchased by the National Park Service, they also used trees as a weapon of protest. On Halloween of 1936, someone in the Glendale Springs community chopped down twenty-three trees so that they fell across a new section of the Blue Ridge Parkway.⁶⁷ Despite widespread interrogations, investigators failed to determine the loggers’ identities, demonstrating the widespread community support the vandal enjoyed.

Although locals residing on lands destined to become part of the new national parks were forced to relinquish properties to the government, those living on land coveted by private developers had many more choices. By the 1960s and 1970s, local residents were less willing to sell property as their parents and grandparents had been. One man regretted that he had no more land left to sell, but if he did, “I’d shore make ‘em [the summer people] pay for

⁶⁶ Fire Prevention Officer to J. C. B. Ehringhaus, February 14, 1935, Ehringhaus Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

⁶⁷ Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway*, 149.

the privilege of fencin' it off and puttin' up them signs. I'd make 'em pay a lot."⁶⁸ Even those who retained land rights felt less enthusiastic about selling to tourist developers. Stanley Hicks noted that many of his neighbors were "going to keep what they've got. My neighbor . . . started to sell . . . and he found out what they were aiming to do with it. He just, he quit right then and he didn't sell it 'cause he . . . found out they was going to cut it up and sell it in lots."⁶⁹ Richard Jackson agreed that "an awful lot of folks are not participating. It's not as easy to buy land anymore. . . . People have kind of quit selling, if they can afford not to sell."⁷⁰

In many cases such resistance came too late: southern Appalachia had already become a popular tourist destination. As Mary Frances Shuford recalled, "the tourists never did change Asheville [to] an industrial town; they changed it from a little country town, an agricultural town, to a tourist town."⁷¹ The same can be said for many communities throughout the region, from Boone to Cherokee. Although some locals did quietly abandon traditional means of subsistence in favor of tourism jobs, many locals refused to silently acquiesce to such social changes. Many resisted tourists' faulty images of their communities and tried to retain traditional environmental relationships. While social and political elites urged such development a step toward modernizing the region, locals rejected such efforts while asserting their own values. In defining what was important to them—land and community values—mountain residents did not reflect the stereotype of the atomistic and uncivilized mountaineer that so many tourists expected to see.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Hicks, *Appalachian Valley*, 53.

⁶⁹ Hicks interview.

⁷⁰ Jackson interview.

⁷¹ Shackelford and Weinberg, eds., *Our Appalachia*, 178.

CONCLUSION

In January 1945, a Hendersonville farmer wrote to North Carolina Senator Josiah William Bailey describing a recent incident with TVA employees. In August and September of 1944, workers arrived on the man's farm to drill experimental test wells that they acknowledged would likely damage the surrounding area. In response, the TVA offered to "promptly" provide the farmer with compensation for any injury to his land, crops, or to the road providing access to the farm. On the eve of the drilling process, a flood swept the area, resulting in pools of standing water that lingered for days. The farmer complained that rather than waiting for the flood waters to subside, TVA workers "went in there in water waist deep . . . [destroying] every thing they came into contact with." Contending with widespread damage to his corn crop as well as the road providing access to his farmland, the farmer immediately sent the TVA a bill for \$500 to cover his losses. Receiving only a stock form-letter response, the man yet again "replied promptly . . . and [wrote] them twice since then," but to no avail. As a last resort, he turned to Senator Bailey hoping for a successful resolution to his complaint.¹

Although he may not have realized it, the Hendersonville farmer reacted in much the same way many of his regional neighbors responded to the TVA and other outside economic and social development efforts. As historian Anne Mitchell Whisnant has suggested, letters written by southern Appalachian residents "reflected a courageous attempt at political

¹ Constituent to Josiah William Bailey, January 10, 1945, Josiah William Bailey Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

expression by a largely powerless constituency.”² Mountain residents often expressed themselves and their concerns in letters to their government representatives, newspapers, and the agencies that managed regional development efforts. Registering their dissent through official channels allowed mountain residents to express themselves to their representatives. While the issues addressed in letters such as the Hendersonville farmer’s often went unresolved, government officials responded to each letter, and the act of writing itself represented individual action and protest.

Yet, composing letters was not the only way southern Appalachian residents responded to outside intervention. Employing a variety of “weapons of the weak,” mountain locals worked to retain control of their lives and communities.³ They refused to sit quietly and passively accept the changes outsiders thrust upon their region in the name of economic and social modernization. Southern Appalachian people instead exercised agency and actively attempted to direct their lives and futures in the face of powerful forces. While not always successful, mountain residents defied the stereotype of the fatalistic and acquiescent mountaineer waiting for civilization to sweep them along. While locals often resented outside interventions and attempted to preserve traditional lifestyles and relationships against drastic change, some welcomed aspects of the programs that they believed could benefit them or be integrated into their own conceptions of community life. Through the varied local reactions to development programs, it becomes clear that the people of southern Appalachia were acutely aware of the ways in which their lives would change as a result of “progress” and

² Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 145.

³ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), xv.

“modernization.” Regardless of the form their reactions took, simply by responding to development programs mountain residents defied the stereotypes that defined them for so long.

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