

Civil or Hostile?: American Nativism and the Interactions between Migrants in
Appalachia, 1865-1915

Master's Research Project

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Abstract

This research project examines the nature of the interactions between white Americans and migrants in Central Appalachia between 1865 and 1914. The aim is to understand what triggered nativist tendencies on the part of white native-born mountaineers and white industrial bosses towards the migratory workforce of southern blacks and southern and eastern European immigrants during Appalachia's most drastic industrialization period. In order to chart these nativistic triggers and checks, I have laid out the project by first exploring the foundational literature on American nativism that focuses on my historical period of study, its connection to the late nineteenth century 'new' European immigration surge, and how both of these histories unfolded in the unique and specialized section of the American South. The discussions that set up the historical context of this project are a large and significant part of my research. They ultimately provide the essential background knowledge and tools to identify what shaped both the civil and hostile interactions between white native-born Americans and outsiders in the southern mountains. Unlike the more extensively studied northeastern and western histories of American nativism and immigration, patterns of hostility towards foreigners in Central Appalachia were not *principally* dictated by an in-built racism or irrational prejudice. Nativist demonstration could not simply be chalked up to small-minded bigotry and discrimination in this region. Rather, Appalachia's real historical isolation, poverty, and capitalist overtake created an environment that made economic gain and sound business strategy more of the indexes in which to measure nativism, civility, or a combination of the two towards outsiders in the mountains.

Preface

Certain historical phenomena in the United States are paired, intertwined, inseparable. Two such stories are the unprecedented massive influx of southern and eastern European immigrants to American shores between the settling of the Civil War and the enactment of restrictive immigration laws in the early 1920s, and the ebb and flow of American nativist sentiments. At the outset, it is sufficient to say that the first triggered the latter. Scores of historians and other social scientists have examined the nature, impact, and reaction to this European immigration boom in America; however, the considerable bulk of this work has been focused on the northern and western urban centers in the United States. How these Europeans were received, interacted with native-born whites and blacks, and built their lives in the American South, has not been extensively surveyed. Even more unexplored are the social interactions that occurred between these immigrants and Americans (white and black) in the mysterious, isolated, and mythic southern mountains known as Appalachia. It is the aim of this project to zero in on the Appalachian South and investigate the interactions between native-borns and foreigners between the end of the Civil War and the outbreak of World War I. Although its protagonists are immigrants, this project is as much about an industrializing Appalachia as it is about the groups of migrants who called the mountains home in the decades on either side of the turn of the twentieth century. The Appalachian context is more than simply a backdrop against which mountain whites, southern blacks, European immigrants, and capitalist masterminds acted out their lives. The linkages that emerge between the seemingly unrelated fields of

this European immigration spike, American nationalist surges, and the hollows and boomtowns of Appalachia, help to illuminate these intertwined American histories.

The design and physical layout of my project is a layered effect. The first half (chapters one and two) sets up the essential grand historical context in order to understand the inner workings of the specialized examination of Appalachia in the second and final portion of my study (chapters three and four). This design scheme is important because it allows me to utilize established historical research on American nativism, 'new' immigration, and the South as a separate and captivating section of the United States, to be carried over and transposed on the still obscure region of Central Appalachia. By beginning with the broader discussions of nativism, the perceived foreign European menace, and the American South, I have then been able to hone in on vital questions concerning the nature of the interactions between migrants in industrial Appalachia. This project is ultimately a compilation of reading comprehensively through and thinking *laterally* around and across a medley of outwardly fragmented primary and secondary sources, in a manner that has enabled me to extract and then re-piece together the stories of nativism and acceptance between white native-borns and outsiders in the Appalachian mountains.

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Chapter I – American Nativism and One of Its Activators: The ‘New’ Immigrant

Anti-foreign spirit has existed in the United States since the colonial era and has survived in the form of both overt expressions and covert inaction until the present day. Many scholars have pointed to Americans’ affinity for feeling and displaying an aggressive sense of nationalism, or nativism, as a root cause for this broad anti-alien sentiment. The historiography of American nativism is vast, complex, and in flux. However, one landmark study published in 1955 by John Higham has proved to be so path-breaking, informative, and vital that it transitioned into an accepted standard and, has ultimately, become a classic in its field. Higham’s *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* made it virtually impossible for other authors writing on American nationalisms,

nativisms, and immigration history not to be drawn to his model and to build off of what he started.¹

In part, this chapter explains Higham's findings and the larger conclusions he drew from tracing American nativist sentiments in relation to European immigration. As Higham's *Strangers* remains a canonical work in its field, his nativism definitions and determinants will be used as reference points for my Appalachian case study. The design of my project is not to concretely or scientifically *test* Higham's theories, nor is it an attempt to uncover whether his nativisms were precisely mimicked in the more microscopic region of Appalachia. Rather, Higham's findings provide critical orientation and explanation for the more explored northeastern and mainstream American nativism conversation that can then be utilized to generally and satisfactorily understand the connection between nativism and one of its chief activators—the 'new' European immigrant.² As I will explain, the interactions between all of the different native, foreign, white, black, industrialist, and laboring segments of the Appalachian population *do* complicate Higham's broader nativism findings. The second part of this chapter discusses principal issues surrounding the arrival of the 'new' immigrant hailing from southern and eastern European countries. Initially, this more overarching look into

¹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

² The term 'new' immigrant was identified approximately in the 1880s when the type of European immigrant entering the United States changed and became *noticeable* to Americans. These immigrants came from southeastern Europe and were typically received negatively by Americans because they were considered unassimilable and harmful to the United States' economic, political, social, and moral progression. They were continuously compared to the desirable 'old' European immigrant stocks that came from the British Isles and northwestern European countries between the colonial period up until the Civil War.

the impact of the 'new' immigrant on American culture, the industrial economy, and emergent pseudo-scientific race-thinking will provide the necessary pre-conditioning for narrowing my discussion down to the South and then the Appalachian region further on.

Higham's definition of 'nativism' is central to the structure of my project. He defined American nativism as an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e. "un-American") connections."³ Higham made it clear that as nativism is an "ism," it therefore refers to a set of attitudes, a state of mind. One of the fundamental goals of his book was to trace the public opinion of nativistic sentiment. *Strangers* showed how American nativism evolved through its own distinctive pattern, how it ebbed and flowed under a variety of pressures in American history, and how it rose up and passed into action at different points. Higham tracked the nativist movement through public opinion, wherever it led, relating it to economic changes, social organizations, political pressures, and intellectual interests.⁴

Higham identified three strands of nativism that existed in the United States. The first main current focused on anti-Catholicism. Catholic institutions looked dangerously un-American because of the pope's perceived authoritarianism, the surge in Catholic immigrants in the nineteenth century, and native-borns' conviction that these foreigners were minions of the Roman tyrant, dispatched to the United States to destroy American institutions.⁵ Anti-radical nativism was the second stream that Higham identified. The American populace

³ Higham, *Strangers*, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ix-x.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

saw Europeans as violent, unpredictable, and prone to political revolution. The cardinal assumption was that since Europeans had been yoked to religious despotism for centuries, they were forever a discontented and disloyal people. These qualities would strike out at American republican freedom.⁶ The final thread that Higham identified came much more to the fore of his research than either hostility towards Catholics or radicals and formed one of the main tenets of *Strangers'* argument. Racial nativism was the belief that Americans descended from the Anglo-Saxons and this bloodline was interpreted to be the ultimate source of American national greatness.⁷ The interplay between these stylized themes was the overall design of Higham's project; yet, the "special feature was the story of how nativism *became* racialized and thus tremendously intensified."⁸

Higham ultimately argued that racial nativism was more capable than other causal agents to guide the powerful belief systems in the United States. Essentially, racial nativism had the most pronounced effect on American cultural attitudes and controlled the dips and peaks of public sentiment and anti-foreign spirit. Although Higham believed that observing successive eras of economic crisis and confidence would dictate levels of nativist agitation, nativism was inherently bound to ideas. The history of nativism firmly rested in ideologies and in emotionally charged impulses.⁹ Cultural attitudes, states of mind, and emotional energy fueled racial nativism.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸ Higham, "Epilogue," in the 2008 paperback printing of *Strangers*, 333.

⁹ Higham, "Chapter Six – Another Look at Nativism," in *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants In Urban America* (New York: Antheneum Books, 1975), 103.

I have tried to emphasize here that Higham, in the end, believed that this ideological-driven framework provided him with the foremost tools to chart and explain the broad and blanket nativism in nineteenth and twentieth century American history. The groups that interacted in the rapidly industrializing Appalachian mountains were not as inextricably bound to a racial nativism cleanly fueled by certain states of mind, and abstract idea- and attitude-formation. Nativism, when it did expose itself in Appalachia, adhered more towards the study of nativism in the Progressive paradigm of history, which predated the publication of *Strangers*.

Progressive era scholars who explored American nativism roots and theories in the 1930s and early-1940s relied more on complex systems of motivation—man’s social, political, and economic motivation as rational, self-interested, and arguably more discernable than Higham’s contemporary model of unpacking nativism’s intangible ideological content.¹⁰ Nativism theories coming out of the Progressive school were studied and depicted as a kind of emotional weapon picked up in times of stress, when white native-born Americans were intent upon “economic rivalry, class advantage, [and/or] preservation of status.”¹¹ These nativist studies traditionally focused more on economic determinants and suggested that nativism was primarily concerned with a hierarchal social order, and thus, this led to white native-borns being afraid of displacement in the

¹⁰ James M. Bergquist, “The Concept of Nativism in Historical Study Since ‘Strangers in the Land,’” *American Jewish History* 76 (1986), 125.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 125. Two key examples of progressive nativist studies are Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom’s Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), and Ray Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Quadrangle, 1938).

marketplace. This line of thinking directed nativists to obsess over increased competition for economic security and general advancement in the United States.¹² The hard line of the Progressives' take was that the native-born had a job to keep and taxes to pay. Immigrants were resented most often for the perception that they took away employment by working for less money, and then they raised taxes by descending into poverty, crime, and disease.¹³

It is clear that this paradigm explored American nativism in a relatively detached and analytic manner.¹⁴ *Strangers* was one of the first books that took the study of American nativism out of the rigidity of Progressive historiography. Higham's ideological interpretation did not always present an absolute contrast between "native" and "foreigner" that once characterized the Progressive historical literature. Higham presented a blurred picture in which states of mind allowed natives and foreigners to be divided among themselves and against each other simultaneously along cultural, religious, or political grounds. Although episodes of nativism in Appalachia did not always neatly fit into either the Progressives' defense-of-status camp, or into Higham and later scholars' more intellectually based defense-of-culture cadre, the character of mountain nativist patterns was more consistently fueled by economic determinants.¹⁵ When it surfaced in its often masked and convoluted forms, nativism remained more clearly defined by social

¹² David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 4.

¹³ Dale T. Knobel, *"America for the Americans": The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), xxii-xxiii.

¹⁴ Bennett, 4.

¹⁵ Bergquist, 133.

class and status indexes because the isolated, “backwoods,” and still largely pre-industrial mountain South was rooted in survival mode.

Appalachia’s delayed, and then nearly instantaneous, transformation from a predominantly subsistence farming agricultural economy to the astounding resource extraction capitalist industrial economy between the 1870s and the First World War assured economics a vital part in any exploration of nativism in the southern mountains. As I will elaborate upon later on, displays of nativism or policies of inclusivity/acceptance depended largely on what “made sense” economically in the region. Often, this “business-strategy” served to guide nativistic sentiment both for the white native-born laborers (the mountaineer population) and for the wealthy white northern and international industrialists who invested in and supervised Appalachia’s non-agricultural development (railroads, lumbering, mining, and textile work).¹⁶

Although economic development and security for the different classes of white Americans living and working in Appalachia could denote nativistic activity, these native-born laborers and absentee landlords could also adhere to Higham’s and other post-1955 nativism scholars’ identifications of such factors as a desire for community-belonging, Radical Right Americanism, and ethnocentrism in underlying nativist episodes. A sense of “true Americanism” undergirded nativist tendencies in any section of the United States. In times of rapid change—such as Appalachia’s economic overhaul—anti-alienism and general prejudice against the foreigner provided Americans with a sense of closeness, community, and

¹⁶ The argument of nativism/hostility towards foreign laborers versus acceptance/civility as a business-strategy for those dwelling in Appalachia will be explored in more detail in Chapter Two and Four.

authority.¹⁷ Belief in this “true Americanism” offered confidence and sanctuary in a changing social structure and thus could function as a restorative fraternity.¹⁸

The industrialists operating in Appalachia sometimes exposed their rightist beliefs that certain scholars have connected to nativism’s intellectual-political qualities. These industrialists were not so much racist as they were deeply concerned about their labor force following their rules and meeting their expectations in order to carry on America’s recent capitalist economic progress. Political rightists and industrialists were extremely passionate men who adhered to traditional right-wing beliefs about progress, protection, and intolerance. They were moralists and idealists. Above all, however, they were Americanists—citizens taught to believe that their ideal society existed in their own country.¹⁹ This belief system insisted on Americans’ own uniqueness, superiority, and their personal identification with the nation.²⁰ They were a part of a great nation and feared any foreign element that menaced its values, degraded its institutions, or impeded its economic evolution. The foreign-labor force in the mountains experienced right-wing industrialists’ simmering anti-alien spirit when their actions (or lack thereof) triggered Americanists’ intellectual-political tenets.

Immigrants in Appalachia predominantly experienced American ethnocentrism more than Higham’s precise definition of racial nativism. Nativist actions that did surface among white native-borns of all classes in the mountain

¹⁷ Bennett, 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

region were not xenophobic, that is, “reflexively or unexceptionally antforeign.”²¹ Rather, these nativistic actions were ethnocentric, the behavior of “setting up as a standard for judging comers to the United States its own understanding of American culture.”²² Ethnocentrism is the practice of the ways in which people “favor their own group and assert its superiority without necessarily being either nativists or racists in a strict sense.”²³ Furthermore, it is not fruitful to regard nativism merely as a cousin of racism, albeit they are allied in some ways. Higham argued that racism was older, more definitively categorical, and divided all people into hierarchized types.²⁴ Nativism was able to borrow aspects from racism because both were militantly defensive of a cherished heritage, stable present, and successful future. Racism, on the other hand, strove to identify and enforce ineradicable differences within one’s own society between native-borns and aliens, all with the central goal of preventing the defilement of an allegedly superior racial group by an inferior group.²⁵ Racism revolved around degradation whereas nativism was a reaction to perceived danger, and thus, could also adopt assimilatory practices when foreign and native-born interactions evolved and threats lessened.²⁶ Industrialists and white native-born laborers in Appalachia, thus, were predominantly ethnocentric if anything and could be subdued depending on the foreign workforce’s ability to either assimilate and/or generate economic advantages and profit for the host community.

²¹ Knobel, xii-xiii.

²² *Ibid.*, xiii.

²³ Higham, “Epilogue,” 335.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 333.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

The above discussion of Higham's categorizations of American nativism and the ensuing general discussion of the facets of nativism and its complications in Appalachia have been centered around the Progressive paradigm and *Strangers*. Importantly, however, between the publication of *Strangers* in 1955 and Higham's death in 2003, Higham gave countless presentations and submitted essays that seriously critiqued his foundational study. The critiques and discussions about *Strangers'* shortcomings and Higham's evolved conception of American nativism more fully aligned with what I uncovered regarding the nature of the interactions between the different groups in Appalachian boomtowns. Firstly, Higham believed that *Strangers* had given the mistaken impression that nativism—with all its negative connotations and hostility—was at the heart of American nationalism. In truth, however, Higham conceded that another element of nationalism existed, and this he termed "America's cosmopolitan faith." This was a more upbeat concept of nationality that accentuated the United States' diverse origins and the prominent egalitarianism element in the nation's self-image. Admittedly, during the period that Higham was writing about, the belief in American nationalism as cosmopolitan and universal was generally at a low ebb and it certainly struggled against the more aggressive and dynamic thrust of nativism. This universality was indeed cut down in an era of lynchings, scientific racism, and war fevers; but Higham failed to emphasize this more inclusive nationalism that would reduce disparities between cosmopolitan ideals and prejudiced realities in the future.²⁷

Secondly, even outside the scope of *Strangers*, Higham explained that the concept of nativism "proved serviceable only for understanding the extreme and

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 334.

fanatical manifestations of ethnic discord.”²⁸ The study of American nativism forced the researcher to recount the most intense interactions between foreigners and native-borns, when it was actually not always possible to find such intensity of feeling. Higham regretted that historians, fascinated by Americans’ passion and panic, had neglected the less spectacular but arguably more prevalent and sustained conflicts enmeshed in social interactions between different groups. Higham believed it was very important to explore these more subdued but sustained stresses between people because they depicted the slow process of ethnic integration and that was where one could really see the course of social development.²⁹

Although *Strangers* thoroughly explored the ideological contours of American nativism, in later years Higham explained that much of nativism’s rise and fall had adhered to economic booms and busts. Higham advised that one of the most productive next steps in this type of research was to understand tensions between groups of people simply as basic structural realities, because purely attributing ethnic cleavages to nativism or racism only served to “take the curse off of” the fact that inequality was very real between Americans and foreigners. What had set groups apart in America throughout history could not fairly be reduced to consistently and strictly nativist terms. It had been the struggles of status and mobility that had underlined much of what Higham and other scholars may have initially too easily attributed to irrational prejudice. Higham’s most pronounced self-critique was his suspicion that “the question of status [had] touched the daily

²⁸ *Ibid.*, “Another Look at Nativism,” 107.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

life of most Americans more intimately than any ideological warfare.”³⁰ The importance *Strangers* had placed on ideologies demanded an examination of why those powerful systems of belief that triggered nativism changed. They essentially followed the social and economic problems of America as an urban-industrial society: confidence in the 1880s, crisis in the 1890s, short recovery in the early twentieth century, and then prolonged crisis again from World War I to the mid-1920s. By recognizing this overarching economic explanation, Higham believed that discrimination and agitation developed where and when immigrants participated in the struggle for not only survival, but also, what all other Americans yearned for: middle-class prestige.³¹

Both Higham and other scholars’ critiques of *Strangers* and other works that attempted to provide an overall view of nativism and immigration in American history had one common suggestion for future students of nativism. Although the attempts to trace the comprehensive larger strains of American nativism have been worthwhile, the recognized next step was to conduct more minute examinations of nativist sentiments at smaller regional and local levels. The reality is that there are many different nativisms, and their character changes “according to the context of the particular conflict of cultures in which they arise.”³² Social historians must comprehend, and then expose, that the differences in nativisms depend not only upon historical era, but, perhaps more importantly, on place. This field of research cannot just study the classic doctrines of ideologies and prejudices; it is time to study very specific interactions of people. Without

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 107-110, see also Higham, “Epilogue,” 337.

³² Bergquist, 140.

getting more microscopic, nativist determinants are being neglected—for example, antagonisms between American minority groups, comparative rates of mobility within the United States, and above all, the likely salient differences in displays of hostility or acceptance towards immigrant groups in one part of the country as opposed to others.³³ Zooming in on the interactions between white native-born mountaineers, southern blacks, ‘new’ immigrants, and their industrial overlords in the Appalachian South answers this call. The nature of the interrelationships in the mountains can help to lead to new understandings of both social conflict and social accommodation.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the ‘new’ immigrant was a possible “activator” and/or “accelerator” to American nativist surges. Also, the ‘new’ immigrant was the most predominant type of foreigner in industrial Appalachia and thus merits description and discussion in this initial part of my project. The almost half-century between the 1880s and the 1920s saw the type of immigrant entering the United States change, and the influx of immigration generally increase to rates unseen in all of the country’s existence. The ‘new’ immigrants coming from southern and eastern Europe were ultimately perceived as “strange” and “unfamiliar” to Americans as compared to the more desirable ‘old’ immigrant ranks who hailed from the British Isles and northwestern Europe earlier in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁴ The ‘new’ immigrants’ presence was being seen and felt. The negative attributes that white native-born Americans attached to these new immigrant ranks were seemingly endless. Both

³³ Higham, “Epilogue,” 336.

³⁴ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 168.

by American and northwestern European standards, these masses were illiterate and otherwise educationally deficient, they were socially backward and underdeveloped, and they appeared too bizarre in physical appearance and culture to blend in.³⁵ Americans received them with an expected “ethnocentric repugnance” and discriminated against these immigrants primarily on the basis of stereotyped traits. As this dislike generated mainly from discrimination based on appearances, accusations of the ‘new’ immigrants being prone to criminality and total unassimilability were not grounded in truth.³⁶ The significance here is not what was either hard fact or unreasonable prejudice on the part of native-borns, but rather what they perceived to be true and how they interpreted and internalized this massive influx of immigration. It is easy from the point of view of the historian to look back on the immigrants entering the United States in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century and see the immigrants as victims. But to Americans living among the newcomers, only the perceived dreadful problems they brought to the nation seemed important. Americans associated spiraling crime rates, mounting poverty, and frightening epidemics and plagues with the new foreigners. These fears activated “America for Americans” responses as they reacted to the upheavals of their age and tried to prevent what they saw as being potentially total cultural destruction.³⁷ Those who exposed nativist sentiments towards the ‘new’ immigrants did not invent the crises of values they saw developing around them. The transformation and disruption of the nostalgic American way of life was altered by these immigrants, and although their

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Bennett, 8-9, 217.

propensity for displaying nativist actions may appear inappropriate and harsh, their fears were bred in their reality.

Another facet of native-borns' anti-alien spirit at this time was rooted in America as a leading industrializing nation and general domestic economic stipulations. The sheer number of the southern and eastern European immigrants who entered the United States in this period actually "remade" the working class.³⁸ 'New' immigrants and their children were very often begrimed by the dirtiest, most physically taxing, and typically, dangerous jobs. One particular reason for American prejudice was the ways in which the native-born and foreigner conceptualized manual labor. Hard physical labor as a wage-earning practice was not a badge of manliness and pride in the United States in the way that it had been in southern and eastern Europe. Coming from a region of the world that placed dignity on a breadwinner who toiled long and hard days, 'new' immigrants were perplexed to find that in America manual labor was largely demasculinized, sporadic and low paying, and often insufficient to adequately support a family.³⁹ Even more problematic for 'new' immigrants and a further source of prejudice for native-borns, manual labor was very racialized in United States. It was designated as "nigger-work," it was more driven and alienating, and therefore it was unsuitable for immigrants who desired to be unsullied by racially typed labor, eventually become homeowners, and begin the slow intergenerational process of

³⁸ James B. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the "New Immigrant" Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (1997), 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

mobility and success.⁴⁰ The 'new' immigrants' unfamiliarity with the English language and American race relations unfortunately caused their working class and physically-laboring lifestyle to be seen as inferior and ignorant by Americans. Despised "nigger work" morphed into "dago work" and "hunky work" (debased and reconstructed slang terminology for Italian and Hungarian or pan-Slavic labor) and these foreign workers were freighted with many demeaning status indicators that inhibited them from thoroughly engaging in "white man's" work.⁴¹

Moreover, the immigrants' noticeable practice of residing in the United States, working extremely hard, and then returning to their country of origin to invest in property and businesses offended many Americans. Immigrants who practiced this "birds of passage" type of work in the industrial age had the effect of sometimes displacing native-born workers because they would labor for less pay, work exceedingly long hours in more dangerous conditions, and often display no interest in such activities as unionization that could prevent them from immediate and continuous wage-earning.⁴² These immigrants saved their money in an almost fanatical manner, according to Americans, and then, did not reinvest in and stimulate their local economies.

⁴⁰ Adam Walaszek, "'For in America Poles Work Like Cattle': Polish Peasant Immigrants and Work in America, 1880-1921," in *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty: Immigrants, Workers and Citizens in the American Republic, 1880-1920*, ed. Marianna Debouzy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 86-91 as quoted in *ibid.*, 19-20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Mark Wyman, *Round Trip To America: The Immigrants Return To Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 10-12; see also Michael J. Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press 1978) as quoted in *ibid.*, 19-20.

'New' immigrants occupied a precarious position in Americans' understanding of late nineteenth and early twentieth century racial hierarchy. The above discussion of 'new' immigrants' seemingly inferior status and general undesirability combined with the era's pseudo-scientific race and whiteness theories gave these foreigners an "in-between" status. In order to think about the 'new' immigrants' racial ambiguity and to capture native-borns' confusion and flux on the racial issue, it is necessary to destabilize our modern categories of race and ethnicity. It is easy to think that these immigrants really were "white" (visible fair skin color), in a way that they were not initially American. Native-borns and older, more entrenched immigrants placed 'new' immigrants *above* African Americans but *below* "white" people. A wide range of evidence supports the case that southern and eastern European immigrants were long plagued by discrimination and oppression based on a racial, not just an ethnic, basis. Although the national state legally deemed 'new' immigrants "white" and non-European applicants to immigrate to the United States as "nonwhite," federal and judicial definitions of race did not guide the day-to-day interactions between native-borns and foreigners. Official fitness for citizenship did not come into play all the time at the grassroots level. Rather, instances of Old World language choices in the streets, incidences of living in ill-ventilated and crowded housing and consequently succumbing to epidemics, and, anarchist and radical political views defined race in this historical period.⁴³

'New' immigrants' experienced this racialization and it, in turn, impacted their racial consciousness as newcomers to America. The first lesson they

⁴³ Barrett and Roediger, 4-12.

absorbed was the importance of being “not black” in this country. They also grappled with the fact that just because they could distance themselves from African Americans (and any other “nonwhite” group, e.g. Asian Americans or Mexican Americans), this did not instantly propel them into the category of whiteness. These immigrants were conscious of their in-betweenness, the importance of America’s racial hierarchy, and their ambiguous and finicky place in that pyramid. So, ‘new’ immigrants simultaneously struggled between a desire for literal distance from non-whites and their sense of shared grievances with these non-whites.⁴⁴ Nowhere else was racial hierarchy and consciousness more fundamental than in the American South. How ‘new’ immigrants fit in with the volatile white-black racial dyad in the southern section left their whiteness even more easily open to debate. It is facile to believe that the influx of southern and eastern Europeans to the South would have caused a nativist explosion, with wholesale fears of foreigners’ endangering the purity of their white race, relaxing the pattern of white supremacy, and undermining the strength of their sectional solidarity.⁴⁵ However, immigrants *did* enter this section and understanding their experiences, as well as southern nativism’s triggers and checks, provides a more complete historical context for explaining the interactions between the different groups that called Appalachia home after the Civil War up until the outbreak of World War I.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15, 29.

⁴⁵ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 169.

Chapter II – The South, Immigration, and Pro-Industrialists Versus Anti-Grassroots

The South has held the fascination of scores of historians since the colonial era. Its hold on both American and international scholars can be partially attributed to one amazing peculiarity of this region, and that is that much of the southern section's history and development are shrouded in myth. Whether scholars are perpetuating its mythical nature or thoroughly debunking southern legends and falsehoods, myth-making and unmaking is central to southern history. One of the South's most enduring myths is the belief that historically it was ethnically homogeneous, united, and orderly. Integral to this idea was that the Civil War generation of southerners and their descendants embodied an ethnocultural Anglo-Saxon purity, which also symbolized the section's virtue and harmony.⁴⁶ In actuality, this did not entirely exist, but the myth served to separate and augment the South from the diversity, disorder, and urbanism that plagued much of the North.⁴⁷ The South's supposed ethnic homogeneity is significant to my project because it suggests that the incredible influx of 'new' immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not make its way south of the Mason-Dixon line. Until the period of major historical revisionism in the 1960s, historical southern homogeneity was not extensively explored. In the last half-century, however, scholars from many different backgrounds have not only presented concrete census studies denoting immigration to southern urban centers, but also put forth studies focusing on social, cultural, and ethnic histories of immigrants in

⁴⁶ Denis C. Rousey, "Aliens in the WASP Nest: Ethnocultural Diversity in the Antebellum Urban South," *The Journal of American History* 79 (1992), 152.

⁴⁷ Randall M. Miller, "The Enemy Within: Some Effects of Foreign Immigrants on Antebellum Southern Cities," *Southern Studies* 24 (1985), 32.

the South. This chapter will discuss immigration to the South as it pertained to nativist expressions and protests against the 'new' immigrant. Within this framework, also explored will be specifically southern whiteness construction; a succinct look at immigrants in the antebellum period; key issues concerning immigrants and African Americans; the post-Civil War effort to secure foreign labor; and finally, the rise of immigrant selectivity and grassroots southern nativism against industrial demands. This course leads my project into the southern subregion of the Appalachian mountains and to an investigation of how the different racial, ethnic, and class groups interacted in this rural-industrial setting.

Chapter One ended by asking complex questions about where immigrants fit within the South's fiery and temperamental white and black racial hierarchy. First it is prudent to unpack southern "whiteness" because much of the South's way of life, as well as, its industrial development, are arguably hinged on this conception. As an academic field, whiteness studies is a subgenre of work that investigates the construction and historicity of white identity and American racialism.⁴⁸ Whiteness as a category of analysis is undoubtedly relevant for topics located in the highly racialized South. One southern historian has charged that by not identifying and discussing whiteness when researching historical life in the South, we are contributing to an American silence. It is crucial not to deny this racial identity and to locate it in our historical research lest we allow whiteness to

⁴⁸ Cynthia Skove Nevels, *Lyching to Belong: Claiming Whiteness Through Racial Violence* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 4-5, see also, Barrington Walker, "'This is the White Man's Day': The Irish, White Racial Identity, and the 1866 Memphis Riots," *Left History* 5 (1997), 32.

be an omission and to stand as the norm.⁴⁹ Whiteness and how race was conceptualized does not reside in nature, but in culture and politics. The task of historians of the American South is to “discover which racial categories [were] useful to whom at a given moment, and why.”⁵⁰ For the native-born southerner, the black slave and then freedman, and the European immigrant, race was an organizer of power—its perception conditional upon southern circumstances of a particular historical moment, and a product of power struggles at southern cultural sites.⁵¹ The fluidity of race and its ever-shifting reality in the South cannot go unstressed. Likewise, the saga of ‘new’ immigrant and native-born interaction in the South forces us not casually to think about race as color, for in order to be “white” in this period and in this place, one needed to be “American.”

The term “whiteness” as a specific category and as a field of study would not have been part of immigration parlance in the antebellum South. Nevertheless, an understanding of how European immigrants fit into the southern section just prior to the upheaval of the Civil War provides a useful contrast to how they were viewed and treated in the postbellum, industrial setting. The southern homogeneity myth was partially fueled by the rationale that as Europeans surged into the North and out to the farmlands of the West, immigrants merely dribbled into the South. This massive imbalance had given scholars reason enough to largely ignore immigrant activity in the antebellum South, and to rely on the other

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), xi.

⁵⁰ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

assumption that slavery repelled foreign laborers.⁵² The disregard for immigrants in a substantial portion of the historiography of the Old South has led more recent scholarship to refer to the immigrant as the South's "invisible man."⁵³ Foreigners did venture into the slave states, however, and their presence was not inconsequential.⁵⁴ The pattern of European immigration to the South was unique in that although these immigrants never made up any significant overall populations in such states as South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, the cities of Charleston, Savannah, and Mobile were home to a very substantial percentage of foreign-borns. Many other urban places in both the Lower and Upper South could be appropriately described as "immigrant cities."⁵⁵ Immigrants entered southern urban centers as a predominantly laboring class. They were disproportionately represented among the lower urban working class, which was also the largest occupational group in every major antebellum city.⁵⁶ Knowledge that European immigrants made up a sizeable composition of the wage-earning population in the urban South has important implications for comprehending how racial and class relations unfolded there and how it influenced the nature of the South's future development.

⁵² Ira Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South," *The American Historical Review* 88 (1983), 1176.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1177, see also, Randall M. Miller, "Immigrants in the Old South," *Immigration History Newsletter* 10 (1978), 8.

⁵⁴ One historian who dissented from the homogeneous/Anglo-Saxon myth earlier in the twentieth century was Ella Lonn. Her seminal work on the immigrant presence in the antebellum South was a singularity until the historiography slowly began to include the study of European immigrants in the 1960s. Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1940).

⁵⁵ Berlin and Gutman, 1178.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1179.

How slavery affected European immigration efforts to the South and then how it affected the ensuing dynamic between the white-black-immigrant triad once foreigners settled in these urban areas has dominated much of the literature. One argument is that slavery was both the cause and the consequence of the South's smaller percentage of immigrants. This idea maintains that because the slave states noticeably did not attract the same number of immigrants as the other sections of the United States throughout the early nineteenth century up to the Civil War, the South became entirely biracial. Furthermore, the sparse Irishmen and Germans that did immigrate were relatively subsumed into the larger white community in order to maintain early southern white hegemony. Slavery increasingly became more important to this section in need of cheap labor for its expanding and successful agricultural economy. The institution of slavery continued to grow and become more complex and Europeans were further repelled by settling in the southern section. By the rise of the secession crisis in the mid-1850s, immigration, or the lack of it, emphasized North-South sectional differences, fixed the character of each region, and determined their rates of industrialization and modernization.⁵⁷

Slavery had the capability of keeping immigrants out of the South because it generally degraded free white workers. Slaves obviously worked at lower rates than free white and foreign laborers, so when they were brought into competition, non-slave labor was crowded out.⁵⁸ It was difficult to compete with the potent combination of slaves and their masters. The only time a native-born southerner

⁵⁷ Miller, "Immigrants in the Old South," 8.

⁵⁸ Berlin and Gutman, 1176.

or northerner or immigrant was used was when a job required a skill set that slaves did not possess, or when the task was deemed too dangerous by the master-class for their slaves to carry out. These southern working class conditions hardly encouraged substantial immigration and have thus made the foreigner seem marginal to the history of the urban antebellum South.⁵⁹ Immigrants were able to compete in the South's urban economic climate when they were *skilled* workers. Skilled immigrants in the antebellum workforce often specialized in artisanal trades. Skilled immigrant workingmen were actually able to make considerable gains in status and mobility in these cities and became a dynamic element in southern society.⁶⁰ These workers had the power to displace skilled slave labor, which deeply affected the behavior, and standing of blacks, both slave and free, in the antebellum era.⁶¹

By and large, however, immigrants who did settle in southern cities in the pre-Civil War period fell into the degraded masse of unskilled workers. As in other sections, white native-born Americans were conspicuous in their absence from unskilled, manual labor. In the South, every type of manual labor was almost exclusively carried out by slaves and free blacks. Irish immigrants were the largest ethnic group to work alongside them in the unskilled labor force. Based on their occupational status, Irishmen were often tarred by southern nativist slander as "niggers turned inside out."⁶² Even more so than in other sections, immigrants who shouldered a shovel or lifted a hod weakened their social status and relegated

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1177.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1188-90.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1193.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1187.

their foreign identities to become classified as inherently inferior like the homegrown slave.⁶³ Additionally, the planter-class feared that the poor immigrants who toiled alongside blacks could unite along their class lines. Southern whites imagined that the immigrants' strange customs, European religions, and lack of knowledge regarding the South's race relations would create an uneasy environment in which foreigners would foster unorthodox views on slavery.⁶⁴ Southerners were often disgusted with unskilled immigrants in the antebellum period because they typically ignored local taboos about "nigger work" and fraternized with blacks in other aspects of day-to-day living. They "reeked of servitude."⁶⁵ Foreign workers passed time in grog shops, groceries, and saloons where native-borns' control over the separation between whites and blacks was weakest.⁶⁶ Thrown together in the same workplace and lowest-class neighborhoods, immigrants violated the etiquette of southern race relations by "living, trading, drinking, and even sleeping with blacks, slave and free."⁶⁷ Southern whites feared a world in which their racial hierarchy was relaxed—where poor foreign prostitutes serviced black men in immigrant districts and where foreign laborers were employed by skilled free blacks.⁶⁸ Revulsion and uncertainty in the antebellum period carried over into the post-Civil War labor shortage era as the South underwent industrial transformation.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Miller, "Immigrants in the Old South," 8-9.

⁶⁵ Roger W. Shugg, *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers During Slavery and After, 1840-1875* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 93-94; *Harper's Magazine* 7 (1853), 755, as quoted in Miller, "The Enemy Within," 39.

⁶⁶ Miller, "The Enemy Within," 46-47.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

To a large extent, the Civil War restored the South's strict black-white racial dyad and reinforced its almost self-fulfilling prophecy as a section composed of purely Anglo-Saxon homogeneousness as it approached the turn of the twentieth century. The above discussion has asserted that the European immigration surge of the 1840s and 1850s *did* affect the South, and that foreigners interacted in a precarious way as chiefly skilled and unskilled workingmen in urban centers. The bottom line was that conflict and nativist tendencies existed between every type of worker in Southern society and that the experiences of European immigrants in urban centers were not identical to those in southern rural settings.⁶⁹ The Civil War and Reconstruction led to a decrease in immigration to the entire region—both because it was difficult to physically travel southward and because heightened racial consciousness and regulations refocused southern life on the white-over-black norm.⁷⁰ Recently freed blacks engulfed Southern cities and antebellum immigrants who survived the war were largely able to edge up the economic and social ladder and assimilate into the New South.⁷¹ Southerners were able to lapse back into their philosophy of white social stasis and fresh European immigrants avoided the post-war South. Racism and sectionalism again prevailed.

⁶⁹ Rousey, 163, see also Berlin and Gutman, 1191-92. Ethnocultural issues in the rural antebellum South require more exploration within this field of literature. One historian, Steven Hahn, argues that the southern yeoman lived in a “separate world” from that of the bustling, race and occupation hierarchical world of urban centers. Hahn's assertion makes it necessary for more historical studies to examine the interactions between foreigners and native-born Southerners (both white and black) in rural contexts. Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁷⁰ Rousey, 154.

⁷¹ Miller, “The Enemy Within,” 52-53.

Following the Civil War, the South experienced a crippling labor shortage. Recently freed slaves migrated to the North, West, and to southern cities, leaving the South's leading agricultural economy stagnant and, in turn, spurring the attempt to rapidly industrialize non-agricultural sectors. Between 1865 and approximately 1905, a wide variety of industrialists desired European immigration to reinvigorate the section. The South's immigration movement operated largely according to what I regard as a policy of "non-nativism-as-sensible-business-strategy." This does not dismiss these industrialists' desire for a selective type of immigrant at times, nor does it strictly mean that industrialists and other pro-immigrationists were free from believing in certain popular prejudices of their age. Rather, these people believed in the economic, political, cultural, and moral way of life in the South and wanted the section to keep pace with the rest of the developments in the nation through the utilization of foreign labor. Large-scale plantation owners, land speculators, railroad companies, extractive-industry tycoons, mill proprietors, private organizations, state governments, and northerners were all, to a certain degree, in favor of luring immigrants southward.⁷²

Pro-immigrationists primarily driven by the desire for the South to economically recover and advance did not believe that the importance of immigration could be overestimated. They recognized that the population in many districts was sparse and that the opportunities for the development of both

⁷² Rowland T. Berthoff, "Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration, 1865-1914," *The Journal of Southern History* 17 (1951), 328, see also Caroline E. MacGill, "Immigration in the Southern States," in *The South in the Building of the Nation*, Richmond: *The Southern Historical Publication Society* 6 (1909), 590.

agricultural and mineral resources were boundless. Work was available but immigrants were needed in abundance.⁷³ Also, the rapid growth of manufacturing interests demanded thousands of workmen to fill newly constructed mills and factories, which the local southern population could not meet.⁷⁴ These industrialists utilized the most effective and up-to-date means of advertising, and some American companies even fostered direct steamship business connections with European ports.⁷⁵ Additionally, inducements were held out to prospective foreigners. Pro-immigrationists' promised immigrants incentives that not only spoke about opportunities for successful employment ventures, but also about happy and healthy living in the American South. They pledged that the climate was "salubrious" and conducive to longevity; they assured political liberty and religious toleration; and they explained that the government would protect their rights.⁷⁶ Most salient to my project is the type of incentives that the Upper South state of Tennessee confirmed. A state immigration handbook published in 1868 assured prospective foreign settlers that East Tennessee was very law-abiding and that Tennesseans were "favorable to immigration, and [were] likely to treat the immigrant with courtesy and kindness."⁷⁷ Newcomers were promised that all classes of locals would welcome them and that organizations like the Ku Klux Klan

⁷³ "Immigration and the South," *The Nation*, Vol. 82, No. 2133 (1906), 399.

⁷⁴ Robert DeCourcy Ward, "Immigration and the South," *Atlantic Monthly* 96 (1905), 611.

⁷⁵ MacGill, 590, and Berthoff, 336.

⁷⁶ Bert James Loewenberg, "Efforts of the South to Encourage Immigration, 1865-1900," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 33 (1934), 376-77.

⁷⁷ Hermann Bokum, *The Tennessee Handbook and Immigrant's Guide* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Company, 1868), as quoted in W. B. Hesseltine, "Tennessee's Invitation to Carpet-Baggers," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 4 (1932), 86.

did not disrupt this peaceable part of the state and the South.⁷⁸ These progressive “New South” pro-immigrationists played down the South’s unfavorable charges such as traditional race relation issues, lawlessness, and intolerability of outsiders. They equated the section’s progress with “statistical increase in population, industrial production, taxable wealth, and bank deposits.”⁷⁹

Once the South regained its composure—(to use this nebulous phrase)—following the Civil War and Reconstruction, the rebuilding of major railroads and the transportation system’s general expansion greatly assisted the South’s immigration movement. Southern railroad companies backed industrial and land departments, published high quality maps and pamphlets to advertise opportunities along their lines, and offered reduced train fare packages for immigrants.⁸⁰ Once the South had stabilized and the tracks were rebuilt in the decades following the war, northerners began to suggest that the influx of ‘new’ immigrants arriving in the North be rerouted to sections of the United States that could benefit more from foreign labor and settlement. Northerners did not express this redistribution proposition in a positive light. The tone was often one of unburdening northern urban centers that were becoming swollen with foreigners. In 1904, Commissioner General of Immigration, F. P. Sargent, suggested a plan of “diverting the stream of arriving alien, by some means as yet undiscovered, into

⁷⁸ *Facts and Figures concerning the Climate, Manufacturing Advantages and the Agricultural and Mineral Resources of East Tennessee* (Knoxville: Knoxville Industrial Association, 1869), as quoted in Hesselstine, 90.

⁷⁹ Constantine G. Belissary, “Tennessee and Immigration, 1865-1880,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 7 (1948), 248.

⁸⁰ MacGill, 590, see also Loewenberg, 377-79.

the channels where it will do least harm," in reference to the South.⁸¹ This desire to steer incoming foreigners to the South was unmistakably to reduce the congestion and overcrowding of the less assimilable immigrants who were becoming visible in the North.⁸²

Even southerners interested in immigration did not favor Mr. Sargent's plan. The South's immigration movement remained guided by its adherence to selectivity and type of immigrant sought. Only large-scale planters, railroad companies, and mill proprietors required such dense labor populations that they were often satisfied with any type of immigrant they could secure (this included tapping into the increasing arrival of southern and eastern Europeans).⁸³ The North's redistribution plan allotted too much control to the federal government over such a sensitive issue as the settlement of foreigners, and the purpose of relieving the congested northern urban centers gave the impression that slight regard was given to the needs of the South.⁸⁴ It would not be made the dumping-ground for undesirable immigrants.⁸⁵ The South's description of "desirable" immigrants was the capitalist and land-purchasing class.⁸⁶ The South wanted English-speaking peoples from the northern states, northwestern Europe, and Canada who were skilled in intensified and diversified farming and artisanal arts.⁸⁷ The South would not stand for the invasion of the newly arrived, ignorant, and

⁸¹ "Where Immigrants Are Wanted," *The Nation*, Vol. 80, No. 2062 (1905), 6.

⁸² Berthoff, 342.

⁸³ MacGill, 589, 591.

⁸⁴ Walter L. Fleming, "Immigration to the Southern States," *Political Science Quarterly* 20 (1905), 290.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ MacGill, 588.

⁸⁷ Loewenberg, 382, see also Ward, 615.

penniless alien who was creating so many problems in other sections of the country.⁸⁸ These “non-assimilative” elements would only debase southern society. Even in its frustration to attract a large number of suitable immigrants, southern pro-immigrationists were never willing to dilute the section’s racial integrity. The South had “no room for... anarchistic, law-defying, revolution-breeding, off scourings of Europe that the North and West [were] so largely composed of.”⁸⁹

Proponents of selectivity were countered by many railroad companies and plantation owners who set aside their nativist tendencies for the sake of the South’s economic advancement and prosperity. Plantation owners who ran large-scale farming operations were clamoring for a workforce and explained very simply that, “no line was being on their nationality, as long as their labor [was satisfactory].”⁹⁰ Industrialists’ relied on the age-old conviction that America was able to assimilate and mold all peoples. They assured nativist and other skeptical southerners that if the “dark-haired races of Southern Europe” were sprinkled throughout the isolated hills and valleys of the sun-kissed land of Dixie, as long as they were “able-bodied and willing to work,” America could assimilate them.⁹¹ An immigration director for several southern rail lines boasted: “there was not a people in Europe which... [would] not turn into good Americans when kept close to the soil under American conditions.”⁹² Industrialists even went so far as to advance their own pseudo-scientific hypotheses about the South’s need to

⁸⁸ Ward, 615.

⁸⁹ *Manufacturers’ Record*, Vol. 25 (1894), citing the *Financial Index of Georgia*, as quoted in Loewenberg, 382.

⁹⁰ *Manufacturers’ Record*, Vol. 45 (1904), 437-38, 465, as quoted in Berthoff, 331.

⁹¹ Berthoff, 357.

⁹² *Public Opinion*, Vol. 39 (1905), 850, as quoted in Berthoff, 333-34.

stimulate its section with foreign labor. A Tennessee immigration commissioner in Nashville, for instance, put forth this statement: "In political economy, as in physiological organisms, stagnation of nutrition is always the precursor of disorganization and death. The influx of new material into the organic structure of a nation is not only helpful but necessary to its life."⁹³ It is clear that for powerful and elite industrialists, any nativist sentiments or prejudicial race conceptions that they may have held were quelled by smart business strategy and economic gain for the South.

Southerners who desired selectivity and immigration restriction recognized the industrialists' motives. An article addressing the South's immigration movement in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1905 captured the debate: "So active are the railroads in [immigration efforts] that it is impossible to tell how much of the 'demand for more labor' is a bona fide one, and how much is circulated by the railroads for their own ends."⁹⁴ This article went on to explain that at a recent conference held on southern immigration, the influence of the railroads was so strong that a paper urging evenhanded restriction of certain immigrants was not permitted a public reading and was not given to the press. The article's final blow was the charge that "wholesale distribution of immigrants by transportation companies [was] not... controlled by a desire to do what [was] best for the community as by purely selfish interests."⁹⁵ The general southern population increasingly understood the pecuniary motives of industrialists, and beginning

⁹³ *Proceedings of the First Annual Session of the Southern Immigration Association of America* (1884), 14-15, as quoted in Berthoff, 356-57.

⁹⁴ Ward, 612.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

around the turn of the twentieth century, the grassroots population insisted more and more that the South's need to industrialize and modernize was not worth the plethora of problems that accompanied indiscriminate immigration.

After 1900, it is possible to detect a shift in southern attitudes toward immigration. The southern grassroots population moved away from its advocacy of selective immigration to a policy of condemning industrialists and insisting on complete immigration restriction. The *Manufacturers' Record* of Baltimore was the South's leading exponent of industrial expansion. As early as 1888, the *Record* itself implored the Southern Immigration Association to proceed with caution: "The South needs many more men of capital... but it does not need mere muscle."⁹⁶ Rapidity of industrialization did not halt a growing southern nativism. In 1891, Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge published an essay concerning the ill-effects of unrestricted immigration. He explained that the desire for "rapidity of settlement" and "quick development of wealth" in the South was "madness." The economic advantages that these would bring were not worth the price of lowering the standard of American citizenship. He entreated: "More important to a country than wealth and population is the quality of its people."⁹⁷ By 1905, southern anti-immigrationists publicly condemned industrialists' plans. They criticized the capitalist forces that only cared about securing "cheap labor" and neglected whether the southern community benefitted "so long as dividends were

⁹⁶ *Manufacturers' Record*, Vol. 13 (1888), 11, 25, as quoted in Patrick Reed, "Nativism in Virginia in the 1890s," in *The Landscape of American History: Essays in Memoriam to Richard W. Griffin*, ed. James T. Wall (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1979), 99.

⁹⁷ Henry Cabot Lodge, "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration," *The North American Review* 152 (1891), 611.

increased.” They accused industrialists of blatantly disregarding the preservation of the South’s American character and its moral and intellectual welfare.⁹⁸ Still other restrictionists not only attacked industrialists, but also made plain their nativist reasoning by specifically identifying the repulsive ‘new’ immigrants as a collective group of people that they did not want settling in their vicinity.

Prominent Tennessean lawyer, Joshua Caldwell, aptly summarized the feelings of grassroots southerners in a memorial collection of his biography and other writings:

It is not uncommon to hear of conventions, and to read editorials, in aid of immigration....I have been met with the assertion that we cannot, without immigration, develop our country. There is nothing so irrational as all this hurry to develop things. I would far rather leave the development to a remote posterity than accomplish it with the aid of Italian lazzaroni and Hungarian paupers. Let us keep our blood clean and pure. We get along well enough as it is.⁹⁹

As Caldwell’s incensed excerpt suggests, the majority of working class and middle class southerners came to fight industrialists over the South’s post-Civil War immigration movement. The decade and a half before the First World War erupted abroad saw southern nativism germinate and effectively keep the wave of ‘new’ European immigrants out. The Appalachian South was a fascinating exception to this rule, as I will discuss in Chapter Four. First, however, it is necessary to understand the South’s “Anglo-Saxon” nativism that was harvested in a region that, in reality, did not receive any amount of foreigners compared to the other sections of the country.

⁹⁸ Ward, 614.

⁹⁹ Joshua William Caldwell, *A Memorial Volume, Containing His Biography, Writings, and Addresses* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Brandon Printing Company, 1909), 203.

Higham discussed the South's breed of Anglo-Saxon nativism between approximately 1900 and 1914. Although southern nativists were not updated or polished on the racial science that was beginning to affect literate northern circles, a southern racial nativism arose that was imbedded deep in its sectional folkways. Long-standing primitive race-feelings came to the fore and were directed at the new immigration surge. The South's general hostility towards European newcomers in this period reflected its chronic "ethnophobia."¹⁰⁰ Higham rationalized that the thrust of southern nativism could not solely be explained in terms of the change in and pace of European immigrant type. Another activator of this change was the flowering of a sectional American nationalism. The South donned a defensive nationalist posture that was imbued with Anglo-Saxon race pride.¹⁰¹ As I have explained, southerners had been proud of their Anglo-Saxon ancestry since the antebellum days, and in the early twentieth century they found it easy to buttress this heightened sense of nationalism with fervent anti-alien sentiment. The industrializing South made sure it remained the "real bastion of Americanism."¹⁰²

The South's nativism culminated into horrific violence when white, native-born southerners lynched foreigners. Two prime examples that received extensive press attention were the lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891 and the lynching of Leo Frank in northwestern Georgia in 1915. The south Italians were lynched after a southern court acquitted the group of murdering the New Orleans police chief. A vigilante group of the city's "best" and most "patriotic"

¹⁰⁰ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 165-167.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 171.

citizens gathered on the night of the verdict and then marched on the prison and proceeded to gun down the acquitted foreigners.¹⁰³ Reactions to the mass lynching varied considerably. Notable, however, was that the predominant exaltation that New Orleanians had rightfully administered a wild vigilante justice to the mafiosos. Furthermore, many southerners warned that this form of mob rule would continue as long as immigration restriction was not implemented and the scum of Europe continued to treat America as a haven.¹⁰⁴ The lynching of the Jewish factory superintendent, Leo Frank, also revealed southerners' full-blown nativism in the early twentieth century. After a long and sensational trial, Frank was convicted of murdering a young white American girl, largely on the testimony of a black janitor.¹⁰⁵ The fact that a black witness's testimony in a murder trial in the Deep South state of Georgia essentially established the defendant's guilt spoke to the heightened degree of anti-Semitism and racial nativism present in the South at that time. It is likely that Frank's immigrant and "in-between" status cost him his life in a region and era where racial violence effectively dictated societal norms and black and immigrant resentment were ordinary. Native-born white southerners lumped the inferior segments of their population together and played one off of the other as they desired. A white Georgian judge and jury accepting a black janitor's sketchy testimony to convict a Jewish mill overseer in a 1915 murder trial is a case in point. These historic lynching cases represent the remarkable manifestation of

¹⁰³ Barbara Botein, "The Hennessy Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 20 (1979), 262, 272-72.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁰⁵ Jacobson, 63.

southern nativism and the principal reason behind the failure of the southern industrialists' immigration movement.

The South's immigration campaign failed because of other reasons as well. Advertisements circulated by the North and the West kept up a barrage of negative reports about living conditions in the South. The West was in direct competition with the southern section to secure foreign settlers, and the North harbored its old sectional animosity towards the former secessionist South. These unfriendly sectional critics claimed that the climate was too hot; malarial fever common; native southerners lazy and proud; legal protection uncertain; political environment intolerant; and region overrun with blacks.¹⁰⁶ Especially affecting were the claims concerning lawlessness, outsider intolerability, and the miscarriage of justice. They were all too well-founded.¹⁰⁷ The South's industrialists, who predominantly served to profit from the 'new' immigration, were unable to reconcile the southern grassroots population to an influx of foreigners.¹⁰⁸ Non-nativism as a business strategy did not prevail throughout the wider South. However, in the unique and isolated region of the Upper South—in particular the central portion of the Appalachian mountain range—nativism and its causes were far more ambiguous. The rural-industrial mountainous setting allowed for economic gain to keep nativistic sentiments in check, *sometimes*. At other times, nativism and ethnocentrism were generated by the same race-thinking that racked the rest of country. The significance lies in identifying the factors, and combinations of factors, that dictated the interactions between the

¹⁰⁶ Fleming, 277, 296.

¹⁰⁷ "Immigration and the South," *The Nation*, Vol. 82, No. 2133 (1906), 398.

¹⁰⁸ Belissary, 247, see also Berthoff, 343.

different groups of people that lived in Appalachia in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century.

Chapter III – Enter Appalachia: Both the Region and the Field of Study

The first sections of this project provided the indispensable complex context of how the histories of nativism, immigration, and the larger South intertwined and were pulsating in the United States in the half-century between the end of the Civil War and the outbreak of WWI. The remainder of my study is a more minute examination of these interconnected histories in the Appalachian South. This chapter introduces the region and the native population (Appalachians or mountaineers) and highlights the relevant characteristics of both, in order to then go on and interpret how they shaped the nature of interactions with migrants in the mountains. I will also discuss the region as a recent academic field of study.

Even more so than the myth-riddled nineteenth century South, the region of Appalachia has remained a mysterious American geographic space. Both the mountains and the people have been described in stereotyped and fictitious terms since the first travel writers made the region the subject of a post-Civil War literary craze. Nevertheless, it is these myth-making and debunking processes that have given Appalachia part of its zeal and a major reason that fostered my initial interest in the folkways of the southern mountains. The fictional portrayals of Appalachia enjoyed nearly a century-long reign (1870s-1970s) of being accepted as truth, and this history became part and parcel of a constructed regional

identity.¹⁰⁹ The most pervasive myths about the region were that it was isolated, “backwoods,” poverty-stricken, and static—forever stuck in the past. The Appalachian people were believed to be naïve and feudist.¹¹⁰ They were labeled as olden-time moonshiners and the sorriest victims of America’s modern industrial transformation. More recently terms such as “hillbilly” and “white trash”¹¹¹ were disseminated and a variety of federal government administrations pledged to rid the mountains of its endemic poverty and inadequate education systems. These piecemeal images contributed to the idea that Appalachia was exceptional. Appalachian exceptionalism came to mean that the region was not affected by the same growth and modernizing intervals that shaped the rest of the United States and that typical American historical developments did not unfold in an expected/anticipated fashion in the isolated southern mountains. This is a succinct recount of the most pronounced historical myths of Appalachia.

The physical region of Appalachia encompasses thirteen states, or portions thereof, extending from the top of the Deep South to the bottom of New England. I am interested in what the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) refers to today as Central Appalachia—primarily the territory encompassing West Virginia, southwestern Virginia, eastern Kentucky, and East Tennessee.¹¹² Central

¹⁰⁹ Audrey J. Horning, “Myth, Migration, and Material Culture: Archaeology and the Ulster Influence on Appalachia,” *Historical Archaeology* 36 (2002), 129.

¹¹⁰ John C. Campbell, “Studies for the Russell Sage Foundation, 1908-1912,” John C. Campbell Papers, #3800, Folder 142. Southern Historical Collection (SHC), The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill.

¹¹¹ John Hartigan Jr., *Odd Tribes: Toward A Cultural Analysis of White People* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 111.

¹¹² Central Appalachia was called “Southern Appalachia” or the “Southern Highlands” by earlier travelers around the late nineteenth and early twentieth

Appalachia is particularly isolated compared to the other subregions of the mountain range. The Blue Ridge and valley section to the east and the south became connected to southern tidewater markets, and on the western and northern end of the range along the Ohio River, market and trade connections were made with northern markets.¹¹³ The subregion wedged between these two is significant because this central portion is largely where the negative cultural connotations have been taken from. This is often the area that traditional Appalachian imagery is referencing.¹¹⁴ The period of intense industrialization that transformed this region between the 1870s and the First World War is what I have examined. Industrialists came upon a heavily timbered, rugged, and remote world—with narrow wagon roads and footpaths, and un-bridged creeks and rivers. A sparse native population, a subsistence agricultural economy, and an absence of institutional life are what greeted the thousands of migrant laborers and capitalist bosses who entered the mountains.

John C. Campbell is regarded as one of the most respected early Appalachian surveyors. He was an educator and reformer who spent twenty-five years living among the mountain people (approximately between the mid-1890s and his early death in 1919), interviewing both the small farmers of the mountains and the city-dwellers of the valleys, and dedicated much of his life to improving the

centuries. Throughout this project, when I use the term “Appalachia” I am referring to present-day Central Appalachia.

¹¹³ Deborah Weiner, *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 20.

¹¹⁴ Margaret Ripley Wolfe, “The Appalachian Reality: Ethnic and Class Diversity,” *East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications* 52 (1980), 40.

lives and institutions of the highlanders.¹¹⁵ Campbell is a reliable source to explain some of the important characteristics of white, native-born Appalachians.

Campbell divided Appalachians into the three groups: the nominal mountaineers who resided in urban environments and were typically financially stable; the normal mountaineers were the rural people who lived in more remote mountain sections and who met mountain living conditions more or less successfully; and, the smallest of the groups, was the needy mountaineer who lived in relative poverty. The conditions of the needy mountaineer had been so over-emphasized in the nineteenth century that the typical success, stability, and progressiveness of the nominal and normal mountaineers were ignored. Campbell insisted that these were the authentic conditions of the mountain population and that the problems of the needy mountaineer were not exceptional or insurmountable, merely the rural problems of the United States intensified.¹¹⁶

Campbell described the personal characteristics of the mountaineers as well. He argued that the mountaineer was not as stolid as had been assumed. In fact, Campbell discerned that mountaineers were “very emotional,” but they donned reserve and impassiveness as a protective attitude when in contact with strangers. Their appearance of stolidity guarded against ridicule and was simply born of a natural suspicion of outsiders due to relative isolation. Individualism, honesty, generosity, and hospitality characterized this population. Rumors of their

¹¹⁵ John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, 1973). This book was originally published by John’s wife, Olive Dame Campbell, after his death in 1919.

¹¹⁶ Campbell, “Impression of the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers,” Knoxville, Tennessee, April 22-23, 1915, Campbell Papers, Folder 172, SHC, UNC.

indolence and lawlessness were unfounded.¹¹⁷ Moreover, mountaineers were less constricted by class distinctions than other Americans. In one of the speeches delivered at Campbell's Southern Mountain Conference in 1917, English folklorist Cecil Sharp explained mountaineers' disregard for caste systems and pedigree. He remarked:

They were the first people I ever met who had no idea at all about different classes of society. That is a position impossible for us to take.... Mountaineers take you as though there was no such distinction. They talked to me just as to a humane being.... Nobody ever presumed that one person was richer or poorer, or one was cleverer, or better dressed. Those things never occur to them.¹¹⁸

This overview of both the geographic characteristics of the region and the locals' personality traits is significant to establish in order to begin to understand how the myth-laden Appalachian section of the United States reacted to conditions of industrialization and its migrant labor force.

Appalachian studies as an academic field emerged during the period of historical revisionism in the 1960s when the trend to study marginalized groups gained scholastic popularity. However, examinations of Appalachia and its history have seesawed back and forth between “bursts of activism and apathy, [and] national attention and neglect.”¹¹⁹ Based on this episodic interest in this region, four major “rediscoveries” of Appalachia have occurred. The first rediscovery was a literary one. In the post-Civil War period, Americans developed a great fondness for regional novels—especially narratives that centered on antiquated customs

¹¹⁷ Campbell, “Studies for the Russell Sage Foundation, 1908-1912,” Campbell Papers, Folder 142, SHC, UNC.

¹¹⁸ Cecil Sharp, “Address by Mr. Cecil Sharp,” Knoxville, Tennessee, April 12, 1917, Campbell Papers, Folder 174, SHC, UNC.

¹¹⁹ Mark T. Banker, *Appalachians All: East Tennessee and the Elusive History of an American Region* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 7-8.

and strange dialects. The interactions and isolated cabins of Appalachia provided just that. Color writers and other travelers churned out a flood of mountain novels that recounted sensational and often fictitious stories of life in the region. The second rediscovery was marked by educated reformers like John Campbell who attempted to establish good schools and other social and economic institutions in the mountains in the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, many of these outside reformers sometimes only volunteered in mountain mission schools for a short period, and then returned to the comforts of their hometowns in New England and elsewhere in the North to pen their remedies regarding mountain problems. The third rediscovery centered primarily on the coalfields during the Great Depression. Liberals discovered the plights and hardscrabble existence of Appalachian miners in the 1930s and attempted to expose their injustices and to garner support for this working-class population. The fourth, and latest, rediscovery in the 1960s was connected to the inception of Appalachian studies as a field. This was a reaction to what the rest of America perceived to be an economic and social crisis that had developed in the southern mountain region.¹²⁰ This pattern of on-again-off-again interest in Appalachia indicates that there has never been any sustained pressure to improve conditions in the region as a whole. The “problems” that have labeled and plagued Appalachia are very complex and arduous; hence, swift and spectacular improvements are not feasible.¹²¹

My research project is situated in the latest rediscovery with the development of Appalachian studies as an official field of inquiry. Early in the

¹²⁰ Robert F. Munn, “The Latest Rediscovery of Appalachia,” *Mountain Life and Work* 40 (1965), 11.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

field's existence, scholars focused on purely defining "Appalachia" and etching out the intricate origins of this idea. Since then, Appalachian studies has advanced to exploring and debunking the multifarious Appalachian myths and stereotypes. The field has specifically zeroed in on the radical period of industrialization that transformed the region beginning in the 1870s through to World War I. In 1962, Harry M. Caudill wrote the first major work to examine the industrialization process in Appalachia. Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* was a poignant account of brutal economic exploitation. This study and some of his later work were undermined, however, by his tendency to condemn the Appalachian people as inherently inferior and incapable of forming a stable society. Caudill's major flaw was his perpetuation of Appalachian stereotypes. In 1980, John Gaventa released *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. His study attempted to identify the early root causes of Appalachian problems by examining the economic and political developments of mining communities in eastern Kentucky and Tennessee. This work, like Caudill's, tended to characterize the Appalachian people as passive victims throughout the wave of industrialization. In 1981 and 1982, Ronald Eller and David Corbin produced their own respective examinations of coal towns and the effects of this domineering extractive industry on the local population. Eller's *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers* presented the largely one-sided negative outcomes of industrialization on the locals. Corbin's *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields* was a relatively morose account of life in the industrializing mountains where the inhabitants were not inclined to form intricate communities. All of these works have contributed significantly to understanding Appalachian history; but, these

historians primarily focused on the exploitation of the region and less on the different groups in the mountains as active participants who played varying roles in shaping the modernization of Appalachia.¹²²

Most recently, a trend in the industrialization period thread of Appalachian literature has been closing this gap. Anthologies such as *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (1995) and *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940* (2002), for example, have presented more minute studies of the different mountain groups that dynamically affected Appalachia's modern development. The final section of my project is grounded here. As mentioned previously, Appalachia is not simply a static backdrop for exploring the interactions between white native-born mountaineers, blacks, 'new' immigrants, and powerful industrial bosses. This particular American region actively shaped the relations between these groups throughout its industrial period.

Chapter IV – Interactions in the Southern Mountains

Today there are very few traces that tell of the thousands of southern and eastern European immigrants and blacks that dwelled in the remote region of Central Appalachia throughout its most dramatic period of industrialization. It is almost as if their time working, living, fighting, befriending, and socializing with each other and the local mountain population never existed. Why is this dynamic and rich history so tricky to locate? Many of the answers to this question have

¹²² Randall Gene Lawrence, "Appalachian Metamorphosis: Industrializing Society on the Central Appalachian Plateau, 1860-1913" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1983), 3-6.

already been brought forth. The incredible influx of 'new' immigrants to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century through to the First World War coincided with, and also triggered, the rise of an age of heightened American nationalism and a general defensive nationwide attitude against the perceived alien menace. Nowhere did this grassroots nativism grow more potent than in the South, and consequently, the immigrant population below the Mason-Dixon line did not nearly compare to the astronomical numbers that inundated the other sections. Scholars have, to a certain extent, ignored exploring the experiences and consequences of this lesser, but not inconsequential, foreign element that *did* make it southward. The Appalachian South obviously falls under this line of geographic reasoning. Furthermore, many of the 'new' immigrants who came to work in the southern mountains and in the middle and deeper South were transient—"birds of passage." The southern blacks that made the trek into the Appalachian mountains were also incredibly migratory. When the Great Depression hit, and then again when the final collapse of the extractive industries occurred in the 1950s, the majority of non-natives (black, white, and "foreign") out-migrated to more promising industrial prospects in the urban centers of the North and West. The Appalachian region was left barren and markedly less inhabited. Finally, the Appalachian myths of impenetrable isolation, static society, and homogeneous folk population have compounded the reasons for the lack of inquiry into this one-time ethnically diverse industrializing American region.

This chapter seeks to uncover whether the interactions between the different groups who congregated in Appalachia during its transformative industrializing years were characterized by hostility or civility. I have laid the

complex ground work to explain what was going on in the more nationwide, mainstream conversation between 'new' immigration and American nativism, as well as what was being expressed in the wider South during the same time period. More than the nationwide and greater South histories, the Appalachian region dictated a different set of activators for nativism than the precise ideological ones Higham originally identified in *Strangers* in 1955. I believe that economic gains—for both the white native-born mountaineers and industrialists, and for the blacks and foreign immigrants—played a far more substantial role in Appalachia than elsewhere. Appalachia *had* been isolated and was seriously less economically developed and secure than the rest of the country. Life and well-being were precarious. General hostilities (including nativistic episodes) and patterns of civility and tolerance could be dictated by economic security, class allegiances, and business strategies. As with all histories of group interaction, ethnic and race relations, and dramatic industrial change, ambiguities and contradictions also arose.

At the outset, it is necessary to outline how Appalachia was abruptly integrated into the American and world markets. The first order of business was for capitalists to acquire thousands of acres of land from the local population. The buying up of land proceeded monotonously as inexperienced Appalachians sold their valuable land and mineral rights habitually for low prices.¹²³ Once the land was purchased, rail lines advanced deeper into the mountains and the extractive industrial operations followed close behind. At this point, employment,

¹²³ Wolfe, "Putting Them in Their Places: Industrial Housing in Southern Appalachia, 1900-1930," *Appalachian Heritage* 7 (1979), 27.

demographics, and politics in the mountains changed. Appalachians had been primarily preindustrial small-scale farmers and merchants.¹²⁴ Subsistence agricultural practices were the major (and usually the only) source of income for mountain families before 1900. Employment and family income then became reorganized around non-agricultural jobs such as mining, logging, and textiles.¹²⁵ The population left their ancestral farms and relocated to centers of urban industrial growth. It is important to note that the majority of Appalachians moved to company-owned towns (and this setting will be discussed in detail further on). Appalachian political apparatuses became linked to very powerful industrialists. This political reorganization ensured that local and state governments promoted a policy of economic expansion and extraction of the region's natural resources.¹²⁶ The very nature and purpose of work changed at this point also. Mountaineers became bound to extractive industrial employment's emphasis on the export of profit and the payment of wages.¹²⁷ Even the Appalachian families who initially tried to remain on a portion of the land that they had sold and then paid rent to continue farming were eventually forced to relocate to mining camps and mill villages. Land values rose exponentially and most mountaineers could not keep up

¹²⁴ Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia, 1900-1920: The Italian Experience in Wise County, Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 87 (1979), 464.

¹²⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Economic and Social Problems and Conditions of the Southern Appalachians*, Miscellaneous Publication No. 205 (Washington, D. C., 1935), 3, 16, as quoted in Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), xix.

¹²⁶ Gordon Bartlett McKinney, "Mountain Republicanism, 1876-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1971), 170, as quoted in Eller, xxi.

¹²⁷ Lawrence, 54.

with the increase in farm rents and the lessening returns on their soil.¹²⁸ Although pockets of industrialization and population relocations occurred unevenly throughout this region, no one was left utterly untouched by this wholesale economic transformation. Thousands of Appalachians were obligated to join the ever-growing ranks of the new mountain industrial working class.

Modern capitalism came later to Appalachia than it did to other regions of the country. Some Appalachian scholars have argued that this industrial invasion was a cultural “shock” to the southern mountains’ predominantly rural setting. Unlike in other industrializing areas of the United States where Americans more often had a choice to abdicate one way of life for another, rural Appalachians had industrialization imposed on them and their geographic environment. This shock factor was problematic because Appalachia had simply not experienced that burgeoning of preindustrial capitalism that had established itself in the northeastern part of the country throughout the duration of the nineteenth century. The economic development that began in the Appalachian mountains between the 1870s and the 1910s represented the “superimposition of mature capitalism on a society that had not been sufficiently cushioned by the preceding economic stage,” and thus Appalachia affords an example of “unrestrained capitalism allowed to run its course.”¹²⁹

Few aspects of this new reordering of life in the mountains were more significant than the company-owned town. This was the foremost symbol of the boom years and it played an important role in the interactions between the

¹²⁸ Eller, 166.

¹²⁹ Wolfe, “The Appalachian Reality,” 43.

different groups of people who migrated to Appalachia. The dominance and multitude of company towns in the southern mountains were in large part a necessary and expedient reaction to the physical and demographic conditions within the region itself. All of the extractive industries in Appalachia commenced in an area of very few established villages and towns. Sparse and scattered settlements, lack of transportation routes, thick stands of timber, and steep mountainous terrain forced these pioneer companies to literally build their industrial developments and adjoining communities from the ground up.¹³⁰ Coal mining was the most prevalent and powerful industry in Appalachia, and will be the main industry discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter. Typical construction of a mine and company town proceeded as follows: a narrow tram road was opened up on which to transport men and building supplies; work gangs then hauled a steam engine and sawmill over the trail whilst cutting lumber for initial mine braces; crews first built the structures only necessary for the mining operation such as the tibble and administrative offices; finally, the mining plant, railroad tracks, and company housing were erected.¹³¹ This pattern was repeated in innumerable ravines and hillsides throughout Central Appalachia and reached its height of expansion in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹³²

Appalachian historians have presented mixed views on how industrialization affected the local mountain population. The positive aspects for the mountaineers have been presented in a light that suggests it gave them more

¹³⁰ Eller, 163, see also, Weiner, 23.

¹³¹ Eller, 164.

¹³² U.S Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Housing By Employers in the United States*, Bulletin No. 263 (Washington, D. C., 1920), 56, as quoted in Eller, 164-65.

opportunities and brought them the benefits of modernization. It is not only unfair, but also incorrect, to portray Appalachians' initial interaction with railroad and mineral buyers as one of total bamboozling and gullibility. Other than the locals who were actually physically displaced by rail, lumber, or coal operations, some Appalachians had options.¹³³ Locals who chose the new industrial lifestyle did so with certain understandings and purposes. They looked forward to a regular cash income, indoor plumbing, electricity, health care, well-stocked company stores, and better schools. These perks of modernization provided mountaineers with better than the norms that they were accustomed to and helped to elevate their standard of living generally.¹³⁴

The negative aspects have been more remarked upon and publicized. The idea that both the people and the land were exploited is commonplace in Appalachian history. Capitalists exploited the unsophisticated mountaineer labor force by paying them comparatively low wages and making them work in dangerous conditions.¹³⁵ The land was exploited by harsh extractive techniques and pollution. After the mountaineers' exposure to the preliminary prosperity of the windfall of modernization, the profits made off of the rich natural resources of the region flowed out of the mountains.¹³⁶ The subordination of local interests to those of outside corporations brought much hardship to the native population. Another principal argument is that the company towns created conditions of powerlessness and dependency for mountaineers. By forsaking their precarious

¹³³ Lawrence, 64-65, 89.

¹³⁴ Wolfe, "The Appalachian Reality," 41-24, see also, Lawrence, 89-90.

¹³⁵ Wolfe, "The Appalachian Reality," 42.

¹³⁶ Eller, xxiv.

lifestyle of subsistence farming, Appalachians in the company towns became subservient to the company and dependent on a wage income. The company permeated all aspects of life in industrial Appalachian settings:

[The mountaineer] lived in a company house, he worked in the company mine, and he purchased his groceries and other commodities from the company store. He sent his children to the company school and patronized the company doctor and the company church. The company deducted rent and school, medical, and other fees from his monthly wage, and, under the prevailing system of scrip, he occasionally ended the month without a cash income.¹³⁷

The privately owned company town, either directly or indirectly, defined the nature of community life in a large part of this region during its critical period of economic revolution. And mountaineers' recognized this trade-off of independence and relative dearth for dependence and steady wage earning. The educator John Campbell observed that Appalachians had difficulty making this drastic adjustment.¹³⁸ Overall, however, it is accurate that an intricate combination of both positive and negative outcomes characterized Appalachia's rapid industrialization. The benefits and harm were relatively equally experienced.

Many mountaineers maintained a dual farming and mining existence between the 1870s and 1910s. Some mountaineers found it difficult to adjust to the specific schedule and routines of industrial production. Many hoped to make a sizable portion of money in a short period of time so they could then purchase good land and return to farming.¹³⁹ Others left the coal camps at seasonal intervals for planting and harvesting. They also laid off for important mountain occasions

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

¹³⁸ Campbell, *The Southern Highlander*, 89.

¹³⁹ Judge Watson, "Economic and Cultural Development of Eastern Kentucky from 1900 to the Present" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1963), 54-55, as quoted in Eller, 166.

such as weddings, funerals, family reunions, and even for cyclical hunting and fishing trips.¹⁴⁰ The most critical problem that industrial bosses and operators faced in Appalachia was the unreliability and shortage of the local workforce. The instability of the white, native-born laboring class was also a significant reason for the company town to wield such a degree of social control over its inhabitants. Capitalists bitterly complained that mountaineers were unsuited for industrial employment and claimed, “only a generation ago they were at least two hundred years behind the civilization of the more densely populated sections of the United States.”¹⁴¹ The early success and expansion of industrialization, combined with the periodic undependability and general diminutive numbers of the native labor force, companies began to supplement their working ranks with southern blacks and ‘new’ immigrants.

African Americans

The Great Migration of southern rural blacks to northern, western, and southern cities has received ample scholarly attention; however, large numbers of southern blacks also migrated to industrializing Appalachia. Even before the region’s rapid period of industrialization, slaves had been mining coal in the 1850s in some of the first collieries in the Kanawha Valley (located in present day southwestern West Virginia).¹⁴² After the Civil War, many blacks who had been

¹⁴⁰ Eller, 167.

¹⁴¹ Stonega Coal & Coke Company, *Annual Report*, 1917, p. 3, Westmoreland Coal Company, Engineering Department, Big Stone Gap, Virginia, as quoted in Wolfe, “Aliens in Southern Appalachia: Catholics in the Coal Camps, 1900-1940,” *Appalachian Heritage* 6 (1978), 45.

¹⁴² Otis K. Rice, “Coal Mining in the Kanawha Valley in 1861: A View of Industrialization in the Old South,” *Journal of Southern History* 31 (1965), 415-16, as quoted in Eller, 168.

part of nomadic railroad construction gangs laying tracks through the southern mountains sought employment in the surrounding coalfields.¹⁴³ Most black miners in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries worked in the coalfields of West Virginia. As the extractive industries expanded, however, good pay and opportunities drew them also to the mining and lumbering regions of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.¹⁴⁴

Both pull and push factors led blacks to the Appalachian mountains. Pull factors were such things as being able to draw a cash wage and lesser degrees of racism in the Upper South. Push factors were the intense racial hostilities ingrained by the failure of Reconstruction and the institutionalization of Jim Crow, as well as the oppressive sharecropping system that kept blacks subjugated and restricted to agrarian work in the Deep South.¹⁴⁵ After 1900, many southern blacks were specifically recruited by labor agents who were hired by a company or a group of companies in the mountains. Labor agents who scoured the mid- and deeper South were typically well armed, well financed, and often accompanied by several black “recruiters” from the mountains who were willing to project strictly a positive image of life in the mountain mines and camps. Once the agents reached their destinations, they sent the recruiters into southern black neighborhoods to obtain a sufficient number of new laborers who would then make the journey northward. They were loaded aboard trains and the doors were sealed and

¹⁴³ Ibid, see also Joe William Trotter Jr., “Black Migration to Southern West Virginia,” in *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940*, eds. Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis (Morgantown, West Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 2002), 138.

¹⁴⁴ Lawrence, 94.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 94-95, 103-104, see also, Trotter, 139.

guarded until they reached the mountains.¹⁴⁶ Not all black laborers arrived from the deeper South voluntarily. Sometimes southern county and municipal authorities could be bribed to open their jail doors for any convict who was willing to board a labor train north.¹⁴⁷ Upon their arrival to Appalachia, race relations between the native labor force, industrial bosses, and southern blacks were both civil and hostile at different times and contingent on certain economic circumstances. Also, Appalachian historians have come down on both sides of the nature of the interactions between the groups in the mountains.

It has been thought that the racial attitudes of white mountaineers towards blacks have been far less hostile than other parts of the South, and even “unimportant” to the pattern of Appalachian life. This line of thinking emerged out of the fact that the southern mountains never developed a large-scale slave economic system and consequently, the highland population had significantly less contact with slaves and then freedmen throughout American history.¹⁴⁸

Southerners who moved westward and up into the mountains in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries despised the institution of slavery and desired to keep their mountainous section open to free labor.¹⁴⁹ Early mountain settlers loathed both the slave and the valley and coastal slaveholders, though early historical

¹⁴⁶ Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia: A Story of West Virginia's Four Major Mine Wars and Other Thrilling Incidents of Its Coal Fields* (Morgantown, West Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 1969), 4-6, as quoted in Eller, 169-70.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ John C. Inscoe, “Race and Racism in Nineteenth-Century Southern Appalachia: Myths, Realities, and Ambiguities,” in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 105.

¹⁴⁹ C. G. Woodson, “Freedom and Slavery in Appalachian America,” *The Journal of Negro History* 1 (1916), 140.

accounts claim that their prejudice was more so directed towards the institution and the master-class.¹⁵⁰ The diminished presence of slavery in Appalachia gave the region the mark of moral superiority, which also fit with the stereotypical rugged individualism credited to mountain men. This history led many to the deduction that the rejection of slavery was a cognizant Appalachian choice.¹⁵¹ Appalachian counties in southern states were further deemed to be “bastions of liberty” through their pro-Union stance during the secession crisis and Civil War. States nearly divided over Yankee or Rebel sympathies, and Virginia actually did—hence the creation of the loyal mountain state of West Virginia.¹⁵² Racial liberality was additionally displayed through its hidden routes and mountain escorts for the great Underground Railroad. Ohio minister, William Goodrich, described this history in an 1872 sermon:

Explain it as we may, there belongs to mountain regions a moral elevation of their own. They give birth to strong, free, pure and noble races. They lift the men who dwell among them, in thought and resolve. Slavery, falsehood, base compliance, luxury belong to the plains. Freedom, truth, hardy sacrifice, simple honor, to the highlands.¹⁵³

Another way to look at the mountaineers’ attitudes towards race and slavery speaks to a more unique brand of racism. New York journalist Frederick Law Olmsted embarked on an extensive fourteen-month tour of different parts of

¹⁵⁰ Albert Bushnell Hart, “Slavery and Abolition, 1831-1841,” Harper & Brothers (1906), 73; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 230-32, as quoted in Woodson, 140, 147.

¹⁵¹ Loyal Jones, “Appalachian Values,” in *Voices from the Hills: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, ed. Robert J. Higgs (New York: Ungar, 1975), 507-17, as quoted in Inscoe, 108-109.

¹⁵² Woodson, 149-50.

¹⁵³ William Goodrich, *God’s Handiwork in the Sea and in the Mountains: Sermons Preached after a Summer Vacation* (Cleveland, Ohio: Privately Published, n. d.), quoted in Inscoe, 110.

the South between 1853 and 1854. The last leg of his journey took him through the backcountry of Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia. Although Olmsted's travel account is not free of bias, he moved through such a remote portion of the South that he was able to interview the most arcane and yet likely typical segment of the Appalachian population. Olmsted discerned that mountaineers were equally contemptuous of all the participants—both coerced and free-willed—in the institution of slavery. He believed that slaves truly disgusted the mountaineers and that few advocated abolishing the institution. Rather, they displayed a blatant racism and it dominated their rationales for tolerating its perpetuation.¹⁵⁴ Olmsted and others also recognized the degree to which class resentment (between mountain yeoman farmer and planter-class) was at the core of whatever opposition Appalachians felt towards slavery and its beneficiaries.¹⁵⁵ Clearly, local mountain attitudes towards slaves were ambiguous. This ambiguous mountain race relations history also carried over into the post-Civil War period in the coal mines and company towns.

As mentioned, black migrants who arrived in the developing Appalachian coal mining districts considered the Upper South a haven as compared to the Jim Crow Deep South. Such mining regions as in southern West Virginia did not go through the confrontational transitions of slavery and Reconstruction. Thus, Appalachian counties could typically start with a clean race slate, and the centuries of master-slave dynamics were not the basis of black-white relations in the

¹⁵⁴ Inscoe, 113-14.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

coalfields.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, black workers looked forward to better educational opportunities for themselves and their children, and also to less restricted racial voting practices.¹⁵⁷ A recent black migrant to Omar, West Virginia wrote to a friend back in Alabama about the improved life for blacks in the mountains: “a collared [sic] man stands just as good as a white man here.”¹⁵⁸ Race consciousness was simply more limited.¹⁵⁹ Most importantly, however, were the hiring/employment patterns and control of the company town that dictated less hostile race relations.

American coal mining scholars attest to the relatively non-discriminatory hiring and employment habits in the mountains. A black laborer from the Deep South could find work easily in the booming coal towns: “a man—not matter what race—who appeared at the company office willing to work could often go to work that same day.”¹⁶⁰ Some mine superintendents even preferred black miners to other groups. John Williams was an experienced Welsh mine manager who took a position in the newer coal mines in Central Appalachia. He had been warned in the older collieries in Pennsylvania that blacks were “the most treacherous and devilish lot of people to deal with, and the only way to manage them was to knock them down with anything at hand, at any sign of offense on their part.” After working with a large black labor force for some time in Appalachia, Williams

¹⁵⁶ Jean Battlo, “Mining in the Melting Pot: The African American Influx into the McDowell County Mines,” *Goldenseal: West Virginia Traditional Life* 23 (1997), 48.

¹⁵⁷ Trotter, 140.

¹⁵⁸ W. L. McMillan to R. L. Thorton, November 2, 1916, Straight Numerical File, 182363-231, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives, Washington, D. C., as quoted in David Corbin, *Life, Work and Rebellion in the Coalfields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 62.

¹⁵⁹ James T. Laing, “The Negro Miner in West Virginia,” *Social Forces* 14 (1936), 422.

¹⁶⁰ Lawrence, 99.

concluded that that they were all “extremely well behaved and enlightened people.” He was fond of his employees and said that he had never had the slightest bit of trouble with any of them. What is more, he explained he “would rather manage 500 [black miners] than half a dozen of the white people in this country.”¹⁶¹ Racism was completely non-existent when another mine superintendent fired and blacklisted four white miners after they complained about the hiring of a black motorman in McDowell County, West Virginia. An elderly black miner supported this type of transaction: “If the company felt a black man could do a better job, cause they wanted profits, they put the black man on the job and nothing was said. It was up to the company.... I don’t know if the whites resented it, if they did, it didn’t matter cause couldn’t do anything about it.”¹⁶² Few occupations in America during this time offered blacks any type of mobility. But, in the coal mines, hardworking and skilled black laborers could be promoted from coal and coke loaders and pick miners up to motormen, brakemen, tipple workers, and track workers.¹⁶³ Black miners were indeed malleable and desirable in Appalachia. Not only were they “more easily handled” and suitable than other types of workers, but southern blacks were extremely keen to work in actual wage-earning jobs and became good customers for the company stores.¹⁶⁴ Even when policies of segregation (primarily regarding housing) were imposed by the

¹⁶¹ Battlo, “Mining in the Melting Pot,” 49.

¹⁶² W. J. Elgin to Justin Collins, May 9, 1912, Justin Collins Papers, West Virginia University Library, Morgantown, West Virginia; interviews conducted by David Corbin with John Drew, Williamson, West Virginia, Curt Smith, Mullins, West Virginia, and John Schofield, Aploca, West Virginia, summer 1975 as quoted in Corbin, 63.

¹⁶³ Battlo, “Mining in the Melting Pot,” 49.

¹⁶⁴ Laing, 418-19.

company operators, they could be violated when it was economically necessary or convenient. One example of this inversion occurred in the Winding Gulf coal field in West Virginia. A coal operator obtained the services of white cokemen, who were rare to come by, so the operator simply placed them in the available empty company houses in the black section of town because all of the others were occupied.¹⁶⁵ Economic gain and sound business strategies had the power to decrease racism and invert segregation (where it did exist) in the rural-industrial setting of Appalachia.

The relationship between white mountaineers and southern blacks could also be shaped by Appalachia's industrial setting, particularly involving the rigidly-controlled company towns. One of the most pervasive arguments concerning the company town in Central Appalachia is that it reduced ethnic and race hostilities and supported fraternization and unity along class lines. The company exercised such extraordinary power over its camp inhabitants that the mountaineers, southern blacks, and immigrants were able to develop a sense of group oppression necessary for class feeling and behavior.¹⁶⁶ Everything in the company mine and town was equalized and standardized. All of the miners received equal pay—it purely depended on how much coal they extracted, and not the color of their skin. Company housing, whether the neighborhoods were segregated or not, were built the same, cost the same to rent, and were generally not overcrowded. The

¹⁶⁵ Elgin to Collins, May 9, 1912, Collins Papers, as quoted in Corbin, 66-67.

¹⁶⁶ Corbin, 61.

company town prevented the socioeconomic competition that plagued black-white relations in other parts of the country.¹⁶⁷

Another important factor to this racial harmony body of evidence is the “code of the pits.” The men worked side by side in the mines. They were forced to depend on each other not only for faster and more lucrative production and profits, but also for their safety. A group of psychologists explained the underground code of coal miners in 1957. Inside the mine,

the miner finds himself in a world of tension... [he is] potentially expendable, close to danger... under protracted tension because he may be the next man to get it... Thus while on the job, both potential and actual threats are all around the miners, and this has to be dealt with in a way as to minimize “wear and tear.” Miners, like other groups, deal with such stress by strong social cohesion on the job. An example of such unity under stress may be seen in army and civilian groups during war-time. When such groups face dangers, prejudice, selfishness, pettiness, hatred and other frailties of personality melt in a “common defense.” There is a “social security” among men who team up, not only to keep working, but to keep alive.¹⁶⁸

The company town’s standardized economic practices and the code of the pits contributed to a degree of racial openness and harmony in Appalachia. Whether voluntary or coerced by the rural-industrial setting, instances of civility and acceptance occurred. White and black workers visited each other’s homes, attended the same churches and physicians, and it was not unheard of for them to mix openly at such social activities as rallies, drinking homebrews in front of the company store and frequenting racially-mixed houses of prostitution.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Corbin, 63, 66, 68, see also Laing, 422.

¹⁶⁸ Lewis Field, Reed Ewing, and David Wayne, “Observations on Relations of Psychological Factors to Psychiatric Illness among Coal Miners,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 3 (1957), 133-45, as quoted in Corbin, 64, see also Battlo, “Mining in the Melting Pot,” 48.

¹⁶⁹ Ralph D. Minard, “Race Relations in the Pocahontas Coal Field,” *Journal of Social Issues* 8 (1952), 31-36, as quoted in Eller, 171-72; Woodson, 150; Jack Rodgers, “I Remember that Mining Town,” *West Virginia Review* (April 1938), 203-205;

It would be too idealistic, and untrue, to claim that racism did not exist in Appalachia. Another camp of evidence suggests that hostile race-relations and discriminatory practices occurred in the southern mountains. In some of the mining camps throughout the region, coal operators stridently segregated the new black recruits from the South. These communities were divided into an “American town,” a “nigger town,” and a “hunkie or dago town.”¹⁷⁰ When segregation was instituted within living quarters, it often trickled down to black-white separation throughout the rest of the company town: schools, churches, recreational facilities, restaurants and saloons could be completely segregated.¹⁷¹ In this setting black laborers often entered the coal mines as the most unskilled segment of the workforce and were consequently relegated to doing the most difficult, dirty, and dangerous “inside” jobs, such as pick mining and coal loading deep underground.¹⁷² These black miners were deemed to be inferior to other workers. They were branded as “shiftless” and “unreliable.”¹⁷³ George L. Fowler explained the condition of black laborers in the Pocahontas coal fields of West Virginia and Virginia:

Here, as elsewhere throughout the South, the negro is the predominating figure, and we find him employed in all grades of labor where cool judgment, high personal responsibility, or reliability are not required... his shiftlessness, adding thereto the belief that he belongs to an inferior race—that he ordinarily matured

Lawrence, 62; and Battlo, “Cinder Bottom: A Coal Fields Red-Light District,” *Goldenseal: West Virginia Traditional Life* 20 (1994), 62-63.

¹⁷⁰ Lawrence Leamer, “Twilight For a Baron: Major William Purviance Tams Jr.,” *Playboy* (1973), 168, as quoted in Eller, 193-94, see also Battlo, “Mining in the Melting Pot,” 49.

¹⁷¹ Eller, 170.

¹⁷² Trotter, 146, see also Eller, 170.

¹⁷³ Eller, 208.

in early manhood and does not grow after that time. In short, that he is a child in his actions and ways of thinking, and is an adult in physical strength only.¹⁷⁴

In addition to observing black workers on the job and their interactions with other laborers, Fowler was also likely in correspondence with the mine managers overseeing these prejudiced mining operations and collecting their opinions. Racist attitudes of mine managers could then have been exacted down on their white native-born laborers and foreign laborers. Incidents of racial violence were not uncommon in the coalfields and were frequently reported in the local newspapers.¹⁷⁵ Fitzhugh Brundage confirmed these findings in his study of lynching in Georgia and Virginia between 1880 and 1930. Brundage made the startling discovery that no area of Virginia saw more lynchings in this period than in its most southwestern mountain counties. He credited this phenomenon to the mountain region's "furious pace" of industrial transformation after the Civil War and the substantial influx of migrant southern black and foreign laborers. Most of the lynchings took place in established mountain towns, rather than the isolated industrial camps, suggesting that the roots of this particular expression of mountain racism were imbedded in the more urban centers of economic development and change.¹⁷⁶ Race relations between black laborers, white mountaineers, and industrial bosses were ambiguous in Appalachia and were dependent on the circumstances affecting individual coal camps and other industrial sites.

¹⁷⁴ George L. Fowler, "Social and Industrial Conditions in the Pocahontas Coal Field," *Engineering Magazine* 27 (1904), 384-85.

¹⁷⁵ Eller, 171.

¹⁷⁶ Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), chapter 4, as quoted in Inscoe, 120.

'New' Immigrants

The occurrences of the unprecedented influx of 'new' immigrants from southern and eastern Europe to America and Appalachia's fierce industrializing period coincided. This stream of immigration was tapped and thousands of foreigners were directed towards the southern mountains. Not only does this infiltration of southern blacks and European immigrants shatter the myth of Appalachia as "backward" and "static," but it correspondingly allowed the coalfields to take on an international character that remains a source of astonishment for those who continue to view Appalachia through stereotypical images.¹⁷⁷ The bulk of recent Appalachian literature acknowledges, and continues to explore, this ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism primarily between the 1870s and the First World War. Only on the matter of interaction with surrounding mountain groups are there real disparities. As with the literature concerning southern black laborers, some studies report that these immigrants mixed easily with white American mountaineers and industrial bosses, while others suggest that they remained segregated and treated with hostility.

Italians and Hungarians were the two largest ethnic groups to enter the mountains. Other immigrants included Poles, Slovaks, Germans, Austrians, "Bohemians" (present day Czech Republic), Lithuanians, Russians, "Slovenians," Croatians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese, English, Welsh, Irish, and Scots.¹⁷⁸ Immigrants began to be recruited after pioneer railroad, mining, and timber operations in Appalachia expanded and diversified with such speed that the

¹⁷⁷ Lawrence, 105-106.

¹⁷⁸ Weiner, 23.

surrounding local labor force proved wholly insufficient. As with early black miners who were recruited from nomadic railroad construction gangs, 'new' immigrants who had journeyed southward with railroad and logging work crews often transitioned into mining for the local coal operations. At first, mine operators attempted to recruit as many experienced miners as possible from the older coal fields of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana.¹⁷⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, the use of labor agents and extensive advertising techniques across the country were employed for wholesale recruitment of bodies. Expert writers and translators were utilized by industrialists to prepare brochures in several languages, which could then be used by labor agents designated to recruit cheap labor in northeastern American cities.¹⁸⁰ Labor agents were sent to such cities as New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, often with an interpreter, to sell 'new' immigrants on the high wages, steady work, and decent housing conditions in Central Appalachian coal mines. Labor agents even began to concentrate their efforts right on Ellis Island, intercepting boatloads of immigrants who could not speak English and were anxious to obtain employment as soon as possible. Finally, companies working out of Appalachia secured immigrant labor through advertisements in northeastern newspapers, especially in different foreign-language presses.¹⁸¹

As in their hiring and employment practices with southern blacks, some industrialists in Appalachia displayed very little or no nativist sentiments towards

¹⁷⁹ Eller, 165.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁸¹ Doug Cantrell, "Immigrants and Community in Harlan County, 1910-1930," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 86 (1988), 122.

their foreign-born workforce so long as economic gains were being made. Industrialists preferred hiring southern and eastern European immigrants for several reasons. As mentioned, many 'new' immigrants were "birds of passage." They desired to make as much money as possible in the shortest expanse of time so they could return to Europe and buy property. If they were not planning to return home, these laborers worked just as hard to save enough money to pay the passage for their families and friends to join them in America. These circumstances produced a mindset that made many foreign workers extraordinarily productive and expedient miners. One coal operator recalled: "Most of the immigrants made excellent miners. They were accustomed to hard work, were quick to learn and eager to please." Their objective was to "save enough money to pay the passage of their wives and children. To that end they worked as hard as possible and spent no more than absolutely essential on themselves."¹⁸² Workers like this were more dependable and predictable than mountaineers and southern blacks.¹⁸³ Some miners in southern West Virginia even kept statistical comparisons that proved their foreign-born workers were superior miners. They claimed that immigrant miners worked from five to ten hours per week longer and produced considerably higher daily tonnage of coal than their American miners.¹⁸⁴ Some immigrant workers were so income-driven that they did not gravitate towards unionization

¹⁸² Walter R. Thurmond, *The Logan Coalfield of West Virginia: A Brief History* (Morgantown, West Virginia: West Virginia University Library, 1964), 63, as quoted in Eller, 207-208.

¹⁸³ Herman Lantz, *People of Coal Town* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), 38, as quoted in Eller, 172.

¹⁸⁴ Jerry Bruce Thomas, "Coal Country: The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and Its Effect on Area Development, 1872-1910" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1971), 182, as quoted in Eller, 172.

efforts that were germinating in older, more northern Appalachian mining regions at the turn of the twentieth century. Union formation and industrial conflict could stop work and slow their rapid money saving practices. Industrialists recruited these miners who were far more docile and production-oriented.¹⁸⁵

Once 'new' immigrant workers arrived in Central Appalachia, many capitalist employers attempted to treat the new recruits well in an effort to retain this labor force. The Stonega Coal and Coke Company in Wise County, Virginia treated their Italian laborers exceptionally. The company allocated money for attractive housing with brick foundations and garden plots.¹⁸⁶ Company officials sought out Benedictine priests from St. Bernard's Abbey in Cullman, Alabama to travel into the Virginian mountains to minister to their Catholic Italian and Hungarian workforce.¹⁸⁷ Industrialists' efforts to appease their foreign work population were a form of paternalism. Top-quality housing and a coal company's direct relationship with a Catholic ministry served the primary function of placating immigrants, keeping them in a servile position, and yielding revenue.¹⁸⁸ Likewise, southern and eastern European immigrants could often only acquire promotions in the mines if it directly benefitted the coal company. The most common opportunity for upward mobility for a 'new' immigrant was becoming a crew boss for his particular nationality's work crew. As the operators needed to

¹⁸⁵ *The Charleston Gazette*, March 3rd and 14th, 1903; *Fayette Journal*, February 26, 1903, as quoted in Frederick A. Barkey, "Here Come The Boomer Talys': Italian Immigrants and Industrial Conflict in the Upper Kanawha Valley, 1903-1917," in *Transnational West Virginia*, 164; Cantrell, 125.

¹⁸⁶ Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia, 1900-1920: The Italian Experience," 457-58.

¹⁸⁷ Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia: Catholics in the Coal Camps," 50-51.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

establish effective means of communication between supervisors and laborers, an immigrant boss was selected based on his English language skills. Orders could then flow down from mine superintendents to foremen to work crew bosses and then to immigrant miners.¹⁸⁹ Industrialists recruited, retained, and promoted foreigners based on what made sense economically. Industrial elites were entirely dependent on content and productive multicultural work forces in the remote Appalachian region. They therefore praised foreigners, blacks, and mountaineers equally as long as they were all willing to work hard and produce. Nativism and racist tendencies were curiously allayed as long as the different groups did not challenge the industrialists' structure of economic relations. The result was a sort of self-serving mountain cosmopolitanism.¹⁹⁰

Similar to the ambiguity and contradictions surrounding black-white race relations in the mountains, the interactions between native-borns and foreign-borns in Appalachia were both civil and hostile. A group of Appalachian scholars maintains that the unique rural-industrial setting superimposed on the southern mountains created conditions of openness and tolerance. As previously stated, in the earlier years of the coal boom, industrialists in Appalachia shared no consensus on how to employ or house laborers according ethnic or racial guidelines. Thus, no systematic segregation scheme existed as a general rule, as was the case in other sections of the United States. Newcomers found few restrictions on where they could find employment or live in freshly constructed coal camps. The majority of pioneer coal towns were thrown open to whoever was

¹⁸⁹ Peno and Guiedo Castagnero interview by Doug Cantrell, July 18, 1986, as quoted in Cantrell, 138.

¹⁹⁰ Weiner, 123.

willing to work.¹⁹¹ In these coal towns, both adult education and schoolhouses for the children taught all of the mountaineer, black, and immigrant students under one roof. Children were allowed to interact freely at recess and after school.¹⁹² When prejudice was expressed, in the form of racial and ethnic slurs, former coal town residents remember it being because of a lack of understanding on the part of American workers and their families, not because of genuine hostile race feelings.¹⁹³ Native-borns responded to the immigrants' religious practices in a similar way. Mountaineers were mainly curious and suspicious about the Catholic faith as opposed to intimidated, fearful, or antagonistic.¹⁹⁴

The commonplaceness of ethnic and racial diversity in both the company and independent towns made multicultural variety an accepted fact of life. One Appalachian scholar has called the multicultural nature of the mountain industrial towns as "unremarkable" and even, "normal."¹⁹⁵ Differences in background and stereotype resiliency certainly existed; however, the different groups could overlook them in the interest of quiescence, harmony, and acceptance. This tolerance and nonchalance regarding ethnic diversity was evident in the construction of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad in Harlan, Kentucky. By 1910, L. & N. construction gangs brought many Italian stonemasons to this remote area. Skilled craftsmen were scarce in eastern Kentucky and the residents often asked

¹⁹¹ Interview conducted by Doug Cantrell with Edward Jackson, Lower Shannon Hollow, West Virginia, December 28, 1977, as quoted in Cantrell, 60. As a retired miner, Mr. Jackson remembered that company houses were assigned to the miners without regard to race and ethnicity in Capels, West Virginia in 1912.

¹⁹² Cantrell, 135, 138.

¹⁹³ Interview conducted by Doug Cantrell with Ann Tiabian, June 27, 1986, as quoted in Cantrell, 137.

¹⁹⁴ Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia: Catholics in the Coal Camps," 48.

¹⁹⁵ Weiner, 109.

Italians to settle in the region. Italian stonemasons found many mountain Kentuckians friendly, the work plentiful, and chose to remain.¹⁹⁶ In McDowell County, West Virginia, the Jewish business class that settled in several of the county's independent boomtowns were praised and written about with fascination in local newspapers. A kind of small-town progressiveness and growing urbanity shone through in these articles as they praised and promoted the Jews' business-oriented values, sobriety, and civilizing influence.¹⁹⁷ Central Appalachia's rapid greater diversity fostered an openness to newcomers that characterized a good deal of the industrial boom and limited the intense racial and ethnic feelings that were endemic to much of the rest of the South.¹⁹⁸

When the overall nature of the interactions in Appalachia's industrial towns were tolerant and ordinary, 'new' immigrants had the capability to assimilate into Appalachian mountain society. Southern and eastern Europeans who entered the industrial workforce came from similar backgrounds as the mountaineers. The foreigners largely hailed from rural areas of Europe where agricultural living and traditional cultural practices were mainstays. This was not dissimilar to the formerly subsistence farming highlanders.¹⁹⁹ Immigrants also tried to recreate familiar aspects of their homeland in the mountains. A prime example of this was the propensity of immigrants to run boardinghouses. In Europe, immigrants had been accustomed to large, extended family lifestyles. In Appalachian industrial towns, companies sometimes constructed extra-large homes for married

¹⁹⁶ Vincent J. Mongiardo interview, June 17, 1986, *Coal Miners Oral History Project*, University of Kentucky Library, as quoted in Cantrell, 121-22.

¹⁹⁷ Weiner, 134-35.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas, "Coal Country," 197, as quoted in Eller, 174.

immigrant families so foreign-born husbands and wives could take in single male boarders from their specific European country. This was known as the “boarding boss system.”²⁰⁰ Not only did this save the company money by not having to construct more traditional single-family homes, but also boardinghouses supplemented immigrants’ income and helped to transition newly arrived foreigners into the coal town grind.

Relative assimilation and Americanization was uneven for most ‘new’ immigrants in the southern mountains. Two different types of marches in which Italian immigrants participated in Marion County, West Virginia depict this uneven process. On Columbus Day in 1912 in Fairmont, West Virginia, nearly five hundred members of local Italian civic societies marched along the city streets in a celebratory and orderly procession. The Italians extolled their mountain American host community and raised Italian and American flags throughout the parade. The Italians’ participation in the festivities gave the clear message that they desired Americanization and were worthy of joining the region’s respectable middle-class. An entirely different march took place in the county in February of 1915 when predominantly foreign-born miners congregated in the coal camps of Lincoln District and marched along dirt roads brandishing both American and red (socialist) flags. The celebratory urban Italians and the desperate, rural strikers had undergone different processes of community development and reception by native-born Americans in northern West Virginia. The first group of Italians who had immigrated around the turn of the century came voluntarily (sometimes with their whole families), often had a skill set, settled in a newly forming urban-

²⁰⁰ Tiabian interview, as quoted in Cantrell, 127.

industrial town, and had more knowledge of American society, or had access to individuals who possessed such knowledge. The demoralized strikers who arrived later to West Virginia largely came to the region as lone laborers through padrone and labor recruiters, had little understanding of their new country, and were forced to settle in the transient coal camps in the outer hinterland.²⁰¹ Another side of Appalachian literature explains the negative experiences of foreigners in the industrializing southern mountains. The interactions between native-born mountaineers, the industrial elites, and ‘new’ immigrants were sometimes characterized by ethnocentrism, nativism, and hostility.

The narrow avenues of immigration—such as the padrone system and other labor broker arrangements—to the Appalachian mountains were distressful and anxiety-ridden for many southern and eastern European immigrants. Coal operators made extensive use of the padrone system to tap the hordes of ‘new’ immigrants entering northeastern port cities. The padrone was typically an older, more assimilated immigrant and acted as an intermediary between his freshly-arrived countrymen (primarily Italians) and coal company bosses down in the Appalachian region. The padrone met immigrants at the docks and offered them a place to live. He then contracted and bargained with his batch of immigrants to take steady and high-paying employment in the rapidly industrializing Appalachian region. Most ‘new’ immigrants accepted the padrone’s services because they were largely untrained for skilled jobs, unfamiliar with American customs, and ignorant of the language and the geographic region they would be

²⁰¹ William B. Klaus, “Uneven Americanization: Italian Immigration to Marion County, 1900-1925,” in *Transnational West Virginia*, 191-209.

working in. Mine operators paid the padrone a predetermined fee to secure a certain number of workers. The immigrants were then loaded onto trains and sent south. Their earlier lodging, food, and train passage were paid in advance, thus they arrived to the coalfields “on transportation,” and were then forced to begin working by paying off their debt to the padrone and coal company.²⁰² Once immigrants detained in the coalfields and construction sites, they often felt that they had been misled about the remote location and nature of the work for which they had been hired.²⁰³ Many ‘new’ immigrants were left discouraged, frightened, and trapped after falling in with labor agents and their harsh recruitment systems.

Trapped is the operative word here. As early as 1891 and up until World War I, complaints of peonage in Central Appalachia surfaced. The legal meaning of “peonage” is that a person (in this case, benighted immigrants), is being held against his will in order to work off a debt. Peonage is not like the permanent condition of slavery; rather, in time, the peon would hopefully be freed once his debt was paid.²⁰⁴ As mentioned, peonage began with recruiting immigrants “on transportation.” Coal companies and other industrialists could not then risk losing their investments if immigrants refused to work and stay in the mountains. This high-risk system prompted some companies to use ruthless tactics to ensure that

²⁰² Humbert S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 77-81, see also Wolfe, “Aliens in Appalachia: The Construction of the Clinchfield Railroad and the Italian Experience,” in *Appalachia: Family Traditions in Transition*, ed. Emmet M. Essin (Johnson City, Tennessee: East Tennessee State University Research Advisory Council, 1975), 84.

²⁰³ Eller, 173.

²⁰⁴ Kenneth R. Bailey, “Strange Tongues: West Virginia and Immigrant Labor to 1920,” in *Transnational West Virginia*, 244-45.

they recovered their assets.²⁰⁵ Once the immigrants arrived in mountain work sites, they then required further “advances” to begin employment: initial rent, food, clothing, and necessary tools were all advanced. These costs were entered into books at the company store and deducted off immigrants’ *forced* future pay.²⁰⁶ One of the first complaints of peonage surfaced in 1891 when two “Bohemian” men escaped a railroad construction camp near Elkhorn in McDowell County, West Virginia. The Austro-Hungarian consul at Richmond, Virginia was notified and complained to the governor of West Virginia that his countrymen were being held against their will.²⁰⁷ In January 1903, a group of Slavic immigrants managed to escape from southwestern Virginia and made their way north to New York City and told their story to an editor of a Hungarian newspaper. They were described as ragged, half-starved, and attested to the low pay, poor conditions, and peonage in Tom’s Creek, Virginia.²⁰⁸

Stories such as these became so numerous that by 1903, the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants sent Gino Speranza to West Virginia to investigate. His findings prompted the investigation and charges of peonage against several industrial companies in the region. Speranza discovered that many Italians had been misled by labor agents in northern cities and then shipped off to Appalachia and “roughed up” if they refused to work. Violence and intimidation tactics were

²⁰⁵ Lawrence, 113.

²⁰⁶ Bailey, “A Temptation to Lawlessness: Peonage in West Virginia, 1903-1908,” *West Virginia History* 50 (1991), 26.

²⁰⁷ J. W. Ewing to Louis Bourchers, March 21, 1891, A. B. Fleming Papers, Department of Archive and History, Cultural Center, Charleston, West Virginia, as quoted in Bailey, “Strange Tongues,” 244 and Bailey, “A Temptation to Lawlessness,” 26.

²⁰⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, Bluefield, West Virginia, January 11, 1903, as quoted in Lawrence, 114.

rampant in certain towns in the mountains. Armed guards and even a mounted Gatling gun over a railroad construction camp near Beckley, West Virginia were exposed.²⁰⁹ Until 1907, state and local authorities did not take any positive action against peonage charges involving foreign-born laborers.

The process of prosecuting these industrialists on charges of peonage was very difficult in the mountains and much of this difficulty arose out of inherent nativist beliefs and industrial-political interconnections. Some companies pled guilty to a small number of peonage charges and then paid a diminutive fine as punishment. Others pled not guilty and mountain juries and judges often acquitted them in remarkably short periods of time. On the one hand, local authorities and government officials were often influenced and manipulated by the powerful industrialist operators in their states. They all shared a desire to attract cheap immigrant-labor to their section and then to retain outsiders and buildup their mountain regions. On the other hand, many industrial elites, mountain political and judicial figures, down to local newspaper editors who all perpetuated or ignored the padrone and peonage systems were acting out ethnocentric and nativist beliefs. When the Governor of West Virginia, William M. O. Dawson, was asked in 1907 to prepare a report on the mistreatment of immigrants charges in his state, he largely denounced the lack of law enforcement which allowed peonage and other acts of cruelty to occur, but did not offer any solutions. On the contrary,

²⁰⁹ "Getting Evidence in the Labor Camps of West Virginia," n. d., Gino Speranza Papers (microfilm), Department of Archives and History, Cultural Center, Charleston, West Virginia, as quoted in Bailey, "Strange Tongues," 244-45, see also Speranza, "Forced Labor in West Virginia," *Outlook* 74 (June 13, 1903), 407, as quoted in Wolfe, "Putting Them in Their Places," 29.

he presented his nativist sentiments and blamed the 'new' immigrant for what had befallen him:

These laborers are of different nationalities; unable to speak our language and unable to protect themselves; many are brutal and vicious; and, their manhood and spirit crushed by centuries of oppression in the foreign lands, they confuse liberty with license. But they are human beings. Our duty, the instincts of humanity, justice, our own safety as a people, and our good name, all demand they be treated justly, and that if the law has been violated that the offenders be adequately punished, and if there be need of further legislation it be promptly furnished.²¹⁰

Undoubtedly, many other men of power in Appalachia shared Governor Dawson's convoluted and nativist opinion. Government officials of all levels in the mountains, as well as judicial systems, "acted in a manner consistent with industrialists' wishes because they were so closely aligned economically, politically, and socially."²¹¹ Furthermore, this American and/or "older immigrant stock" power structure allowed their ethnic prejudices to affect how they employed foreign labor and then ignored ill-treatment.

The prevalence of padrone labor recruitment and peonage in the industrial camps of the southern mountains represents the most systematic type of discrimination against 'new' European immigrants. Additionally, as with the levels of prejudice directed towards southern blacks in Appalachia, immigrants experienced other discriminatory practices in more punctuated and episodic ways. Some company towns enforced total segregation. "Hunkievvilles," "Tallie Hollers," and "Little Polands" were constructed far down along the creek banks (which flooded in springtime) while white native-born laborers, bosses and

²¹⁰ *Special Message of Governor Dawson Concerning Cases of Peonage and Labor Conditions to the Legislature of 1907* (Charleston, West Virginia: Tribune Printing Company, 1907), 32-35, as quoted in Bailey, "Strange Tongues," 245.

²¹¹ Bailey, "A Temptation to Lawlessness," 43.

superintendents lived in finer homes at higher elevations.²¹² Segregated cemeteries could be found in these industrial sites as well.²¹³ In these company towns, foreigners typically held the least desirable and dangerous jobs in the mines. What is more is that it was not uncommon for overseers to blame foreign-born workers for unsafe conditions in the workplace. They believed that because many different nationalities worked underground, language barriers prevented foreign workers from understanding each other and their English-speaking bosses' commands. The immigrants' ignorance of the host-language was deemed to be a primary factor in hazardous mining conditions.²¹⁴ When statistics were examined, however, immigrant laborers were no more likely to be involved in mining accidents than white native-borns or black miners. The premise that foreigners were unsafe was based on prejudice rather than on hard facts.²¹⁵

The body of evidence that suggests immigrants were at times treated with hostility and exposed to nativist sentiments is not unfounded. Some industrialists enacted policies of benevolent paternalism in order to control and retain their foreign laborers. Other companies in the mountains maintained an ethnocentric stance and coerced their immigrant working class to adjust and work relentlessly for the good of the industrial operations. Both techniques were driven by sheer economic gain, and thus, nativism was utilized as a business strategy. How

²¹² U.S. Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission, Immigrants in Industry, The Bituminous Coal Industry*, Doc. No. 533, 1911, 3, pt. 1: 192, 229-32, as quoted in Cantrell, 120, 138.

²¹³ Cantrell, 140.

²¹⁴ "20,000 Miners Needed," *Annual Report, Department of Mines* (Charleston, West Virginia: Tribune Printing Company, 1908), ix, as quoted in Bailey, "Strange Tongues," see also Lawrence, 115, 117.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

immigrants and blacks were treated by the industrial elite often trickled down to influence the nature of the interactions between the different ethnic and racial groups laboring under them. Moreover, the interactions of civility or hostility were individualistic and occurred at particular rural-industrial camps in the mountains.

Beginning with the outbreak of WWI, the immigrant and southern black presence began to decline in Appalachia. Initially, the start of the war saw vigorous recruitment of blacks again from the Deep South, but in the economic downturn in the coalfields in the 1920s, blacks were the first to lose their jobs.²¹⁶ The flow of foreign-labor into Appalachia peaked in the first decade of the twentieth-century, but the war in Europe virtually halted all 'new' immigration to the United States. Many southern and eastern Europeans in the southern mountains returned home to join their native countries in battle, or returned shortly after to seize employment opportunities in the depleted postwar European labor market.²¹⁷ Still others were attracted to northern and western urban centers where they could find higher wages and better living conditions. By the early 1920s, the war, its aftermath, and burgeoning isolationism and Americanism led to the passing of restrictive immigration legislation. National quota systems effectively ended the wave of 'new' European immigrants to America and Appalachia.

²¹⁶ Trotter, 144.

²¹⁷ Cantrell, 140.

Conclusion – Ambivalence: Appalachia as Unexceptional?

This project began by charting the conversations of American nativism and its connection to the ‘new’ European immigrant. It then transitioned into a compulsory discussion of the South, “Anglo-Saxon” nativism, and the section’s general volatility. I ended by zeroing in on the upper southern subregion of Central Appalachia during its most turbulent period of industrialization and presented how and why the rural mountain boomtown setting both mimicked and rejected ethnic and race relations between white native-borns and outsiders in other regions of the country. The Appalachian setting complicated Higham’s foundational study on the determinants of American nativist tendencies between approximately 1865 and 1914. Although the stereotype has been overdrawn, Appalachia *has* suffered (and continues to suffer) from real economic hardship and isolation, and its economic destiny has historically not been in its own hands. The southern mountains as an enduring symbol of poverty in a nation noted for prosperity destabilized Higham’s 1955 assertion that nativism was chiefly dictated by the ideological patterns of white native-born Americans. Nativism—when it did surface in Appalachia—was indexed chiefly by economic gain and shrewd business strategy. The region’s nativistic displays said more about Appalachia’s internal economic and social uncertainties than it did about the more mainstream concerns of the immigration debate, manifestations of whiteness, and/or other hostile expressions regarding ethnic and race anxieties. Issues surrounding economic self-interest touched the lives of the native mountaineers, newcomers, and capitalist overlords in Appalachian boomtowns more intimately than any sort of larger (and, primarily, urban northeastern) ideological xenophobic warfare.

Originally, I set out to try and answer whether the nature of the interactions between white native-born Americans and migrants ('new' Europeans and southern blacks) in Central Appalachia was predominantly civil or hostile. What makes this topic so intriguing is the sharp dichotomy that characterizes the evidence as to how white mountaineers and white industrial bosses received these outsiders. Were instances of nativism and prejudice infrequent exceptions in a mountainous climate of acceptance, a small indication of the actual greater nativist environment, or something in between? Ambivalence is the answer that best describes the interactions amongst my chosen groups between the fifty-year span from the end of the Civil War to the start of World War I. I have presented two simultaneous bodies of Appalachian historical research: one that suggests the southern mountains were a unique, racially liberal, and open environment, while the other maintains that Appalachia was as ethnocentric and racist as other regions of the United States, but its displays only varied in degree and form of expression.

The nature of the evidence that deals with Appalachian social interactions at the grassroots level is inherently speculative, circumstantial, and extremely fluid. The sheer range of civil and hostile experiences between white native-borns and outsiders demonstrates the limits of arriving at generalizations and drawing definitive conclusions about a society and a region that have been subjected to more than their share of stereotyping and homogenization. I identified business strategy and economic benefit as the chief triggers for displays of either nativism or inclusivity. No matter whether the interactions were characterized by civility or hostility, they must be understood to be specific and quiltlike in nature. The

ambivalent character of the interactions between natives and migrants in Appalachia during its transformative industrial period indicates a need for deeper and diversified research to be conducted in Appalachian studies. This project has insisted on the centrality of further acknowledgement of the contradictions and complexity of the four-way relationship between mountaineers, blacks, 'new' immigrants, and industrialists in pre-WWI Central Appalachia.

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