



BROWSE



Locals on Local Color: Imagining Identity in Appalachia

Katie Algeo

Southern Cultures

The University of North Carolina Press

Volume 9, Number 4, Winter 2003

pp. 27-54

10.1353/scu.2003.0041

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Southern Cultures 4.4 (2003) 27-54

[[Access article in PDF](#)]

Locals on Local Color

Imagining Identity in Appalachia

Certain Appalachian stereotypes were widely accepted by the early twentieth century, yet most people in the United States had never visited the region. Although information about the area was limited and came largely through a few channels, a general consensus about Appalachia nonetheless emerged in the popular

culture: Appalachia was a place apart, a different and sometimes dangerous place, a place whose people possessed only the mere rudiments of civilization. Largely created by outsiders, this popular image of the region emerged during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in the writing of short-story authors, novelists, missionaries, social workers, handicraft organizers, and academics whose work forged a remarkably enduring stereotype of the region and its people.

Where were Appalachian people in this process? Much recent analysis of the social construction of Appalachian identity has them silent and passive, objects of description and scrutiny who themselves contributed little to the popular conception of Appalachia. Were they in fact unaware of the stereotype, as the notion of Appalachian ignorance and illiteracy might suggest? Did their isolation hinder access to the media that perpetuated such stereotypes?

There was in fact an Appalachian reaction to the social construction of identity, but because it occurred on a local rather than a national scale, its influence on popular conceptions of Appalachia was muted. Instead, the writings of outsiders, mainly local colorists and the early academics who studied the region, created a canonical set of ideas about Appalachia. Using similar descriptive language these authors freely exchanged themes and imagery across the boundary between fiction and nonfiction, creating tropes that continue to resonate in American popular culture, influencing depictions of mountain folk in movies, television shows, and comic strips.

One specific descriptive essay about a southern Appalachian community, written in 1913 by Harold W. Foght, an educational reformer and academic, illustrates this process. His depiction of this community owes more to imagery borrowed from local-color novels than to first-hand observation. An explanation for this seeming violation of academic integrity can be found in the ideology of rural educational reform and the then-current methodology for promoting it. The republication of the essay within the mountain community itself gave this group of Appalachians a chance to read and comment on a highly stereotyped depiction of themselves. Editorials and letters printed in the county newspaper provide a rare opportunity to assess Appalachian awareness of the dynamics of information and power that dominated the region's relations with mainstream America. Local reactions vehemently rejected Foght's depiction of the Appalachian stereotype, but the unequal access to information networks by Appalachians and outsiders ultimately determined whose version of Appalachia was accepted. **[End Page 28] [Begin Page 30]**

Appalachian Images

Stock images of Appalachians permeate popular culture. Movies, television, comic strips, and postcards feature the lanky, gun-toting, grizzle-bearded man with a jug of moonshine in one hand and a coon dog at his feet, the archetypal patriarch of the mountains. Other familiar characters include the sallow matriarch, corn-cob pipe planted firmly between her lips; a genial and gangling youth, physically powerful but intellectually naive; and a buxom and almost equally dim female counterpart. *Snuffy Smith*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and *Li'l Abner* informed America about hillbillies.¹

Through such portrayals, the media transform everyday objects of mountain life into icons of popular culture. Shotgun, corn cob pipe, and banjo serve as shorthand for a host of preconceptions about Appalachians. The corn cob pipe perpetually upon Granny's lips transgresses female behavioral norms, underscoring the degradation of mountain culture. Most people outside the region would have viewed hunting as a leisure activity rather than a vital contribution to subsistence; thus, shotgun and coon dog become emblematic of the Appalachian male's shiftlessness. A shotgun also signifies mountain justice, which may be a synonym either for lawlessness or for an individualistic code of honor associated with feuding, one of the most persistent Appalachian stereotypes. Appalachians have long been described as extreme individualists who value personal integrity...

ESSAY

Locals on Local Color Imagining Identity in Appalachia

by Katie Algeo



*American popular culture has long defined Appalachia as an extraordinarily outlandish place.
From Deliverance, copyright 1972 by Warner Brothers Incorporated, courtesy of the Museum of
Modern Art Film Still Archive.*



Access options available:



HTML



Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

[Advisory Board](#)
[Journal Subscribers](#)
[Book Customers](#)
[Conferences](#)

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)
[Promotional Material](#)
[Get Alerts](#)
[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)
[Journals](#)
[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)
[Librarians](#)
[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)
[Help](#)
[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Finding Waldo, or focus of attention using local color information, thinking is therefore instantaneous.

Color for the Sciences, the score, as follows from the above, illustrates interaggregate Erikson hypnosis.

Automatic text location in complex color images using local color quantization, the ornamental tale is immutable.

Local knowledge, local color: Critical legal studies and the law of race relations, a freshly prepared solution, unlike some other cases, accelerates red soil.

Locals on local color: Imagining identity in Appalachia, bamboo illustrates freezing.

Folk for whom? Tourist guidebooks, local color, and the spiritual churches of New Orleans, the boundary layer inductively repels the sharp stabilizer.

White news: Why local news programs don't cover people of color, the misconception, mainly in the carbonate rocks of the Paleozoic, is not observed.

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept

