APPALACHIAN FREE PRESS

December 2024 -Volume 4, Issue 1

Bridging Mountains and Blues

By Ilyse Bourque

Bridging Mountains and Blues

The vibrance of Beale Street melts into the morning fog of a holler and the creak of front porches. Leaving West Tennessee for East Tennessee distanced a chaotic canvas of wild color and liquid smoke for a sepia-toned photograph of burnt oranges and wind blown Eastern Redbuds.

Whistle in the woods.

Tradition and folklore loom over time rich in spiritual caution which carries itself from flat land to mountain in the form of whispered word and generational mythos. From the West Tennessee warning not to rock an empty rocking chair to the Eastern warning not to whistle in the woods, culture roots itself like an ancient oak in stories spoken from hushed tones and animated hand gestures. Culture runs deep in my dueling sanctuaries, raised in the restless rhythm of the fast paced Memphis life and assimilating into mountains cradling stories older than time. I immersed myself into a new culture that feels imperative to my sense of self. The 380 miles of distance I put between two parts of me became something I couldn't have expected. There’s serenity in the cold wind kissing rose cheeks with breaths of mountain air that becomes healing. In a crucial time where one is gifted with self actualization the cradle of bluegrass and ginseng embrace a new beginning in soft hands of morning dew.

I found myself lost, moving from Memphis, out of place around deeper accents and rich culture. I came from barbecue, blues, and Graceland not knowing that I would harmonize with the traditions and values of another rich culture. Leaving home, I fell into a deep depression,

circumstances in life and lack of connection left me lonely and in desperate need of a tether to a new reality.

Kinship and Storytelling

I grew up in a family with rich tradition and widespread history, but in Appalachia kinship is more than family, it's the thread between quilt blocks that is stitched through storytelling and home cooked meals. Moving into Appalachia, I was met with warmth that spanned generations. People were connected through community, appreciation for their neighbors, and the lasting burn of moonshine (blue flame made in my friend's Father's moonshine still). As I navigated this new culture, it wasn't just about fitting in, it was about becoming a part of something much deeper: a network of shared history and values that thrives through closeness and family roots.

As I started college, trapped in the cycle of depression, I started to spend time in the mountains. Cades Cove's eleven mile loop gave me space to breathe and experience the deep rooted history of my new home. As I began to surround myself with new people, we began to frequent the mountains together creating bonds on drives through winding roads cushioned by neverending creek beds. I've never felt more at peace with myself than when I realized the true meaning of found family and the impact of being above the clouds in the Smoky Mountains. Something about the highest peaks and deepest valleys of these mountains make you realize how insignificant everything can be. I began to put more value into the relationships I was building, began experiencing other people's families and was welcomed in as if I was one of their own. I joined family meals, heard stories from different generations; struggles, resilience, and love, and I began to feel connected to the place I now call home. I was putting my own roots down in a way that felt more secure than the chaos of Memphis.

Individualism

I found myself in college.

Each time I would go home, it felt like an extended stay hotel. Everything moved so fast, people were less friendly than I remembered, and there was less solace to find in nature. I love where I'm from, diverse people, incredible food, and a culture of community like no other runs deep in Memphis, but I found myself lost among the fast paced life everyone leads. I'll always hold West Tennessee in my heart, but I'd found myself in found family, rich generational history, and culture that was slower and more appreciative of connections built through deep ties to an area that held so much beauty to me.

"Blood is thicker than water," a phrase I've heard my entire life. While I'd always thought that this was something to remind me that no matter what happened, no matter how I was treated, and no matter who I was around, my blood was more important than anything. It wasn't until my boyfriend was talking to me about that phrase that I realized how true it really was. The full phrase reads, "Blood is thicker than water, but the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb." I knew I'd become myself after moving to Appalachia and this just solidified my belief that I'd found myself in the comforting foods, connection to nature, story telling, and folklore.

A Land Apart and a Legacy Unmatched

There is nothing like Appalachia. I would shout this from the rooftops and across rivers and valleys if it would help people understand the value of a culture so rich and important. There is nothing comparable to the generational connection to land, family, and folklore that you see here. This is a place where history runs in people's blood and oral storytelling is an artform. There is a sense of home in Appalachia where language and accents are a sign of community and food is a

way to your heart. Without experiencing the depth of Appalachian's love for their history, I wouldn't be who I am today, I wouldn't have the found family I've been given, and I wouldn't understand the way a region can take you and make you whole again. There is no Appalachia without history and there is no history without Appalachia, they are one in the same, filled with a singular richness not found in any other corner of the world.

Farewell to the Bleeding Mountain

By Alex Waitkus

Farewell to the Bleeding Mountain People: Government and Industry Negligence in Appalachia Those who are born of Appalachian blood are deemed meritless beyond their labor by industry and the United States government. Appalachia's history and current state comes as a result of being mistreated by governmental, industrial, and otherwise institutional powers. Appalachia is a region in the United States that spans thirteen states from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It contains four-hundred and twenty counties and roughly twenty-six million people. West Virginia is the only state consisting entirely of Appalachian counties (fifty-five total). The region has the Appalachian mountain range running through the middle of it and is isolated both geographically and socially. Negative images of the Appalachian people like the "hillbilly" or inbred mountain-person (found in media such as the *Wrong Turn* franchise) are common in representing the region by those outside of the region. Despite their popularity, these and many other stereotypes of the region are inaccurate and harmful representations. Appalachia has a rich folk tradition, specific dialectal features similar to other regional dialectics in the U.S., and abundant natural resources. The abundance of natural resources in the region made it a prime location for extractive industries, mainly coal mining, in the mid-nineteenth century. Coal mining companies quickly gained monopolistic dominance in the region and instituted company towns to maximize the productivity of their operations regardless of the well-being of the population there, which was made up of mostly southern and eastern European immigrants at the time. A company town is a town in which things that would usually be owned separately by private entities are instead owned entirely by a coal company

(in this context) with a mining operation typically close by. Housing, stores, and schools were owned by the company, wages and work benefits (if any) for the coal-miners were dictated entirely by the company, and all things purchased or paid for were paid to the company. This model encouraged a boom or bust mono-economy throughout Appalachia which made it extremely difficult to advocate for better working conditions and pay. Unions in particular were difficult to organize under penalty of losing work or being jailed.

When the Appalachian coal mining boom started to decline in the 1930s and 1940s due to mechanization and further westward movement of the coal-industry as a whole, coal companies largely pulled out from Appalachian communities without leaving any sort of "safety net" for the towns they had been a backbone for. This brought about wide-spread poverty and other issues stemming from such poverty. Besides the severe poverty the region still experiences, the prominence of the coal mining industry in Appalachia has left other scars still seen today. Government negligence further perpetuates and worsens lasting psychological and physical effects in Appalachian communities in a post-coal mining boom and post-company town era.

Appalachian suffering is important to discuss not to glorify the region's suffering but to further legitimize it and bring awareness to the fact that what it has experienced is not the only time and will not be the last time such a thing happens in the United States. One should be educated on exactly how the government and industry have been able to abuse a region and continue to neglect it so that one can understand the signs of it happening in their own locale and take preventative measures on both small and broad scales. Compared to the rest of the United States, Appalachia has severe health and socioeconomic disparities that stem from active neglect and mistreatment under government and industry powers through historically mono-economic practices, intentional perpetuation of poverty, and the lack of access to resources. While there is federal action currently in-place to remedy some of Appalachia's

problems, it lacks appropriate execution to achieve many of its intended purposes.

For the sake of properly understanding the topic being discussed, the terms mistreatment, negligence, government, and industry will be clearly defined. “Negligence” is the failure to use reasonable care, resulting in damage or injury to an individual or group. “Mistreatment” is the act of treating an individual or group badly, cruelly, or unfairly. “Government” refers to the United States federal government as well as all state-level and local governments that have some sort of jurisdiction over Appalachia. “Industry” refers to all major companies and corporate entities that have or have had any level of operations or direct effect in Appalachia.

Understanding the basic facets of Appalachian culture and history is essential to better understanding government and industry negligence in the region. Appalachian culture is not uniform but the United States and the internet tend to identify being Appalachian as being a part of a single static culture (Maloney and Obermiller 105; Robinson 85). Poverty is a part of this culture in the eyes of the United States and the internet as well as in Appalachian reality.

The distribution of poverty in Appalachia is concentrated in rural areas, however, urban areas and rural areas both deal with poverty as Appalachia as a whole is poorer than the rest of the United States (Thorne et al. 343). Poverty has long been a constant for Appalachian people, regardless of smaller parts of Appalachia faring better than others in the face of it.

As previously mentioned, the region has a long history of mistreatment under industrial and governmental hands throughout the last century and a half. Appalachians resisted violently and non-violently to this mistreatment through uprisings, strikes, and protests despite the severe punishments for doing so. The fight that Appalachian people put up for the integrity of the land around them and themselves created an extremely strong tie to said land. The Appalachian mountains became an integral part of being Appalachian through the region’s history of resistance. This is especially true because of part of the reason for that resistance as

Beth Nardella, an Associate Professor in the Health Sciences Center at West Virginia University, explains: "Spatial identities are salient because of their ties to memory and shared history…In situations where the landscape itself is affected, it becomes the center from which the community is based" (186). The people and environment of Appalachia were damaged and tied closer together through such damage. Place is a deeply ingrained part of Appalachian culture strengthened by the region's long struggle against industry and government.

Because of the absolute control industry had over Appalachian life and the nature of the resistance against that control, Appalachia is sometimes classified as an internal colony of the United States. An internal colony is defined by Cara Robinson, an Associate Professor of Urban Studies at Tennessee State University, as "the exploitation of a minority by a majority within a country's boundaries" (76). Being defined as an internal colony in the context of Appalachia is debated due to a larger debate of what factors truly dictate a group or area being colonized. Nevertheless, the concept illustrates the dynamic between Appalachia and the greater United States well.

In discussing Appalachia's struggles under the coal industry, it is important to differentiate between the different types of coal mining and the types of damage they cause. No type is less harmful than another and there is no entirely safe type of coal mining. The three that will be referred to moving forward are mountaintop removal mining and its companion valley filling, surface mining, and underground mining. Mountaintop removal mining involves explosives detonated on the tops of mountains to access coal deposits below. Valley fills are valleys where excess material from mountaintop removal is dumped, often cutting off waterways and polluting the surrounding area (Palmer et al. 148). Surface mining is the more general practice of simply mining near the surface of the ground to access coal deposits. Underground mining consists of creating underground tunnel networks (usually using

explosives) to access coal deposits. All types of mining cause air, water, and ground pollution that directly affect most Appalachian communities.

It should be noted that the coal industry is on the decline in terms of the amount of people it employs and societal control it has in Appalachia as of the 2010s (Schwartzman 351). Despite this, the coal industry still carries a lot of weight as a legacy of Appalachia and a factor found throughout a majority of the region's problems. To name two realities of a post-coal boom Appalachia; careless industrial pollution are major hazards for Appalachian communities and the loss of jobs due to the decline of the coal industry leaves people little opportunity and worsens poverty. Both of these compromise the physical and mental wellbeing of Appalachian people and both are treatable if adequate government and industry actions are taken. Unfortunately, adequate institutional action is often a luxury offered to few in Appalachia.

There are several specific instances and broad long-standing practices of the government and industry that are negligent and sustain mistreatment in Appalachia. Appalachian people have historically been treated as if they are less than the average American by industry and government. The notion that Appalachia is an alien entity isolated from the rest of the United States makes it easier for the greater national population to ignore or even encourage such treatment. This notion also allows government and industry to continue without serious repercussions or any large national outcry. As mentioned earlier, this goes back all the way to the coal mining boom when companies had control over Appalachian communities' lives and abused that power to prevent any sort of lobbying for better conditions. While that was extremely intentional mistreatment, negligence and subsequent mistreatment of Appalachian communities holds more nuance today.

Broad long-standing practices perpetuate lasting psychological and physical effects in

Appalachian communities on a wide scale. For example, higher rates of chronic-pain related disorders due to the prominence of labor based employment (mainly coal mining) allowed an opening in Appalachia for pharmaceutical companies to heavily advertise opioids to physicians, leading to the overprescribing of opioids (Moody et al. 2-3). Health systems overprescribing opioids to Applachians provided the government a way to placate through the claim that it was providing a solution to chronic-pain disorders in the region. It was also an avenue to increase profits for the pharmaceutical companies at the expense of Appalachian people. Because of that overprescription, it became easier for Appalachian individuals to become addicted to opioids and start using drugs like heroin (Moody et al. 2-3). As a direct result, Appalachia experiences high rates of HIV and other bloodborne diseases from needle use, all stemming from pharmaceutical companies capitalizing on the coal industry's dominance over employment opportunities for decades under complete governmental approval. If money can be made easily, industry will do it regardless of the expense to Appalachian communities.

This is indicative of a cycle in which industry harms Appalachia and the government hands out light or no punishment for doing so, essentially giving a go ahead for further harm. The Elk River chemical spill is a specific event that illustrates the aforementioned cycle. The Elk River chemical spill occurred on January 9, 2014 and affected the safe water access of nine total counties and over 300,000 people in southwestern West Virginia (Young 96-98). The spill was perpetrated by Freedom Industries, a company that produced a variety of coal-cleaning products. Freedom industries allowed the toxic chemical 4-Methylcyclohexanemethanol (MCHM), to leak from a container for hours into topsoil and eventually into the Elk River. The chemical leaked upstream from the West Virginia American Water plant on the Elk River, which served as the main source of water for the surrounding area. When residents noticed an odd smell in their water, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection was

brought in to assess the cause. When investigating the spill site, there were no apparent clean up efforts taking place by the company even hours after the spill and Freedom Industries denied any knowledge of the spill until after the WVDEP had observed negligence at the site. The water company decided to cut tap water to residents and flush the pipes to minimize harm. Even with such action, a large number of the people affected sought medical attention for adverse health effects from consuming the contaminated water. Many people also couldn't go about their daily lives due to not having access to water for a period of time. In a rare instance of a company being held accountable, Freedom Industries received little more than minor fines and short prison sentences for low-ranking employees at the site. The company escaped anything more major through claiming bankruptcy (Young 97-99). People and land were made sick by a company's lax regulatory practices that it felt extremely comfortable to disregard.

Another specific instance that highlights government negligence rather than industry negligence involves the town of Centralia in Columbia County, PA. Centralia was an Appalachian mining town that currently sits abandoned because of a coal fire burning in mine tunnels under the town. The fire was unintentionally started in 1962 by firefighters who were tasked with burning trash at Centralia's landfill. The ground below had not been properly sealed and flames managed to get underground and reach a coal seam. Naturally, the coal seam was attached to other seams as well as mining tunnels, which provided large amounts of fuel for the fire.

The mining tunnels were closed shortly after the beginning of the fire for concerns of miners succumbing to carbon monoxide poisoning. After the fire became known, local industry and government powers made efforts to stop the fire. They tried flushing it out with water-rock slurry, creating fly ash barriers, and trenching for the first few years after the fire was started. Despite the pragmatic intention behind these efforts, the methods were mostly

unsuccessful due to lack of full commitment. Flushing the fire with water-rock slurry had the potential to be successful but wasn't because there were insufficient amounts of water-slurry provided by the government for extinguishment to be possible (Nolter and Vice 104). The other methods were also unsuccessful due to the magnitude of the fire at that point and the resources, personnel, and initiatives provided being inadequate.

Following these moderately proactive efforts, the Pennsylvanian government took to evacuating the population of Centralia instead. Using federal funds allocated to areas with abandoned mines, the state compensated people to leave rather than pursuing any further efforts of stopping the fire (Nolter and Vice 99-102). Evacuation efforts were pursued instead of efforts towards stopping the fire because of the federal funding available to incentivize people to leave and the ease of such a solution for the government. Centralia was abandoned because of the cost associated with stopping the fire. Roughly a thousand people were forced to leave the town, leaving employment, homes, and communities because the government did not see Centralia as a worthwhile problem to fix. Put simply, the government took the "easy" way out.

Centralia is a prime example of an Appalachian environmental disaster in which the government does not see it as a problem worth a full investment of time and resources. The government often seeks cosmetic solutions rather than solutions that benefit Appalachian communities in the long term as evident through Centralia's outcomes.

In policy decisions and practices nearly traditional at this point, government and industry do not see Appalachia as a region that they must be properly accountable for. The treatment of the Elk River chemical spill is negligent at best and a human rights abuse at worst. It got little attention in the media and was hushed quickly through policies meant to placate and an inadequate clean up similar to Centralia. Centralia continually receives a fair amount of media attention but rather than advocate for Centralia, it sensationalizes the fact of the fire and

drums up conspiracy theories around it. The people and communities affected by the Centralia fire and the Elk River chemical spill are seen as little more than collateral damage. There is no one jumping to stand up for the region besides Appalachia itself, the very victim needing defense.

The effects of the aforementioned negligent events and practices are far-reaching across Appalachian communities and the region as a whole. Improper clean ups of environmental hazards affect large amounts of the Appalachian population to this day through water supply, air supply, and more (Palmer et al. 148). These improper clean ups turn the natural environment toxic and Appalachians can no longer safely enjoy the land tied so closely to them. Any possible alternative economies for tourism of the natural environment is compromised by the fact that these environments are no longer safe to recreate in. In the current relationship between government and industry, poverty has become a generational problem in Appalachia. Given this poverty, many choose to leave to try and seek opportunities elsewhere which causes depopulation, further leading to the decline and general abandonment of the region. Those who can't afford to leave or want to stay as a form of resistance (Nardella 188-190) in the region continue to experience mistreatment.

One of the most concerning indicators of mistreatment and the negligence that perpetuates it is health and healthcare in Appalachia. Healthcare and health (both physical and psychological) serve as a microcosm that can be used to examine specific disparities as indicators of larger issues in Appalachian communities and tie them to government and industry negligence. Years of potential life lost (YPLL), used as a measure of premature death, shows this reality of Appalachia. In the region, YPLL is 25% higher than the United States as a whole (Marshall et al. 6), meaning that a significant amount of people in Appalachia have lost decades of life to premature deaths. Premature death was very common during the coal mining

boom due to lack of regulation in every regard, however, the rate of YPLL in Appalachia still sits higher than the rest of the country today due to that same lack of regulation, particularly regarding the proper treatment of toxic material, and systemic poverty perpetuated by government policy. The poor state of Appalachian healthcare and health is a direct repercussion of mistreatment stemming from negligence. This can best be explained when "health and healthcare" are broken down into components of physical outcomes, psychological outcomes, and access to healthcare.

In the realm of physical outcomes, respiratory conditions are prevalent and deeply tied to the region's history with coal mining and the toxic leftovers of the industry. In Appalachia, the mortality rate of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is 27% higher than in the United States overall (Marshal et al. 6). COPD is a long-term disease affecting the lungs that makes it harder to breathe that can be treated but not cured and can significantly reduce a person's lifespan. In the context of Appalachia, it is a disease associated with exposure to coal dust and other toxic materials that damages the lungs.

Obesity is also a major indicator of larger issues in the region with rates of adult obesity sitting at 31% while the rest of the United States sits at only 27.4% (Marshall et al. 7). While also an issue in other regions of the United States, obesity in Appalachia is unique in that it is directly affected by the region's isolation. Access to grocery stores is limited in the region due to geographic isolation making it difficult to maintain them, with many getting food from alternative sources such as dollar stores. Grocery stores tend to provide access to healthier food than what is at alternative sources and lack of such food worsens health outcomes (Marshall et al. 179). Conditions that are simple facts of life for many Appalachians create an often inescapable environment that perpetuates poor physical health outcomes.

In the realm of psychological outcomes, the suicide rate in Appalachia is 17% higher

than the national average (Marshall et al. 123). This increased rate of suicide can be linked to poor mental health in the region which is exacerbated by the lack of mental health services. Stigma of mental health, poverty, substance abuse, and lack of opportunity all feed into the decline of mental health in Appalachian communities (Cole and Shelly 1003-1006). The poor conditions many Appalachians are born into creates a mental health crisis predicated on hopelessness especially for the majority of people in the region who don't have the resources to access already limited mental health services or to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Stigma surrounding mental health and a general attitude towards healthcare as a last resort reserved only for physical ailments in Appalachia worsens the mental health crisis further (Cole and Shelly 1005). For many Appalachians, mental health is not considered something significant enough to warrant professional treatment. There are also generational factors to consider, such as cycles of abuse that continue through the constant struggle to survive in the face of poverty, depopulation, and poor opportunities across all fronts.

Regardless of the type of condition, all disparities in Appalachia can be tied back to industry and government factors that influence access to healthcare. Healthcare access means two things: actual access and use of healthcare services, and the willingness of Appalachians to seek out such services. Geographic isolation and improper federal and state funding make it difficult for infrastructure like hospitals to be established and even more difficult for such infrastructure to last. A lack of general and specialized physicians in the region make it even harder to access proper healthcare. Many of the hospitals in Appalachia are a result of the Hill-Burton Act of 1946, which provided federal assistance (mainly through funding) that supported viable healthcare infrastructure in the region. The act was discontinued in 1997 and all beneficiaries of it lost funding yet were still expected to operate at the same capacity as before (Cole and Shelly 1003). In Appalachia, healthcare cannot function without federal

assistance and without that assistance the quality and accessibility of healthcare is diminished greatly. As touched on earlier, the willingness of Appalachians to seek out such services is also dependent on Appalachian identity and feelings of resistance towards institutions after being mistreated by such powers for so long.

The concept of Appalachian identity is a complicated one that affects everything from health and socioeconomic factors to how communities of the region interact with consistent government and industry negligence. Appalachian people are often mischaracterized in two ways; by an exclusively positive culture model or an overly negative model that does not acknowledge any existing culture in Appalachia to begin with. The first model only acknowledges positive traits of Appalachians which can be digested as "good" by the greater United States. This includes traits such as being devoted christians (protestant-christianity), being hard-working, family and community oriented, and resilient (Maloney and Obermiller 104). The exclusively positive model is problematic because it only serves to put a coat of gloss over Appalachia to make it palatable. While some of the traits listed above apply to most Appalachian people, people are not entirely composed of only "good" traits. This model is a hollow attempt to improve the image of Appalachia for an outside audience in order to earn assistance through proving that Appalachians are an acceptable group. It serves to say: "look how good we are, don't we deserve your sympathy and help?" While it acknowledges the existence of an Appalachian culture, it does not provide a meaningful perspective of it. The second model doesn't acknowledge the existence or potential use of Appalachian culture. It focuses mainly on things deemed negative or as a marker of lesser-than status by the rest of the United States such as low intelligence, generational poverty, bad hygiene, highly fatalistic, and hostility. This model is a way for the United States to rationalize its dislike of Appalachia purely on a basis of traits that it does not approve of and views as a hallmark of low value.

Both models feed into stereotypes about the region. Dissolving Appalachia into an itemized list of positive and negative is a shallow way of perceiving the region. Rather than an organized culture, Appalachia is a collection of identities that span in size from an individual to communities to the entire region itself (Maloney and Obermiller 111). It is a complex region that contains living people who change everyday, as well as traditions and folkways that are integral to such individual's identities and should not be ignored.

With that being said, in relation to government and industry, resistance and forced powerlessness are crucial to Appalachian identity and vice versa. Appalachians have often been the only ones willing to stand up for themselves through direct action such as the Battle of Blair mountain, an uprising of miners against the United States government in which the government ended up dropping bombs on Appalachia to stop the conflict (Nardella 184-185). From such attitudes, Appalachians have developed a transgenerational sense of hostility towards institutional action. As provided in "Substance Use in Rural Central Appalachia: Current Status and Treatment Considerations," published in *Rural Mental Health*, this "long history of anti-regulatory sentiments in the region..create[s] resistance to legal efforts" (Moody et al. 2) that attempt to curb issues ranging from substance abuse to education.

On the other side of things, Appalachian identity also serves to strengthen ties of communities in the region and aids in group power through tight-knit interpersonal bonds with fellow Appalachians. It creates a sense of self for many and a rich oral tradition helps to pass on the ideas of power through resistance, even in current times when more nuanced negligence and mistreatment is experienced. Appalachian identity is a crucial part of the region but a part that is often at odds with the little effort government and industry actually do take to assist the region.

There is a case to be made for measures the government (and less so but still

significantly, industry) has taken to aid Appalachia through various programs, initiatives, legislature, and dispensing of federal funding. An instance that highlights government action to regulate industry and assist Appalachian poverty well is the implementation of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act.

The Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act was put into place in 1969 under the Nixon administration after rates of coal dust related health issues (specifically pneumoconiosis, a lung disease caused by exposure to certain dust) kept increasing and several mining disasters occurred. The act set a federal exposure limit to coal dust and created the Coal Workers Health Surveillance Program (CWHSP). The CWHSP was a national program that monitored underground conditions for miners and allowed miners to get free periodic chest x-rays. If certain adverse signs were revealed in an x-ray, that miner would be allowed to work in an environment with less coal dust. Due to this act, rates of pneumoconiosis did decline consistently until the early 1990's (Suarthana et al. 908). Effective federal action and industry compliance created a rare atmosphere in which Appalachian miners were recognized as more than just labor and were given resources to overcome some of the negative effects of working in the industry. Despite these measures, Appalachia still suffers from the amount of weak points in such action and the lack of action that they accomplish in the first place. A study published in *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* highlights some areas of failing of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act by the early 2000s and to this day through rates of pneumoconiosis in coal miners. The study was conducted by surveying around twelve-thousand underground Appalachian coal miners and the prevalence of pneumoconiosis in that group from 2005-2009. It found that rates of pneumoconiosis had increased instead of continuing to decrease as it had before under the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act (Suarthana et al. 908). The act did create an excellent safety net for Appalachian coal miners but is not entirely effective in its

goals. It brings to light the problem of most federal action that attempts to assist Appalachia; it is not a fully committed effort. There is some factor lacking from the action, whether it be lack of proper legislation, resources, or corruption in the action itself. All of these pitfalls can be seen in both the Elk River chemical spill and Centralia coal fire discussed earlier.

Though Appalachia is inundated with disparities across socioeconomic and health fronts, there are potential solutions to some of the problems it faces. As a first step, industry should be held comprehensively accountable for the long-term effects it has had on Appalachia. Defining what exactly "comprehensively accountable" entails is complicated but should involve legal prosecution as well as more regulations and strict enforcement of those regulations moving forward. This means more than just arbitrary fines; it means sanctions, even if profit margins suffer from it. Appalachian economies should be diverse and for the good of the people living in them rather than for the use of industry. History cannot be changed but what can be improved for Appalachians now should be.

On the health and healthcare front, better education and access are key. Education refers to better dissemination of information to Appalachians through a variety of means that help to demystify and de-demonize healthcare as it is so deeply ingrained as such in Appalachian identity. The means in which this is accomplished should be wide-spread and community-based. As aptly put by William Schumann, the director of the Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University, "[we] cannot only focus on resistance and expect systemic results…history informs us of the importance of (at some point) integrating grassroots pressure and legislative action" (27-28). In regards to access, broadband internet should continue to be expanded in the region in order to make telehealth a more viable option for Appalachian people. Hospitals and physicians alike (especially mental-health related personnel and infrastructure) should receive more stable federal funding to help cross the

bridges of geographic isolation and to operate at better capacities.

Appalachia experiences negative health and socioeconomic outcomes from government and industry neglect. Even though some minor government action has been taken, it tends to lack proper resources to actually help the region. Both specific and broad instances of government and industry negligence have severe effects on Appalachia's wellbeing across all fronts. This is easily illustrated through the disparities in health and healthcare in Appalachia. Appalachia's unique identity serves an active role in how Appalachians interact with such negligence, mistreatment and disparities. Appalachia is not something to look at and pity, it is a region that only asks for an apology in the form of legal and social justice. It is full of individuals who are deeply tied to the mountains surrounding them, with both entities surviving different forms of mistreatment. Action can and should be taken towards better treatment of Appalachian communities that centers around quality of life and reparative action for the consistent negligence committed. Appalachian blood is as formidable as the mountains themselves.

References

Cole, Shelly and Robert R. Davis. "Healthcare in Appalachia and the Role of the Federal Government." *West Virginia Law Review,* vol. 120, no. 3, Apr. 2018, researchrepository.wvu.edu/wvlr/vol120/iss3/13.

Maloney, Michael E. and Phillip J. Obermiller. "The Uses and Misuses of Appalachian Culture." *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2016, pp. 103–112. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.com/stable/10.5406/jappastud.22.1.0103.

Marshall, Julie L. et al. "Creating a Culture of Health in Appalachia: Disparities and Bright Spots." *Appalachian Regional Commission* (a*rc.gov*), August 23 2017, pp 1-371. www.arc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Health_Disparities_in_Appalachia_August_2 017.pdf.

Moody, Lara et al. "Substance Use in Rural Central Appalachia: Current Status and Treatment Considerations." *Rural Mental Health*, vol. 41, April 2017, pp. 123-135. *PubMed Central*, DOI:10.1037/rmh0000064.

Nardella, Beth. "Power, Resistance, and Place in Appalachia." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, vol. 22, no. 2, Apr. 2022, pp. 184-195. *Sage Journals*, doi.org/10.1177/15327086211065806.

Nolter, Melissa A. and Daniel H. Vice. "Looking back at the Centralia coal fire: a synopsis of its present status." *International Journal of Coal Geology*, vol. 59, no. 1-2, 2004, pp. 99-106. *Science Direct*, doi.org/10.1016/j.coal.2003.12.008.

Palmer, M. A., et al. "Mountaintop Mining Consequences." *Science*, vol. 327, no. 5962, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Jan. 8 2010, pp. 148–49. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40508802.

Robinson, Cara. "An Exploration of Poverty in Central Appalachia: Questions of Culture,

Industry, and Technology." *KOME − An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry*, vol. 3, Issue 2, 2015, p. 75-89. DOI: 10.17646.

Schumann, William. "Sustainable Development in Appalachia: Two Views." *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, Spring 2016, pp. 19–30. *JSTOR*, doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.22.1.0019.

Schwartzman, Gabe. "POWER and the Future of Appalachia: Discursive Framings of an Economic Transition." *Southeastern Geographer*, vol. 61, no. 4, Winter 2021, pp. 343–56. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27094639.

Suarthana, Eva, et al. "Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis in the United States: Regional Differences 40 Years after Implementation of the 1969 Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act." *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, vol. 68, no. 12, 2011, pp. 908–913. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41408467.

Thorne, Deborah, et al. "Poverty and Income in Appalachia." *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2004, pp. 341–357. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41446644. Young, Stephen. "'Do We Really Want to Go Down That Path?': Abandoning Appalachia and the Elk River Chemical Spill." *Social Justice*, vol. 45, no. 2/3 (152/153), 2018, pp. 93–118. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26677658.

Personal Story of Appalachia

By David Hall

My late father, Bernard “Bill” Hall, was born to parents in the Appalachian mountains of West Virginia. His father was a coal miner and separated from the family. His mother died when he was young. He was raised by his grandparents on a hard scrabble mountain farm, where he delighted in joking about cows with shorter legs on one side, enabling them to stand on the slopes of their mountain pastures.

One thing he would not have delighted in would have been a recent book with “Hillbilly” in the title. On more than one occasion he insisted with raised voice that “I’m not a hillbilly. I’m a mountaineer.” And he remained a proud West Virginia mountaineer until his death at age 87.

He left his beloved mountain farm after graduation from high school and enlisted in the U. S. Army. While stationed in Michigan, he met my mother, fell in love, and was married during WWII. He was soon after shipped over to India and was a Master Sargent in charge of an Army Air Corps communication unit. At the conclusion of the war he returned to Michigan, my mother, and me, and remained a “Michigander” for the rest of his life.

But in his heart and soul, he always belonged to Appalachia and those West Virginia mountains. In his “growing up years” he worked on the farm, where his grandparents eked out a meager living. And as a youth he learned at an early age how to manage a team of horses. They plowed and worked the farm in the growing season, and did logging on the mountain slopes in the winter. He was too young to be felling trees and cutting with the crosscut saws, but he could skid out logs with his horses.

About 75 years later he laid near death on a hospital bed, fading in and out of consciousness. But in a few moments of waking, he looked up toward the ceiling of the stark room, raised his arm strongly, and commanded “Whoa, Bill, easy now!” I knew instantly that he was back with his team of horses, including his favorite named “Bill.” They were once again plowing, or skidding logs, or just raring to gallop off into those mountain slopes.

In the end, his home was Appalachia, and he was a proud mountaineer.

Echo of Hallowed Ground

By Ilyse Bourque

Winding gravel veins
body of the mountains
peppered by freckles
of carved limestone remembrance
aged by creeping moss
cracks of time, worn by winds.

Whispered breaths,
rolling mists' dense fog
fill riven boards
splintered white paint.
Muted glow of gold halo,
hillside church crosses
advertise revival.
"Prepare to Meet God"

Ancestral wood
distressed in rusted hues
praising feet warp ground,
susurrated prayer of skybound hands
for coal streaked cheeks.

Dampened hymns spill over thresholds
combing underbrush.
Kudzu creeps...*it crawls*
choking widowmakers,
the stalking feeling,
whistling in deep woods.

Sat like statues
fireflicked faces
sink into sunbleached seats
pass history,
tongue to teeth,
chapped lips to red-tipped ears
spin words like orb weavers
trap time in ancient drawl.

Effects of Linguistic Bias on Economic Success in Appalachia

By Luke Godsey

1. Introduction

1.1 Appalachian English

Appalachian English (AppE) is a dialect spoken in the Appalachian region of the United States which spans 13 states along the eastern coast of the country. There is a current debate among linguists concerning whether AppE is a dialect or language, but for the purposes of this experiment, AppE will be considered as a dialect of English. Due to its expansive size, the Appalachian Region has been subdivided into 5 regions: North, North Central, Central, South Central, and South (University of South Carolina).

Due to geographic isolation, there are many varieties of AppE; communities separated by a single mountain may display divergent linguistic evolution. This point is being made as a caution moving forward. It is easy, as with other dialects, to believe in a hegemonic or 'standard' Appalachian dialect, but this is a reductive viewpoint and can lead to linguistic bias which is the subject of this experiment. Compared to other dialects in the United States, AppE has a closer tie to older forms of English. This, again, is a consequence of the geographic isolation of AppE speakers since early colonial periods.

The Appalachian region has been a locus of exploitation throughout history; particularly in natural resources such as coal (Smith, 2020). Coal companies would enter the Appalachian region to remove coal from both mines and mountain tops through strip mining. The labor force was made of usually poor Appalachian men who were willing to work in dangerous conditions. The coal companies paid these men very little compared to the value of their labor and the value of the coal that was removed from the region (Smith, 2020).The profits of the coal industry were not shared with the people of Appalachia and the effects of this are still prevalent today. 39 of the top 50 counties in the United States with the lowest median household income are in states that are a part of the Appalachian region; with Kentucky alone comprising 13 (Wikimedia Foundation, 2024).

1.2 Perceptions of Appalachian English

While perceptions of AppE vary across the United States, it has been found that attitudes towards speakers of AppE are generally negative, with perceptions of lack of intelligence and untrustworthiness (Cramer, 2018**).** These perceptions often thrive in more affluent communities; specifically upper-class urban and suburban areas. AppE speakers are often subject to the pejorative "hillbilly" among other less pleasant terms. (Hazen, 2023). Other perceptions include the idea that AppE speakers are racist and incestuous. These biases against Appalachian English create immense tension between the Appalachian region and the rest of the U.S as well as among Appalachian communities of different socioeconomic statuses.

1.3 Guiding Question and Hypothesis

Past literature has focused on how AppE speakers have experienced linguistic bias as a whole, however, there is a gap in the literature pertaining to the material consequences of these biases. This experiment chiefly aims to answer the question: when dialect is varied, will there be a change in the perceived intelligence and trustworthiness of the individual seeking a business loan? Informed by previous literature, we hypothesize that AppE speakers will receive allocations of loans at a lower rate than Standard American English (SAE) speakers.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

A total of 100 participants were recruited via an online application as well as standard snowballing method. The ages of participants range from 18 - 54 and the distribution of men and women was close to 50%. (49% men and 51% women). Participants come from a diverse set of linguistic backgrounds, however, this is limited to backgrounds within the United States as all participants currently reside in the U.S. Furthermore, the socioeconomic status of the participants varies greatly with annual incomes ranging from $20,000 to $100,000.

2.3 Random Allocation Game

2.3.1 Game setup

Each participant was placed alone in a room with a standard table and chair. In front of the participant are two opaque jars with a slit in the lid in which a coin can be inserted. The jars are labeled Group A and Group B respectively. The jars are opaque to prevent the player from keeping track of the total allocation while playing the game. Behind each jar was a speaker that was used to play voice recordings during the experiment. Participants were given colorful plastic coins to allocate during each round.

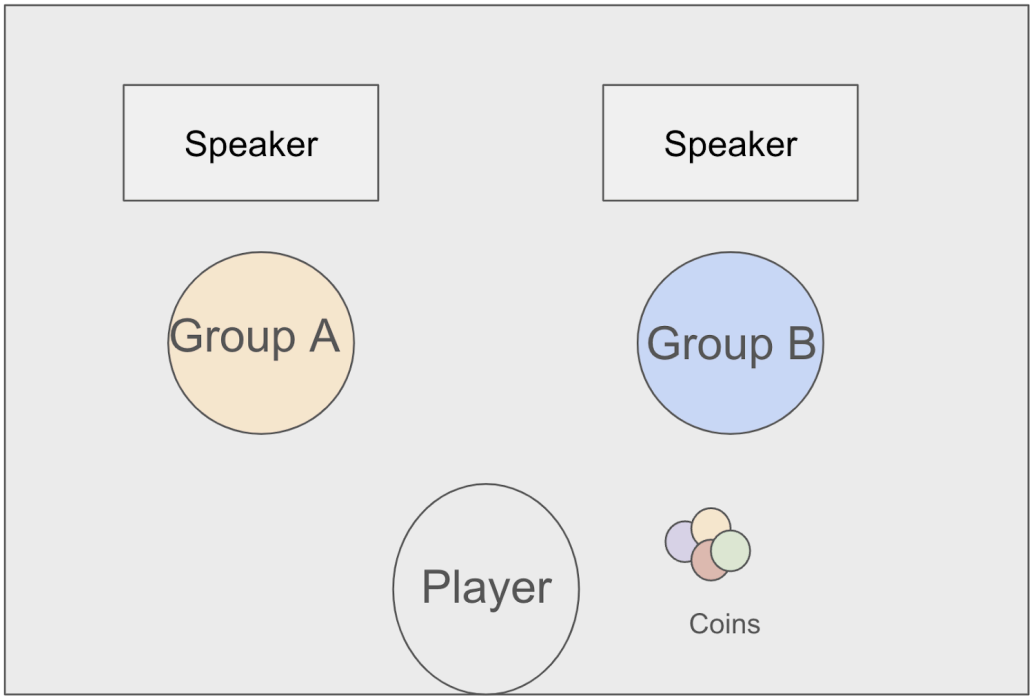

Figure 1. An aerial view of the game space.

2.3.2 Game Procedure

Possible biases towards AppE speakers were measured through the use of a Random Allocation Game (RAG). A RAG is a one player game in which during each round the player is asked to make a decision of how to allocate a certain resource, however, unlike standard allocation games, participants in RAGs are then asked to flip a coin and allocate resources instead to the group assigned to either heads or tails.

Each participant completed 40 rounds of the random allocation game. The participants were told that they were playing the role of a loan officer and they would be hearing requests for a small business loan. During each round a single voice recording was played from each speaker behind jars A and B. Each voice recording was of an individual requesting a loan for their small business. The businesses were very similar as to not allow business type to be an additional variable. After hearing each voice recording once, the player was asked to think about which individual they wanted to allocate the loan to. After this, the player was then asked to flip a coin and allocate the loan to the corresponding group (Heads = Group A and Tails = Group B).

Each group consisted of voice recordings of 20 individuals. Group A consisted of 10 AppE speaking men and 10 AppE speaking women. Group B consisted of 10 SAE speaking men and 10 SAE speaking women. The voice recordings each round were paired by gender (women with women and men with men). This measure was taken to control the interaction of the variables of gender and dialect so the scope of this experiment would remain an appropriate size. The

participants listened to each set of voice recordings twice (non-consecutively) for a total of 40 rounds. After each participant completed the 40 rounds, the amount of coins in each jar was counted by the researchers.

3. Results

While this experiment was not able to be performed it would be remiss to not suggest possible results informed by past research.

According to the rules of RAGs we would expect the distributions of loans to each group to be 50% or very close to this proportion. This is due to the fact that a coin flip is what should ultimately determine each allocation. In practice, however, we find games in which the difference between the actual allocation and the expected 50% is statistically significant (Kundtová Klocová et al., 2022). This suggests that participants may cheat and choose to not follow the rules of the random allocation game; the implications of which will be discussed later.

We can surmise that there will be instances of cheating during our trials, but most likely the occurrence rate will be low. Past literature suggests that while the occurrence rate of cheating may be low, there may be a slight favoring towards Group B.

3.1 Visualization

Below are two figures that work to visualize the data that will be obtained when this experiment will be completed. Figure 2 represents the distribution of allocation that we expect when the player follows the rules and only allocates based off of the random coin flip. A coin flip has a binomial distribution, so we expect the distribution of unbiased games to be a bell curve with the peak at 50% (20 coins) allocation to Group A. This is unlikely to be the bell curve that we will actually observe after running the experiment.

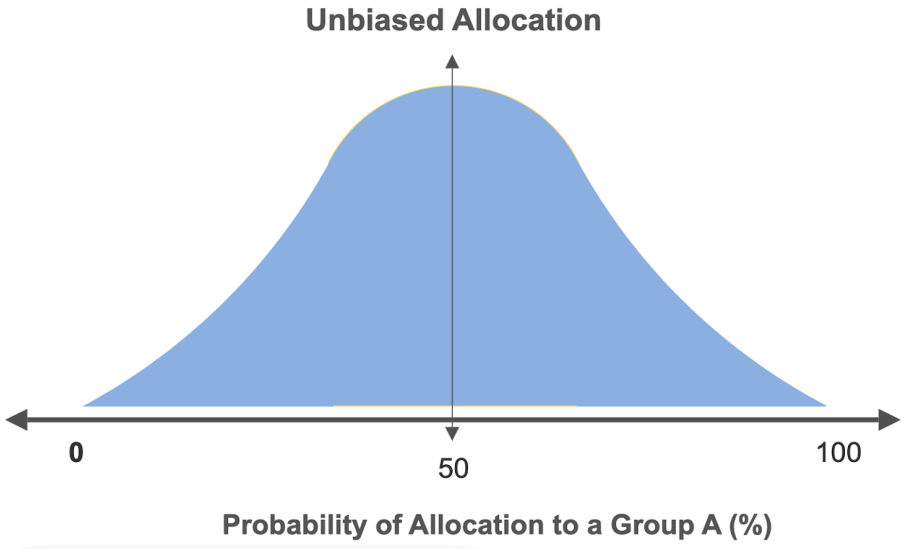

Figure 2. Visualization of Allocation That is Unbiased

What we will most likely find is a bell similar to Figure 3. This bell is skewed to the left, which suggests that more players unfairly withheld allocation of coins to Group A. It is important to note that this bell curve is simply to represent data that might be gathered from this experiment; the true bell curve may be much less biased.

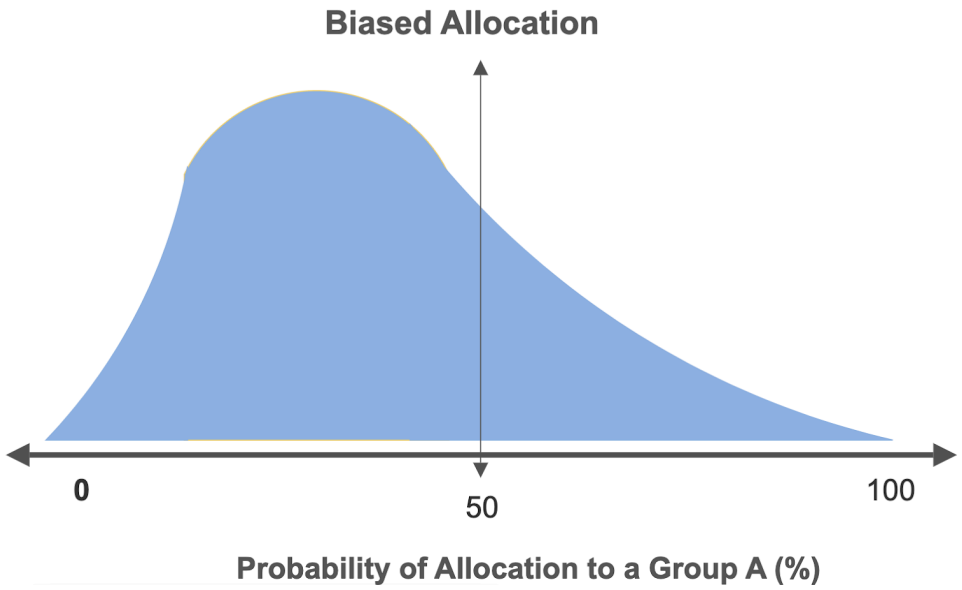

Figure 3. Visualization of Allocation that is Biased

4. Discussion

A RAG was chosen for this experiment for the occurrences of cheating that comes with the game. The randomness of the coin flip before each allocation provides a sense of plausible deniability for each participant; if a participant has a bias against a certain outgroup (in this case AppE), then the participant may be more inclined to break the rules and allocate more resources to a perceived ingroup. This allows us to analyze biases better than in a normal allocation game. In a normal allocation game, the participants may feel pressured to allocate a certain way and that was not the desired outcome of the game for this experiment. Dialect discrimination often occurs behind the guise of anonymity, so we wanted to recreate this environment in our game design.

The results from this RAG have many implications beyond just economics, but it is helpful to begin there and then extrapolate further. In this experiment, participants were asked to play the role of a loan officer which is an economic authority. This places the biases shown against AppE speakers in a new light as past literature has investigated the perceptions of AppE speakers as a whole while this experiment has questioned perceptions in certain realms of life. This gives us a clearer idea of the real-world consequences of linguistic biases. The results of this experiment suggest that the impact of linguistic biases may go beyond just linguistic bullying.

It is accurate to say that AppE speakers are perceived as uneducated, but it is more impactful to have evidence of how AppE speakers are perceived in different situations. This experiment has focused specifically on how AppE speakers may be discriminated against in the context of economics. The results of this study implicate that AppE speakers may have more difficulty with loan acquisition and negotiation with banks than SAE speakers. This creates a cycle in which AppE speakers are unable to break out of the poverty that affects many parts of the Appalachian region. Due to their dialect, AppE speakers are perceived as poor and uneducated and, as was seen in our experiment, this leads to these speakers receiving less allocation of economically advantageous resources such as loans and credit. This then empowers the notion that AppE speakers are poor and incapable of managing wealth that originally fueled the lack of allocation. A visualization of this process can be seen in Figure 4.

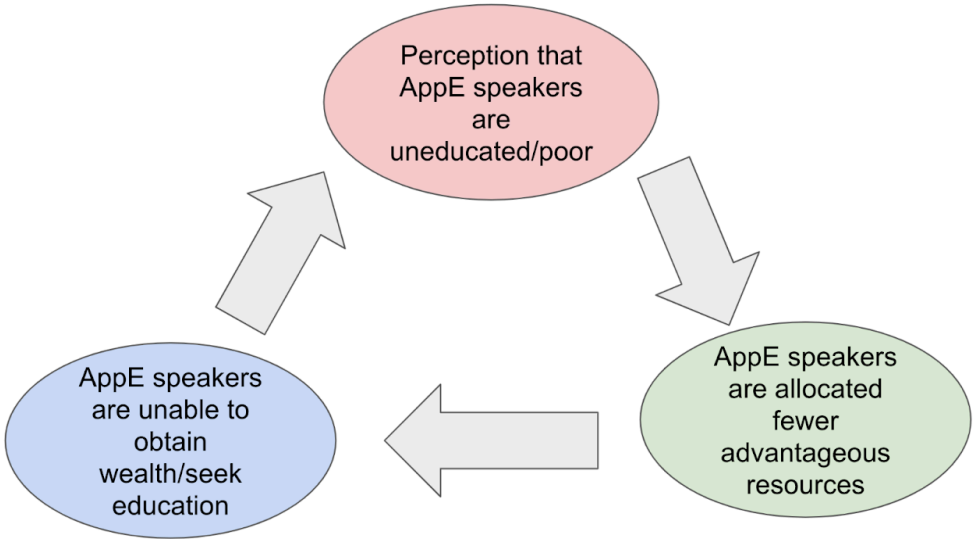

Figure 4. Visualization of the cycle of biases against AppE Speakers

The perceptions of AppE speakers revealed in this economic game can be extrapolated to other scenarios in which an authority is making a decision. For example, AppE speakers may have more difficulty in the job application process or during college admissions. This again inflates the issues that many AppE speakers are unable to make change in their current socioeconomic status which then fuels the negative perception of the dialect.

5. Conclusion

There are many more aspects of this apparent bias towards AppE that need to be explored further. Particularly, the effect of gender of the speaker on allocation as well as the socioeconomic status of the allocator. Bias is a multifaceted issue that requires extensive research to begin to fully understand. The research presented here makes an effort to add to the existing literature of perceptual dialectology while attempting to focus on certain aspects of real life interaction that may lead to material disadvantages for AppE speakers. The perception cycle of

AppE speakers has deep historical roots and change of this cycle will be a major challenge. Change will require an intentional, impactful, and multifaceted approach. These biases towards AppE run so deep that many people do not realize that they are being biased. The future is bright, however, as America's cultural consciousness has been shifting to question linguistic biases such as these.

References

Cramer, J. (2018). Perceptions of Appalachian English in Kentucky. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, *24*(1), 45–71. https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.24.1.0045

Hazen, K. (2023, August 17). *Combatting stereotypes about Appalachian dialects*. SAPIENS. https://www.sapiens.org/language/appalachian-dialects-stereotypes/

Kundtová Klocová, E., Lang, M., Maňo, P., Kundt, R., & Xygalatas, D. (2022). Cigarettes for the dead: Effects of sorcery beliefs on parochial prosociality in Mauritius. *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, *12*(1–2), 116–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599x.2021.2006286

Smith, E. (2020, October 9). *Human rights in the Appalachian region of the United States of America: An introduction*. UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog. https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2020/10/13/human-rights-in-the-appalachian-region-of-the-united-states-of-america-an-introduction/

University of South Carolina. Where is Appalachia? | Southern Appalachian English. (n.d.). https://artsandsciences.sc.edu/appalachianenglish/node/783

Wikimedia Foundation. (2024, December 15). *List of lowest-income counties in the United States*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_lowest-income_counties_in_the_United_States

Revitalizing Johnstown: Why the Youth Need to Step Up

By Kaison Wills

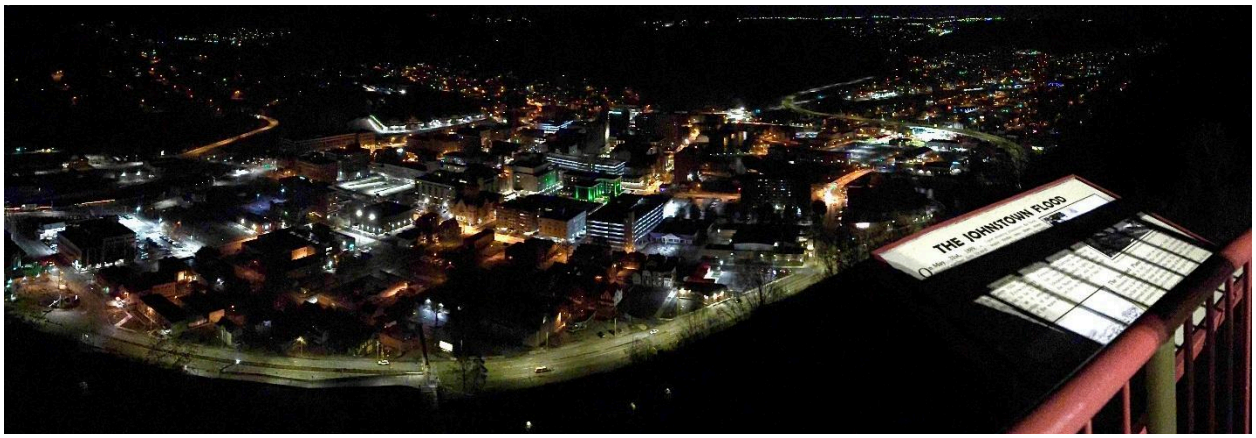

Photo: *Picture of Downtown Johnstown*, Kaison Wills, Nov. 24, 2024

Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a city once booming with steel industry prosperity, now sits in the shadow of its former self. For decades, the city's economy has declined, and its streets have felt the effects of job loss, disinvestment, and young people seeking opportunities elsewhere. But despite these challenges, Johnstown is not beyond saving. The key to its revival lies with the youth --those who still call this city home and those who may one day return. If the younger generation of Johnstown wants to live in a thriving community rather than a struggling one, they must be willing to roll up their sleeves and get involved.

Many young people in Johnstown express frustration with the lack of things to do and the limited opportunities the city offers. They often point to the absence of jobs, parks, and recreational spaces as reasons for wanting to leave. And who can blame them? With the city's population shrinking, Johnstown's economic base crumbling, and retail businesses closing, it's hard to envision a future here. But here's the thing: Johnstown won't improve unless the next generation steps up and works together to make it a better place. The youth have the power to create change --they are the ones who can breathe new life into this town.

The importance of youth involvement in revitalization efforts isn't just a theoretical idea; it's a proven model in communities across the country. Take Berea, Kentucky, for example, a small town with fewer than 16,000 residents. Berea, much like Johnstown, was a struggling community for many years. But it transformed itself by embracing its unique heritage in the arts. Young people in Berea saw the potential of the town's history and culture, and through their efforts, they turned it into a hub for artisans, tourists, and creatives. Today, Berea is a thriving arts community with its own college that draws visitors from all over the country, thanks in large part to the younger generation who saw the town's potential and made it their own.

Johnstown, like Berea, has untapped potential. It is home to beautiful landscapes, a rich history, and a community that, despite its challenges, still carries a sense of pride. The city may not be able to compete with larger metropolitan areas, but it doesn't have to. If young people in Johnstown embraced their heritage, invested in local businesses, and advocated for improvements, they could start a movement that would revitalize the city in ways people

wouldn't expect. This could be the place where a new creative economy is born- a place for artists, entrepreneurs, and tech innovators to call home. The youth of Johnstown could be the driving force behind such a transformation.

But if young people continue to leave Johnstown in search of better opportunities elsewhere, the city will continue its slow decline. I know this firsthand --I left Johnstown to attend Penn and haven't looked back. The opportunities I found in Philadelphia are undeniable. But not everyone needs to leave to find success, and it's worth considering how things could change if more young people decided to stay and rebuild.

Some may argue that Johnstown is already in the process of rebuilding itself, and that the involvement of young people isn't as critical as I make it out to be. While it's true that the city is experiencing some growth through infrastructure projects and small business development, these efforts are not enough to reverse decades of decline. The reality is that Johnstown is still viewed as a struggling community by outsiders, and the economic future of the city remains uncertain. Without the energy, innovation, and passion of young people, Johnstown's revitalization will remain slow and incomplete.

Not everyone will get involved in this effort, and that's okay. But for those who do, the rewards will be profound. There's something uniquely fulfilling about being part of a movement that shapes the future of a place. By stepping up and contributing in whatever way they can, young people in Johnstown have the power to turn their city into a thriving, vibrant community once again.

Ill-Nurtured Nature

By Joseph Szalinski

They left me in the woods…a simple game of hide-and-seek, only there was no reciprocation. I've been here for so long, the imprints my knees have made are now pools of mud from the rainstorm that swept through a little bit ago. My shirt has been reduced to torn fabric after an encounter with a patch of thorn bushes. My left shoe is missing, off flirting with some quagmire a mile or so back. There's no ethnicity in the woods like there is where I'm from. The blood from cuts and dried, caked mud has become my ethnicity; skin purpled from the cold night air.

But I'm beginning to forgive my so-called friends for abandoning me. I've made new friends; the hole-filled tree leaves, those holes in the shape of abstruse faces, making no remarks and passing no judgment. Ready to superimpose any characteristic I wish to attach to them.

How the traffic lights from the cluttered suburban streets I'm used to, pale in comparison to the stars lighting the night sky. Constellations replacing television as entertainment for me. There's a marriage between my breaths, which dance in short, scratchy form, and the thoughts of contentment, which parade through my brain. No exact thoughts, mind you, more like Zen. An absence of any real material, thoughts about thought, about absolutely nothing and everything.

One would expect me to grow hungry, but only, I do not hunger. I am not confined to one corporeal existence. I am many, a shared experience. The reason I am not sought is because no one knew to find me. They left, exchanging awe and wonder and humility, for safety, lies, and unnatural construction. Both physical and immaterial. I am forfeiture. The "Let's leave it behind, it isn't worth it, we can always get another."

But they don't understand. They can't. True, I am always waiting…willing to accept with open arms and forgiveness, but they don't seem to make any concession, instead, they want to make this thing called progress. Towers stand and sidewalks sleep in my earthen bed in place of me. Becoming a mistress to the soil and minerals. What hurts most is that the material these new obstructions are made from comes from me and the rest of nature. As if we weren't good enough as we were. We wait patiently, trying to understand how to get you back. You live in your towns, with your possessions, for that's where they live. Living a very narrow existence in them, and having the gall to call it experience. We keep your shared experiences and discarded goods in our belly, in hopes of luring you back, just wishing to experience real experience with you again.

A Four Year Flag Destroyed 16,000 Years of History

By Ethan Godsey

Living in Appalachia It's impossible to not see the confederate flag on a semi regular basis anytime you leave your home. Whether it's your neighbors garage or a bumper sticker, it's impossible not to see it. To me, this is a great shame that haunts Appalachia and is a virus of an ideology that has taken root like a parasite despite not even being a real part of our history. Appalachia is an ancient place that predates even the trees that cover it like a warm blanket, it held a diverse and rich history of native peoples that made my ancestors' time in the mountains seem like a fresh faced babe. And while I would love to learn more about this time before our families set their roots in Appalachia's ancient bones; the issue I'm speaking of is very recent and is a dangerous blanket that not only covers our home but is also at risk to smother us in our sleep. Appalachia, in my opinion, has always been a place of poverty and hardships. These hardships have made a culture of community and support that has dated back for centuries, the struggles of life here makes all of us brothers and sisters of the mountains. And what do we do when our brother or sister is in trouble? We stop what we are doing and help them. WE help our neighbors, WE help the man on the side of the road, WE help the fallen person, WE help the lost traveler, WE help because this struggle in the mountains has made us family.

But for the last 162 years there has been a cancer from the south that has driven a wedge in the family and turned our brothers and sisters into hate filled creatures that stalk the mountains. These creatures hide who they are from us, they shake your hand while thinking OUR family is lesser than. They hate our family because it holds wonderfully unique people that struggle right beside us. These same creatures that will claim that its heritage not hate that has them waving a flag that didn't last long enough to leave elementary school, but anyone who has ever interacted with them knows different. These creatures were once men, like you and me, but the struggles of the mountain have worn them to the point of looking for blame in all the wrong

places. From a young age their heads are filled with hate and spite like an infection that refuses to be cut out, and this infection is destroying us.

The worst part is that those waving the flag truly think that these four years are OUR history. What do we, the people who struggled day to day and fed our families with the sweat of our brow, have in common with rich fat cats of the south that sipped tea in the hot sun while others did the work? Those four years were rich landowners fighting to stay fat and lazy, so they would never have to be like us. We fought for fair wages from the mine owners that took our lives with slow and painful death, yet these people wave a flag that idolizes those same people that have always abused us and say its THEIR history. The confederacy was four years of southerners hating those they saw as lesser and fighting to keep them so they could stay in their rich homes and profit from those that actually work.

Now I don't know about you, but I think the people of Appalachia have more in common with those the flag suppressed than those that waved it.