

Assumptions & Realities:

Searching for Appalachian Culture in Literature

Here's the best-laid plan!

 **Diving in: “hillbilly,” “Why I Will Always Write about Appalachia”:** information, history, context

 **Digging in: what is assumed, what is real?**

**“Among Elms & Maples,” “Twenty-Six Days,”
“The Road,” “Talk About Pretty”**

? **Digressing? “Mountain People,” “Underworld,”
*Trampoline***

 **Deducing: what does it all mean? connections?**

“Hillbilly”: assumptions, associations

- **poor**
- **uneducated**
- **insular**
- **independent**
- **country, rural**
- **proud**
- **coves**

Appalachia

13 states

420 counties

78 distressed

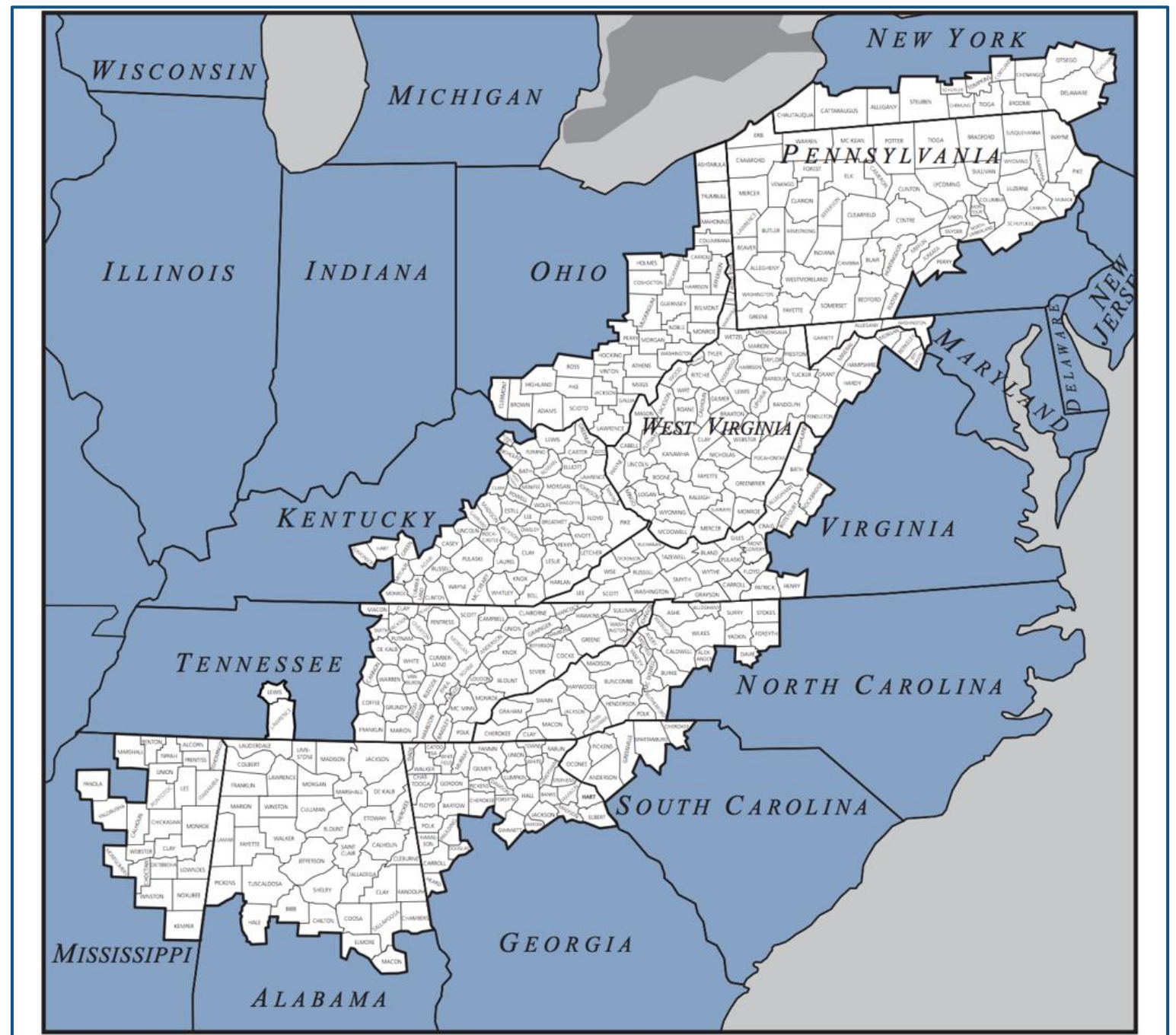
104 at-risk

223 transitional

13 competitive

2 attainment

Appalachian Regional Commission



Appalachian Subregions

Northern

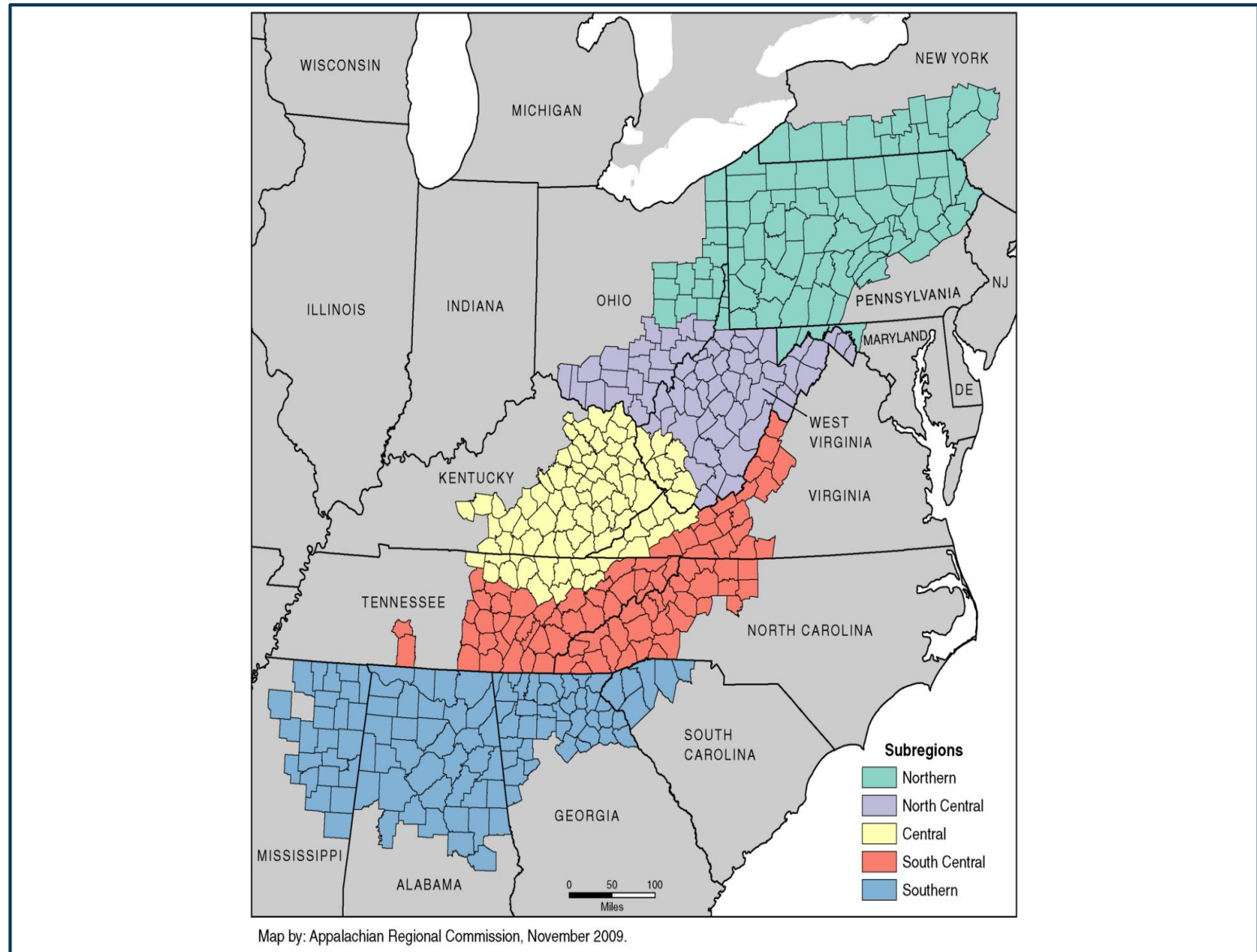
North Central

Central

South Central

Southern

(OH = northern & north central)



Appalachian Ohio Counties

**Adams; Ashtabula; Athens;
Belmont; Brown; Carroll;
Clermont; Columbiana;
Coshocton; Gallia; Guernsey;
Harrison; Highland; Hocking;
Holmes; Jackson; Jefferson;
Lawrence; Mahoning; Meigs;
Monroe; Morgan; Muskingum;
Noble; Perry; Pike; Ross;
Scioto; Trumbull; Tuscarawas;
Vinton; Washington**

(32 of 88)

Foundation for Appalachian Ohio



Why I Will Always Write about Appalachia

- ❖ **History**
- ❖ **Losses**
- ❖ **Reasons for isolation**
- ❖ **Derogatory terms**
- ❖ **Cultural denigration**
- ❖ **Stereotypes/reality**
- ❖ **Answer: literature of their own for future writers**

Your comments, questions?

- **down on Hillbilly Elegy?**
- **memoir?**
- **own experience**
- **pack horse librarians?**

Mountain People, by Jo Carson

Mountain people
can't read,
can't write,
don't wear shoes,
don't have teeth,
don't use soap,
and don't talk plain.
They beat their kids,
beat their friends,
beat their neighbors,
and beat their dogs.
They live on cow peas,
Fatback and twenty acres
Straight up and down.

They don't have money.
They do have fleas,
overalls,
tobacco patches,
shacks,
shotguns, foodstamps,
liquor stills,
and at least six junk cars in the front yard.
Right?
Well, let me tell you:
I am from here,
I'm not like that
And I am damned tired of being told I am.

(29-30)

from *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet*

**View of
Morgantown, West
Virginia, 1935
– Walker Evans**

***Walker Evans:
Photographs for the
Farm Security
Administration,
1935-1938***

**Available: Otterbein
library; archive.org**

Chicago Institute Of Art



**General view of
Seneca Glass Co.,
1974**

**Seneca Glass Co.
Factory, Beechurst
Avenue between
Sixth & Eighth
Streets, Morgantown,
Monongalia County**

**WV Photos from Survey
HAER WV-6, Library of
Congress**



**View of Morgantown,
West Virginia, 1935**


– Walker Evans

***Walker Evans:
Photographs for the
Farm Security
Administration, 1935-
1938***

**Available: Otterbein Library;
archive.org**



Among Elms and Maples, Morgantown, West Virginia, August, 1935

 “present” = almost 1985
(*Cold Comfort*, 1987)

 verbs & -ing forms

 outside vs. inside, art vs. life

 appearances & realities

 literal, metaphoric “frames”

 poem’s emotions, tone

 “That would be another
picture, not this one.”

Your questions?

- ...
- ...
- ...

Underworld: Hopedale Mining, Cadiz, OH,

by Jeanne Marie Laskas


Everyone I talked to in the coal mine had a reason for being there that had nothing to do with coal, even if the reason was beer. . . .


“They say if you truly find a job you love, then you’ll never work a day in your life,” Foot told me, and he wasn’t talking about coal mining. Fifty-two head of beef cattle, a brand-new Massey 390 tractor, a Krone KR 125 baler, and a Case IH 995 tractor with a loader on it – that’s why he mined coal: to afford his farms, two of them, 280 acres in all. He was hoping to buy a third, because he had three kids and it only seemed right to leave each kid a farm.


I heard that kind of story over and over again. Only a few of the coal miners I met *didn’t* own at least a hundred acres of Ohio farmland, chunks passed through the generations, added to, divided among brothers and sisters. Farming doesn’t pay the bills, so you go into the coal mines. The deep, rich, plentiful mines of the Appalachia region are what have helped keep so many family farms east of the Mississippi intact for over a century. [. . .] (31-32)


from Hidden America: From Coal Miners to Cowboys, An Extraordinary Exploration of the Unseen People Who Make This Country Work

Twenty-Six Days

 **story moves quietly, subtly, so may overlook “facts” or not realize importance of events or characters ‘til later; what puzzled or confused you as you read?**

 **when do we realize what the title refers to? why wait so long to reveal it?**

 **multiple assumptions, mindsets ultimately upended by reality, truth; what assumptions and realities did you notice?**

 **beginning and ending ¶s; why begin and end with that focus? what does Rash achieve with it?**

Twenty-Six Days Comments, Questions

 **Professors' names – narrator is custodian**



 **He!**

 **slowly increasing the tension – tension remains at end, we don't know the ending**

 **...**

The Road

Context

-  **George Ella Lyon's poem, prompt, "Where I'm From," sparks memory, images, creativity**
-  **Alice Walker's 1972 essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," recognizes & praises the Black art displayed in women's gardens**

To notice as you listen:

- ❖ **organization, its aims**
- ❖ **where road is**
- ❖ **past, present**
- ❖ **color!**
- ❖ **stereotypes turned on heads**
- ❖ **layers of meaning in "beautiful"**

Pauletta Hansel reading “The Road”

Click here to watch: <https://youtu.be/3KsumeDQSbl>



The Road Comments and Questions



Trampoline, by Robert Gipe

Blue Bear wasn't just about winning a fight. Everything I could see from Mamaw's porch, every place I run through on a four-wheeler, every birdsong and spring flower, every ferny frond that come up beside a yellow muddy trail – all that kept me alive sure as if it was air I was breathing. The trees and the roll of the earth held me up like the ridge holds the cloud from passing so it can pour down rain. The vines and the rabbits and the squirrels and the orange lizards out on the rocks after a storm . . . I needed them close and always, where I could get to them quick

When this reason for fighting came into my mind that night . . . , the faces of my cousin Denny and his daddy rose up before me. Those coal miners who had been so good to me, who had loved me through my tree-hugging ways, needed mountains and woods more than any of us. They loved it here, and they had to tear it up to stay. The full hard hardness of their lot came down on me that winter night . . . (225-26).

Talk About Pretty

💡 whole poem follows “He said” – sound of language

💡 what all is pretty?

💡 what are the surprises in the poem?

💡 why are they surprises?

💡 compare to “The Road”

Jim Wayne Miller, 1936-1996

" Good poetry will deal with ordinary things...and still manage to evoke a sense of wonder, of the miraculous."

Prof. of German language & lit at Western KYU for 33 years

Poetry, fiction, essays

Encouraged Appalachian Studies programs, gave workshops on Appalachian lit, writing

Talk About Pretty comments, questions



Connections, Deducing, Questions

Note: If you read “Carp, and Other Lessons,” please add it to your comments/questions if you’d like.

- 🔍 What assumptions, realities, threads of meaning connect these works?**
- 🔍 What did you find out about Appalachian culture in these pieces of literature? What is valued?**
- 🔍 What works did you particularly like? Why?**
- 🔍 What questions remain?**

Pulling it all together discussion

- 🔍 **small town similarities – lessons in “Carp . . .” not necessarily lessons related only to Appalachia**
- 🔍 **reality, metaphoric, wisdom that occurs years later: could not have articulated at the time – meaning accrues**
- 🔍 . . .
- 🔍 . . .
- 🔍 . . .

Further reading

- 📖 **Chris Offutt, <http://chrisoffutt.com/work/books/>
<https://www.oxfordamerican.org/magazine/item/550-trash-food>**
- 📖 **Maggie Anderson, other poems in *Cold Comfort* (some inspired by Walker Evans photographs); *Windfall*; *Dear All***
- 📖 **Ron Rash, other stories in *Nothing Gold Can Stay*; *Something Rich and Strange* (he also writes novels and poetry)**
- 📖 **Pauletta Hansel, *Coal Town Photograph*; *Palindrome*; *Friend***
- 📖 **Jim Wayne Miller, <http://jimwaynemiller.net/> – too numerous to list!**
- 📖 **Richard Hague, rest of works in *Milltown Natural*; *Earnest Occupations: Teaching, Writing, Gardening, and Other Local Work*; many poetry collections**
- 📖 **authors/books noted on digression slides: Jo Carson, Robert Gipe (trilogy)**