

# H-Net Reviews

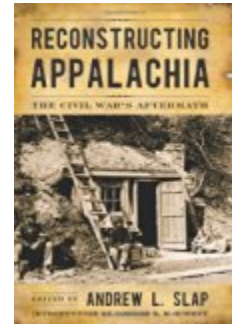
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Andrew L. Slap, ed. *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath*. New Directions in Southern History Series. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010. 390 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2581-7.

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## Deconstructing Appalachia

The tenth entry in the New Directions in Southern History series, *Reconstructing Appalachia* is not a book about the Reconstruction of Confederate Appalachian states. It is a book about changes in the lives of people living in the core Appalachian area during and after the Reconstruction Era. In thirteen essays scholars describe and analyze the Civil War's long lasting effects on the Appalachian regions of Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Collectively, the essays describe social changes that began in 1865 and extended long into the twentieth century.

Since the late 1970s, Appalachian scholars have known that Appalachia is an idea. Editor Andrew L. Slap gives readers not familiar with the invention of Appalachia a literature review describing the work of writers dealing in local color, journalists, and academics who, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, created myths about the people who lived, and live, in the core Appalachian region. The idea of Appalachia was created during Reconstruction, and its beginning is usually attributed to Will Wallace Harney's article "A Strange Land and a Peculiar People," published by *Lippincott's Magazine* in October 1873. Popular local color writers, like John Fox Jr., spread Appalachian stereotypes to a wide audience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The idea of Appalachia and its accompanying stereotypes entered the academy through Berea College President William Goodell Frost's "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern

Mountains" (*The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1899). Harry Caudill's 1963 book *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* and Jack Weller's 1965 *Yesterday's People* revived Frost's Appalachian stereotypes and sent the War on Poverty's battalions marching in the wrong direction with the war's soldiers engaging the wrong enemy.

The essayists of *Reconstructing Appalachia* demolish the myths and rebuild the Appalachian Reconstruction and Industrialization eras, using as a foundation the work done by Appalachian historians since the late 1970s. The editor arranges the collection into five topical groups: violence and politics, isolation, economics and politics, economic development, and the twentieth-century effects of nineteenth-century stereotypes. The essays focus on both local and regional issues, but writers grouped together do not always agree about the causes of social change in the core Appalachian region. The different opinions are the collection's strength, providing starting points for further research and academic debate about the Reconstruction Era in the core Appalachian region.

The first four essays focus on violence and politics in the mountain region. Keith S. Hébert reviews the Mossy Creek Ku Klux Klan's activities in Georgia's northeastern White and Habersham counties during and after the 1868 gubernatorial election. He argues that localism rather than politics motivated this group's violence. Specifically, after the 1868 election, the Mossy Creek Klan spent its energy supporting the local independent distilling in-

dustry by attempting to disrupt the enforcement of federal liquor laws. T. R. C. Hutton examines Breathitt County, Kentucky, where a staunch Union supporter led a small interracial group of men to seize the county courthouse in Jackson in the fall of 1874. Known as Bloody Breathitt, the county has a history of violence that extends from the Civil War through the coal wars of the twentieth century. Hutton reviews the battles between veteran Union supporters and the KKK through the 1897 murder of William Strong, the leader who fought against Democrat redemption from his 1874 occupation of the county courthouse to his denouncement of the resurgent Klan in the 1890s. Strong's murder apparently was in retaliation for his outspoken opposition to the local Klan. In Hutton's view, violence in Breathitt County was caused by a "confluence of personal grievances, class division, and racial violence" (p. 84). Hutton rejects localism as a primary cause of postwar eastern Kentucky violence. However, the idea of feuding sold more newspapers than did an explanation of the complex factors that caused violence in Breathitt County in the remainder of the nineteenth century. Steven E. Nash argues that race was not the decisive issue that caused violence in western North Carolina from 1865 to 1867. Loyalty to either the late Confederacy or the Union among returned veterans brought about a guerrilla war in the North Carolina mountains. Paul Yandle's essay demonstrates that western North Carolina had a major role in overthrowing Reconstruction, and argues that the KKK played only a small role in that struggle. After Klan violence subsided, Yandle writes, "western North Carolinians who opposed Reconstruction dueled verbally with white Republicans and African Americans for years" (p. 154).

The isolation of southern Highlanders in their valleys and hollows has been a staple of the core Appalachian stereotype since publication of Harney's "A Strange Land and a Peculiar People." Kyle Osborn and Mary Ella Engel deal with the degree of Appalachian isolation during Reconstruction in two essays. Osborn tells the story of William "Parson" Brownlow's shifting political and racial views. An east Tennessee newspaper publisher, Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig* helped change his antebellum reputation as a defender of slavery to that of a man who always had favored abolition, enfranchisement of African Americans, and the preservation of the Union. Arrested and imprisoned by Confederate Tennessee authorities in late 1861, the Confederacy gave him to the Union army in 1862. He was on the federal army's heels when Knoxville returned to federal control in September 1863. His new newspaper, the *Whig and Rebel Ventilator*, set about re-

constructing Brownlow's views and reputation. His successful campaign for the Tennessee governorship in 1865 was due in large part to the enfranchisement of Tennessee's male African Americans and the disenfranchisement of white Confederate veterans. Brownlow's bid for reelection in 1867 was backed by a deployment of his State Guard militia to protect his constituency. Engel's saga is an interesting story of a Mormon missionary recruiting people in the northwestern Georgia highlands to take up the Mormon faith and to migrate west. John Hamilton Morgan was one of many well-intentioned religious and secular reformers who entered the southern Highlands to bring relief and the benefits of education and a modern society to people America believed lived in "poverty and ignorance ... and a way of life culturally out of step with America's new industrialization and urbanization" (p. 192). The difference between the Mormon mission and later efforts to reform the isolated mountaineers was that Morgan and other Mormon missionaries offered an opportunity to move to new land, untroubled by continuing political divisions, while other denominational organizers wished to bring redemption and a new culture to an ignorant people in situ. The Mormons reached this rich recruiting field first, and a Presbyterian missionary of the 1880s and 1890s later reported that "he encountered Mormons 'in the most distant and inaccessible parts of the mountains. They have more missionaries in Kentucky (and probably in every Southern State) than all other denominations together'" (p. 202).

The intersection of economics and politics is a more traditional question for Appalachian historians, and two essayists explore the issues as they existed in postwar West Virginia. Randall S. Gooden describes the "combination of political, social, and economic circumstances" that "made peace elusive in West Virginia at the close of the Civil War" (p. 211). In this part of old Virginia that seceded from its Confederate motherland to remain loyal to the Union, postwar disagreements between Unionists over the treatment of former Confederates led to the creation of a new political coalition. Unionists in northern West Virginia were especially hostile to returning Confederate veterans and made clear that the former rebels were not welcome to live among those who remained loyal to the Union. Wartime differences were set aside by railroad construction and by disagreements with Virginia about West Virginia's fair share of Virginia's antebellum debt. West Virginia's negotiating team included former soldiers from both sides of the Civil War. Ken Fones-Wolf also reviews West Virginia in his analysis of the alignment of a border state with its southern and

northern neighbors in the political and economic arenas. Fones-Wolf surveys the political and economic realignments of West Virginia's counties from the states founding through 1910. By the turn of the twentieth century, the state's southern coalfields were controlled by absentee owners, while its northern section developed an industrial economy based on local capital. West Virginia ended the period as a "borderland for the nation's most developed region" (p. 262), but also a society that retained a legacy from old Virginia.

Economic development issues determined how Appalachians filtered their memories of the Civil War, and constructed their own regional myths of participation in the war and its aftermath. Robert M. Sandow looks at Appalachian Pennsylvania, an area he claims is underexamined. Widespread resistance to the federal draft brought internal conflict and violence to an area otherwise undisturbed by contesting armies. Sandow's story revolves around the murder of a U.S. provost marshal shot while pursuing a mountain region draft resister. During the 1864 draft, 400 men of 660 drafted refused to report for induction. The high levels of draft evasion in Pennsylvania's mountain region brought a federal military expedition into the mountains and the deputy marshal's death followed. The killer evaded the law until 1875. His capture coincided with a series of coal miners' strikes in the same area invaded by federal soldiers in 1864, and people remembered the occupation of their homeland by the federal government and were embittered by the possibility of federal intervention in the series of strikes. Whether the verdict was jury nullification, or community-based resistance to the federal government, the jury took only thirty minutes to free the federal lawman's killer, sending a clear message to the federal government about involvement in local affairs. Tom Lee writes of east Tennessee and the memory of that place as uniquely Unionist during the Civil War. Lee begins with a refutation of Frost's Appalachian creation myth

of "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains." He then follows the creation of a stronger myth by eastern Tennesseans of a united and loyal group of mountain men who won the American Revolution at the Battle of King's Mountain, remained loyal to the Union, and were politically and economically of a single mind during the turbulent years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This collection's final two essays explain the importance of nineteenth-century mythmaking and stereotyping of core Appalachian residents as those myths exerted their influence on the area's economic, political, and cultural development into the twentieth century. John Inscocoe elaborates on Slap's literature review of the creation of southern Appalachian stereotypes by local color writers, newspapers, and academics of the late nineteenth century. Anne Marshall studies the memory of the Civil War by eastern Kentuckians in another story of a monolithic Unionist myth disproved by a closer examination of events in the Commonwealth's mountain region.

In his introductory chapter, Slap warns that "the essays in this volume do not paint a coherent portrait of the Civil War's aftermath in Appalachia." He concludes that the "variation in descriptions of Appalachia ... may also demonstrate the difficulty of defining Appalachia" (p. 43). This book's readers may conclude, as I did, that the lack of a coherent portrait of Appalachia in and after the Reconstruction Era is symptomatic of the reality that Appalachia and Appalachians are heterogeneous. The stereotypical myth of a homogeneous people, ethnically similar, united in political allegiances and economic pursuits may finally be laid to rest. Civil War, Reconstruction, and Appalachian scholars will find the most value in this book. This collection of essays presents scholarly work revising the historiography of the core Appalachian region during the years following the Civil War; it is not a book written for a general audience.

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