

Carol Mason's CSEGA report, "Textual Reproduction of Ethnicity in the Kanawha Valley: The 1974 Textbook Controversy Revisited" (a work-in-progress written in 2002) has been updated, expanded, and revised as a book published by Cornell University Press in 2009 titled *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy*.

In lieu of the work you were expecting to see, Dr. Mason and Cornell UP have been so kind as to allow us to share the prologue to her book below. A copy of Dr. Mason's 2002 work-in-progress is available in CSEGA's papers in Marshall University's Special Collections.

To order Dr. Mason's book visit Cornell UP:

[http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/cup\\_detail.taf?ti\\_id=5375](http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/cup_detail.taf?ti_id=5375)

Carol Mason is Associate Professor of English and Director of Gender Studies at Oklahoma State University. A native of Kanawha County, Carol Mason infuses local insight into this study of historically left-leaning protesters ushering in cultural conservatism. Exploring how reports of the conflict as a hillbilly feud affected protesters, she draws on substantial archival research and interviews with Klansmen, evangelicals, miners, bombers, businessmen, and residents who, like herself, were students in Kanawha County during the dispute. Mason investigates vulgar accusations of racism that precluded a richer understanding of how ethnicity, race, class, and gender blended together as white protesters set out to protect "our children's souls." In the process, she demonstrates how the significance of the controversy goes well beyond resistance to social change on the part of Christian fundamentalists or a cultural clash between elite educators and working class citizens. The alliances, tactics, and political discourses that emerged in the Kanawha Valley in 1974 crossed traditional lines, inspiring a nazification of the Klan, propelling Christian conservatism into the limelight, and providing models for women of the New Right.

*Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy*

As described by the Cornell University Press:

***Reading Appalachia from Left to Right* examines the legacies of a pivotal 1974 curriculum dispute in West Virginia that heralded the rightward shift in American culture and politics. At a time when black nationalists and white conservatives were both maligned as extremists for opposing education reform, a Christian mother who objected to new language-arts textbooks featuring multiracial literature sparked the yearlong conflict. It was the most violent textbook battle in America, inspiring mass marches, rallies by white supremacists, boycotts by parents, and strikes by coal miners. Schools were closed due to arson and dynamite while national and international news teams descended on Charleston.**

## PROLOGUE

### Reading Appalachia

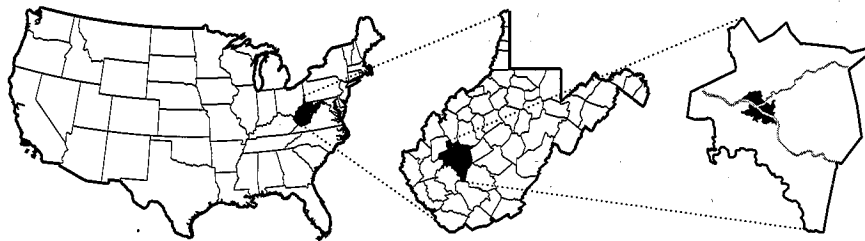
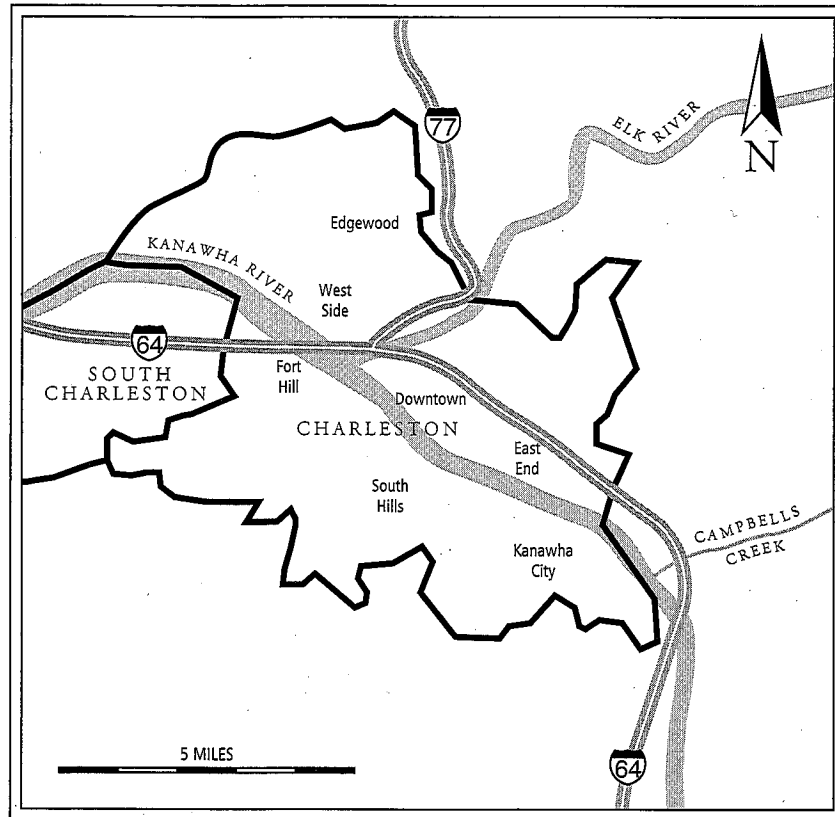


FIGURE 1. The city of Charleston, West Virginia, in Kanawha County. As the county seat and state capital with two interstates, two rivers, a railroad system, an airport, and three television stations, Charleston was not a culturally or geographically isolated place in 1974, although the curvature and steepness of the mountains that rise up around the city may make it seem so. Artwork by Dan Carter.

With two rivers, the Elk and the Kanawha, merging in the middle of it, Kanawha County was probably always a place of meeting and exchange. Before the Civil War, a significant salt industry thrived on the riverbanks. After the Civil War, coal became a prominent industry, followed by chemical refineries. Kanawha County in the late 1960s and early 1970s covered 907 square miles, including the city of Charleston, which has been the state capital since 1885. In 1975, Charleston's population included 67,348 residents, 10 percent of whom were African American. "Less than 1 percent of the population" of the entire county in 1970 was "nonwhite" and "only 2.9 percent" were "first or second generation foreign-born."<sup>1</sup> Other significant population bases in the county include those to the west of Charleston, such as South Charleston (an incorporated city), Dunbar, Cross Lanes (the largest unincorporated town in the state), Nitro, and St. Albans. To the southeast of Charleston are considerably smaller communities including Marmet, Belle, Cedar Grove, East Bank, Chesapeake, and Montgomery. Kanawha County was experiencing a surprising growth in industry and population at the time when America's most violent curriculum dispute erupted. The 1974 Kanawha County textbook controversy took place largely in the city of Charleston, which was, relatively speaking, an urban hub of commerce, industry, and government.

As the county seat and state capital with two interstates, two rivers, a railroad system, an airport, and three television stations, Charleston was not a culturally or geographically isolated place in 1974, although the curvature and steepness of the mountains that rise up around the city may make it seem so (see figure 1). Affluent areas within the city included Edgewood and South Hills—which overlooks the downtown area and was

often vilified as the bastion of elites known as "hillers." Less affluent areas within the city included the East End, where the board of education office and the state capitol building are located. Just outside the city limits was a more rural community known as Campbells Creek, where some textbook protesters set up a headquarters. Working-class residents of Campbells Creek were often derisively referred to as "creekers." Although the labels "hillers" and "creekers" hardly originated with the textbook controversy, they helped fuel the perception that it was primarily a class conflict between privileged urban professionals and downtrodden rural coal miners. Contrary to popular assumption, however, "less than 5 percent of the county work force [was] engaged in mining. This small fraction [was] considerably less than the 16 percent of the labor force employed in the chemical industry," which was central to the city of Charleston at the time.<sup>2</sup>

Made up of coal, natural gas, and brine-based chemical works including international corporations such as Union Carbide, DuPont, and Monsanto, the Kanawha Valley's industrial economy at the time of the textbook dispute seemed to be faring better than expected in a recession. In January 1975, the *New York Times* reported that the area was

making a good recovery from the 1969 closing of a mammoth FMC Corporation ordnance plant in South Charleston. A new American Motors Corporation automobile stamping operation and other steel fabricators have moved into the abandoned FMC factory space. Scores of mines lie just outside the city, and coal is expected to have a banner year now that the United Mine Workers strike is ended. The long decline in Appalachian population may have ended, too. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, there is a "return flow" population trend. One out of four jobs in the crippled Midwest automobile industry has been filled in recent years by Appalachian whites who fled hard times in the mountains.<sup>3</sup>

Whether they were returning from Detroit or had never left the valley, Kanawha County residents in the early 1970s were optimistic about opportunities in the "sprawling industrial complex." Rates of unemployment and per capita income for the entire state were closer to the national average than they had been in previous decades.<sup>4</sup> "By almost any standard of measurement, West Virginia had drawn perceptibly closer to national norms" by the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Although fairly abundant, however, jobs in the Kanawha Valley were not guaranteed to secure prosperity for anyone but the corporate owners. Like the coal mining companies, chemical manufac-

turers were mostly absentee corporations who exploited workers and the environment. It was in this beautiful and toxic valley that the textbook controversy took place.

### A Controversy Unfolds

In April 1974 the Kanawha County Board of Education gathered for a routine meeting in Charleston. On the agenda was a report from a textbook selection committee that had worked ten months to decide which new language arts curriculum to recommend for adoption for all levels, through grade twelve. The curriculum they chose included more than three hundred titles from mainstream publishers. The major series of the books were D.C. Heath and Company's *Communicating* (grades 1-6) and *Dynamics of Language* (7-12), Scott, Foresman & Company's *America Reads* (7-12) and *Galaxy* (7-12), and Silver Burdett company's *Contemporary English* (7-12). Additional books were recommended as supplemental texts, including McDougal, Littell & Company's *Language of Man* (7-12) and *Man* (7-12), and Houghton Mifflin Company's *Interaction* (K-12).<sup>6</sup> In dutiful fashion, the selection committee described the books they chose and their procedures for ensuring that the books met a state-sanctioned mandate to include multiethnic and multiracial literature in the new curriculum. Everyone seemed surprised when the only female board member, Alice Moore, objected to the selection committee's report by raising questions about the books, even though she admitted she had not yet read them. With a flurry of accusations about the committee's purpose, its relationship to national "anti-American" trends, and particular concerns over lessons in dialect that she and others referred to as "ghetto" language, Alice Moore sparked the controversy.

She succeeded in delaying but not stopping the purchase of the curriculum, which proponents saw as tools to teach reading and writing as artful communication in relevant multiethnic social contexts. Book supporters did not mind that this new language arts curriculum eschewed phonics, replacing them with "reading for meaning" and "look-say" methods. But opponents of the curriculum were skeptical of the methods and contents; they said the books advocated unprincipled relativism, promoted antagonistic behavior, contained obscene material, put down Jesus Christ, and upheld communism. Throughout the spring and summer, thousands of protesters mobilized, objecting to the books as well as to the board's selection process. At a board of education hearing

on June 27, 1974, more than a thousand citizens showed up to debate the new textbooks. After listening to them for nearly three hours, the school board voted 3-2 to adopt the books.

Testimony from the protesters varied in terms of emotionalism and argument, with some articulating points regarding the duty of elected officials to serve the people's will, and others raising precise questions about the appropriateness of the content. Internal documents demonstrate that pro-textbook board members considered closely some of the specific complaints against the new curriculum. For example, school board staff itemized each complaint featured on a flier urging protesters to "take the textbooks to court" and examined each against what the books themselves said, circulating the results in a memo. In response to the charge that the "elementary books undermine faith in God and make Bible stories seem like myths!!" school board staff reported:

Myths are defined as ancient stories created in order to explain the world in which people lived. Myths often became part of the religion of the people. Some of the characters were usually gods, and the stories would tell how men were first made or explain why there were seasons or perhaps even tell why the rabbit had a short tail (p. 12, Level 5). Beginning with level 3, each book has two or three myths including "Story of First Woodpecker," Greek, Japanese, Indian, and African examples. No Bible story is included. Never is a Bible story called a myth. Examples do not undermine faith in God. Rather, all peoples have religious beliefs.

This was one fairly extensive explanation of what school board staff considered to be the actuality behind eighteen claims on the flyer. The memo of these explanations was twenty-three pages long, a substantial response to one flyer distributed by protesters. School board members who disagreed with the protesters on particular points apparently did not do so out of careless disregard of their specific complaints about the content of the books.

More general complaints about the lack of representation in the textbook selection procedure were another matter, however. At least one board member, Harry Stansbury, was concerned enough by charges about an elite conspiracy of educators that he researched the backgrounds of each of the teachers who served on the original textbook selection committee. What he learned was that all five teachers were raised and educated in West Virginia; two were not born in West Virginia but had been residents since

at least high school. The selection committee members, all women, had bachelor's degrees and some graduate credentials from such familiar local institutions as Marshall University in Huntington; West Virginia State College in Institute; Concord College in Athens; Morris Harvey College in Charleston; and West Virginia University in Morgantown. Therefore, to Stansbury, protesters' claims of infiltrating elites seemed far fetched. But the question of parental involvement in book selection was a salient point that the board would not fully consider until forced to do so later. Alice Moore and protest leaders felt ignored by the board's June decision to purchase the curriculum and kept mobilizing residents of Kanawha County throughout the summer.

When the academic year began in the fall, organized protests increased.<sup>7</sup> In late August, parents agreed to boycott the schools and some businesses, most notably Heck's, Inc., a department store linked to one of the school board members, Russell Isaacs, who had voted for the books. During the first week of September, according to the local newspapers, "nearly twenty-five percent of the county's 45,000 students did not report to the first class day of the school year"; about "2,000 people attended an anti-textbook rally at Campbells Creek"; "3,500 coal miners walked off jobs in a wildcat strike not due to start until November" to show support for the opposition; and "protesters shut down the city bus system, leaving 11,000 customers without transportation." One minister, Charles Quigley, publicly prayed for God to strike down the three board members who supported the books; it was viewed as a death threat. Calls for the resignations of various school officials proliferated. Facing these profound demonstrations of dissent, the school board closed the schools for three days, removed the controversial books from the classrooms, and called for a group of citizens and parents to review the books. In the process of filing a suit to prevent use of the textbooks, Ezra Graley, another minister, was arrested for contempt of court. By the end of September, he and the other leading protest ministers, Marvin Horan and Avis Hill, ended a rally in disagreement as to whether or not continue the boycotts.

In October and November, tensions were so high that members of both sides of the controversy issued threats and committed acts of violence. Gunshots were fired by book opponents and proponents at picket sites and schools. Arson and bombs briefly closed down Wet Branch, Midway, Chandler, and Loudendale elementary schools. School buildings were vandalized, sometimes with Klan and Nazi insignia. Fifteen sticks of dynamite caused significant damage to the board of education office building.

Ministers broke an injunction against more than five picketers at businesses and schools, resulting in fines and incarceration. A federal grand jury indicted several men for conspiring to blow up more schools and television and radio towers.

Parents continued boycotts amid continuing protests and the arrest of school board members for "contributing to the delinquency of minors." Rallies and marches opposing the "filthy" and "ungodly" books grew. A march organized in favor of academic freedom attracted about one thousand supporters of the books and of the school board. Two days later, four times as many protesters walked three miles from the civic center to the state capitol building in a formidable show of resistance. Some students—supported by liberal parents, clergy, and teachers—staged counterprotests and claimed their right to read. Private Christian schools were set up as alternatives to the public school system in Kanawha County. Meanwhile, the review committee approved by the board of education could not reach a consensus: a majority recommended accepting "all but 35 of the 325 books," while a minority recommended banning 180 of the books. With the committee's input, the school board took a vote on November 9, 1974. The ruling was in favor of returning almost all of the controversial books to the classroom, with the exception that "the 35 most controversial books were . . . placed in school libraries to be read only by students with parental permission."<sup>8</sup> Consequently, every kid came home one day with a permission slip to be signed or not. Every parent had some say in the matter of the child's education.

In December, a West Virginia teachers' association invited the National Education Association to Charleston to investigate the chaos. At approximately the same time, the Ku Klux Klan made its first public appearance of support for the textbook protests when a grand dragon (state leader of the Klan) arrived from Ohio to discuss the issue on a Huntington radio station. By this point, news teams from national and international broadcasters had visited the area; Kanawha County became the subject of discussions on the CBS news magazine *60 Minutes* and the biggest talk show of the time, *Donahue*. In January 1975 national Ku Klux Klan leaders made a media splash with a rally on the West Virginia capitol steps and legal hearings regarding the October bombings of schools began. Some residents of the upper Kanawha Valley proposed seceding from the county, effectively dividing it in two.<sup>9</sup> But by and large, the direct action of marches, rallies, and vandalism waned.

Perhaps the protests subsided in January because attention to the Klan

and the bombings were tainting the Kanawha Valley as a place of extremists. Or perhaps protesters felt they had won a substantial victory in forcing the board to create a review committee, in getting the most objectionable books out, and in compelling some school board officials to resign. Or maybe it was just the drizzly winter that kept the masses from gathering. When spring came, the coal strikes were over, the big rallies were gone, and the books were in the classrooms.

### Ethnicity, Appalachia, America

*Reading Appalachia from Left to Right* takes seriously the protesters' claim that the selected texts had the power to interfere with students' sense of community—their sense of belonging to family, to Appalachia, and to America. According to the protesters, the multiethnic language arts curriculum represented a battle for "our children's minds" and "control over our children," who were being subjected to an "alien" philosophy espoused by the books. Clearly the protesters felt threatened and were figuratively circling the wagons against enemy attack, drawing a boundary within which "we" reside as a community and upon which "they" encroached. In so doing, the protesters articulated a community bound by what they considered to be proper linguistic, literary, and moral standards. Also, some illiterate parents who wanted their children to have what they did not, the benefits of literacy, objected to the new books because they lowered standards in education. These types of objections pointed to a fundamental truth about the power of textbooks and the process of education, which is that our sense of ourselves as "a people" is instilled in us by institutions such as schools, where we learn to relate to one another through verbal and written skills. Schools teach us a common language and conventions of communication that give a community its sense of identity, a sense of belonging, of being one of "the people," or *ethnos*, to use the Greek term. Or, "let us simply say that schooling is the principal institution which produces ethnicity as linguistic community."<sup>10</sup>

To introduce new methods of schooling is to alter that production of ethnicity, that production of understanding ourselves according to conventions of communication and norms of language usage. For an example of such norms, consider how West Virginians sometimes insist on the name "mountaineers" rather than "hillbillies" to show pride in Appalachian heritage. Of course, some embrace the term "hillbilly," reclaiming it from its use as a term of derision. In either case, language creates that sense of

ourselves as a people, as an ethnicity. The protest of a new language arts curriculum was, intentionally or not, tantamount to protesting a new linguistic community and an altered sense of ethnic identity. The result, if not the intention, of the protest was that it brought into question and defined anew what it meant to be a concerned parent, a responsible citizen of Kanawha County, a loyal American, or, as one protester put it, a "true son of Appalachia."

Validating the protest of the books in this way—as a legitimate concern over the power of education and textbooks to create a sense of community, a production of ethnicity—will not resolve the ambivalence of that term, *ethnicity*, whose definition is the source of great consternation. On one hand, ethnicity is used as a category to denote people of color in particular. It therefore often serves as a racial distinction, distinguishing between whites and nonwhites. On the other hand, ethnicity is also often seen as synonymous with culture: a shared sense of geography, traits, tradition, and practices that characterize a group of people. In this capacity, ethnicity is a universalizing term, suggesting that all people have an ethnicity, regardless of race. Together, these paradoxical paradigms of understanding ethnicity suggest that it is fluidly defined rather than naturally given, a process rather than a fact.<sup>11</sup>

In examining the textbook controversy as a yearlong process of drawing boundaries and making claims about who a "true" Appalachian was or who a "concerned parent" was or who "our children" were and could be under the influence of a new language arts curriculum, *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right* examines the *ongoing* linguistic production of ethnicity in the Kanawha Valley. The fact that all the protesters were white, according to all consulted records, is a significant aspect of this production, especially since the books they objected to showcased writings by people of color.<sup>12</sup> But it would be simplistic and one-dimensional to claim that people protested the books *because* they were white or "not quite white" in the way that "hillbillies," "rednecks," "white trash," or Appalachian "hicks" are said to be.<sup>13</sup> It is unfair to suggest that the protest of multiracial literature confirmed some essential ethnic character that secures West Virginians' identity as feuding hillbillies, white trash, and the like.

The emphasis on ethnicity in *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right* is not, however, an attempt to dodge questions of racial stratification or racism in the Kanawha Valley.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, it is an attempt to illuminate them in relation to, and as part of, the institution of education and the power of language that concerned protesters. Writing off the protest as

the result of a reactionary bunch of racists would ignore the very legitimate claim that the protest, and other curriculum disputes, made: that new schooling *can* yield an altered sense of community with new social identities and different social relations. In fact, a general history of education reveals that American schooling developed because of this basic belief. Consider this sketch of pertinent changes since the nineteenth century, which contextualizes some key assumptions underlying the Kanawha County textbook protest.

Progressive education, "a subject of endless confusion and controversy," emerged in the 1920s as a response to the industrial nineteenth century's rote memorization and moral didacticism that reflected the mechanistic regimentation of factory assembly lines. Such discipline was replaced by more "child-centered" approaches that included "individual projects, exhibits, and field trips." Economic collapse and the Great Depression furthered interest in this type of education, situating the school as a place for relief from poverty and for envisioning a social order capable of providing sustenance and, later, able to ward off fascism. Throughout the 1930s, school emerged as a welfare institution and "many teachers without necessarily intending to came to accept an activist role for the state."<sup>15</sup>

After World War II and its restoration of prosperity to the United States, critics of progressive education said it was not only an outmoded idea but one too close ideologically to the new national enemy, communism. A return to "basics" was called for by three groups: "academicians who opposed the power of professional educationists; intellectuals who had philosophical objections to the instrumentalist thrust of progressive education; and popular writers who merged these themes with criticism that the schools were too collectivist." However, federally sponsored innovations in education again emerged in the late 1950s. The U.S. response to the 1957 launching of *Sputnik*, the Soviet satellite that initiated the space race and heightened the cold war between the two countries, was to launch new science and math curricula; history and social sciences were next in line for revamping. Last and not least, "the teaching of English and modern foreign languages underwent serious reevaluation in the late 1950s and the 1960s, but neither enjoyed the coordination (and for English, the funding) common to similar efforts in the natural sciences."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the call for curricular innovations coincided with anticommunist efforts to identify "subversives," which culminated in the red-hunting hysteria known as McCarthyism (after Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin). Schools thus became a "crucible in Cold War America": teachers were made to sign

loyalty oaths or were fired, and the anticommunist scrutiny of new learning materials schizophrenically emerged at the very moment when the government was sponsoring and encouraging curricular reform.

By the early 1970s the extremism of McCarthy had run its official course, however; the blacklisting and termination of presumed "reds" were no longer pursued. But the watchdog mentality and recycled objections to progressive education from the 1940s remained forcefully intact.

In addition to this brief general history of education, scholarship on curriculum disputes demonstrates that, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, textbooks have been the contested terrain upon which the "national story" has been written and rewritten according to various perspectives. Some of this scholarship recognizes the role of populist rhetoric among textbook protesters, taking into account key tropes from era to era. This scholarly approach to curriculum disputes examines educational texts as *reflections* of cultural conflicts in society, and protesters as historical agents producing such conflicts.<sup>17</sup> Other research recognizes schoolbooks as textual producers of nationalism and the nation-state itself.<sup>18</sup> Recognizing that textbooks produce readers as national subjects, rather than merely reflect the cultural conflicts already existing, is a working assumption of *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right* and corresponds with the fundamentally true claim that a curriculum has power to change relationships and cultural identities. The protesters had good reason to question how a new language arts curriculum would affect future generations and current social relations between parents and children, parents and teachers, the formally educated "elite" and the "masses" whose education was not obtained primarily in schools.

That is not to say, however, that all the protesters were equally high-minded or unified by one philosophical approach in opposing the controversial books. On the contrary, to speak of the protesters in toto belies the different groups, the particular factions within groups, and the various arguments against the books (and against the school board) that existed. Those who felt the books' purpose was to "niggerize the nation" joined with Klan leader Ed Miller to protest the curriculum in pointed hoods on the steps of the West Virginia capitol building or at the foot of a burning cross at Witcher Creek.<sup>19</sup> Those who wished to thwart the one-world Jewish-socialist government that the books were supposedly advocating appreciated the articles in the *Liberty Bell* magazine, which was published by the local John Birch Society bookstore owner, George Dietz. For those "business and professional people" who considered the books to

be full of obscene, anti-free-market, socialist (but not necessarily Jewish) propaganda, they tapped their foot to "Elmer's Tune," a local column written by chemical company owner Elmer Fike.

Then there were the bulk of the protesters, the "concerned parents" who saw the books as an attack on "our" children and "our" way of life. Ministers Ezra Graley, Charles Quigley, Avis Hill, and Marvin Horan were inspirational organizers who fueled the apocalyptic sense that "our children's souls" were at stake and that we would answer for our actions for or against the books on Judgment Day. Alice Moore appeared as the quintessential concerned mother even though her rhetoric and reasons for opposing the curriculum varied, beginning with what were perceived as race-based arguments that later gave way to warnings about the deleterious effects of "humanistic" education. She denounced the Klan and worked instead with Elmer Fike and the ministers, as well as others—nationally known Christian advocates such as Charles Secrest from the Christian Crusade, Robert Dornan of Citizens for Decency, Texas textbook monitors Mel and Norma Gabler, James McKenna from the nascent Heritage Foundation, and Connie Marshner from the Heritage Foundation and the Foundation for a Free Congress.

Without acknowledging this variety of protesters, scholars and journalists represented the controversy as one homogenous thing or another. In addition to caricatured accounts of degenerate hillbilly racists, there were two other key explanations (see figure 2). One excoriated Alice Moore as a narcissistic instigator who loved media attention and creating a fuss all around her. This explanation feminized the protest, portraying it as the frivolous or tragic result of a meddling woman, and infantilized the protesters as Moore's unruly, uneducated children. The other prominent explanation, far more learned, was no less gendered. Depicting the protesters as working-class heroes, some accounts conjured up the image of the gritty coal miner, that masculine icon of noble resistance to economic exploitation and modern corruptions. In all three prominent explanations for the controversy, the protesters were either romanticized or demonized.

These dichotomous representations reflect America's general ambivalence toward Appalachia. There was no separating the actuality of Kanawha County protesters from the Appalachian stereotypes that preceded them. Inseparable still, the myths and the realities of Appalachia need to be analyzed together to account for why the Kanawha County protesters could signify on one hand all that is good and right with America and, on the other, all that is bad and wrong. Appalachia has long



FIGURE 2. The media depicted textbook protesters as degenerate racists and throwbacks to Puritan piety. James Dent, Charleston Newspapers. Reproduced with permission.

functioned as a cultural and geographic imaginary where modern ways are supposed to be resisted and transgressed. Understanding more about Appalachia's personification, the hillbilly, illuminates why the protesters were seen either as heroes or savages. Constructed through historical, literary, sociological, and popular discourses, the hillbilly has always defied categories, transgressing racial, sexual, and gender boundaries.

Beginning with William Byrd's 1728 portrait of white settlers in North Carolina, which "introduced many of the standard tropes" and reflected

"the ambiguity that would thereafter always characterize hillbilly imagery," Appalachians have been portrayed as people who do not conform to gender roles considered to constitute a supposed natural order.<sup>20</sup> Byrd described Appalachian women as too physical, often taking on the manual labor that their male counterparts appear too lazy to do.<sup>21</sup> In the nineteenth century, writers portrayed Appalachian women as transgressors of gender roles by lampooning the essentialist notions of purity and femininity that comprised the Cult of True Womanhood in the urban centers of the eastern United States.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, stories of Appalachian men—most notably and quintessentially Davy Crockett—also represented a challenge to bourgeois gender roles, "invert[ing] absolutely the values and admonitions of the male moral reformers" of the time.<sup>23</sup> By the time the word "hillbilly" first appeared in print in 1899,<sup>24</sup> Appalachian men and women were well established as transgressors of modern, middle-class gender roles.

Moreover, as sexual beings, hillbillies such as Crockett defied categories produced by the sexologists, physicians, and moral reformers of the nineteenth century. Tall tales of Crockett's polymorphous perversity included episodes with animals, men, and women that suggested a kind of "liminality," according to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg. She defines liminality as "the stage of being between categories and the power inherent in that process."<sup>25</sup> Like an adolescent who is neither child nor adult, "the hillbilly" is a liminal figure in American culture and letters, exuding a sexuality that can be construed as comically or dangerously crossing the bounds of proper sexuality.<sup>26</sup>

Especially in this capacity to offend middle-class sensibilities, "hillbilly" in the twentieth century emerged as a derogatory term for poor whites. As the poster population for the midcentury War on Poverty, images of Appalachian whites in particular were used to upset the bourgeois myth of American classlessness.<sup>27</sup> But manufacturing paternalistic empathy for Appalachians also produced a byproduct of fear and hatred of "rednecks" and "white trash."<sup>28</sup> As a stereotype of impoverished living, "hillbilly" is akin to "white trash," a term that "calls our attention to the way that discourses of class and racial difference tend to bleed into one another, especially in the way that they pathologize and lay waste to their 'others.'"<sup>29</sup> Depicting Appalachians as trash or as hillbillies thus inextricably conjoins matters of poverty with matters of race. Moreover, "stereotypes of white trash and 'hillbillies' are replete with references to dangerous and excessive sexuality [such as] rape (both heterosexual and homosexual), incest, and sexual abuse," even though "such abuse occurs

in all segments of the population."<sup>30</sup> In this way, the hillbilly serves as a foil for middle-class social mores, defining modern norms against the perceived abnormality of a liminal subject whose sexuality, gender, class, and race are distinctly "other."

As a white "other," the hillbilly has a particular racial status defined by premodern "nobility" or "backwardness":

Despite their poverty, ignorance, primitiveness, and isolation, "hillbillies" were "one hundred percent" Protestant Americans of supposedly pure Anglo-Saxon or at least Scotch-Irish lineage, which countless commentators of the late-nineteenth—and early-twentieth centuries, greatly concerned by waves of Southern and Eastern European immigrants, took pains to prove. Thus, middle-class white Americans could see these people as a fascinating and exotic "other" akin to Native Americans or Blacks, while at the same time sympathize with them as poorer and less modern versions of themselves.<sup>31</sup>

This racialization implied in any representation of the hillbilly can be maligned or championed. In this way the hillbilly's ambiguous liminality is matched by America's ambivalence toward those labeled hillbillies. Female Appalachians, for example, are idealized or demonized not only in terms of racial purity or inbreeding but also as all-natural "hillbilly gals" or unnatural "mannish misfits."<sup>32</sup> (One need only think of the media manipulation of two West Virginia privates stationed in Iraq, Jessica Lynch and Lynndie England, to see that such idealization and demonization of Appalachian women are alive and well in the twenty-first century.)<sup>33</sup>

As representatives of mountain living and country life, hillbillies can thus reflect either (1) heroism, bravery, and loyalty to traditional ways or (2) a deviance, sadism, and primitivism that is said to fly in the face of modern progress (see figure 3). In other words, the hillbilly "served the dual and seemingly contradictory purposes of allowing the 'mainstream,' or generally non-rural, middle-class white, American audience to imagine a romanticized past, while simultaneously enabling the same audience to recommit itself to modernity by caricaturing the negative aspects of pre-modern, uncivilized society."<sup>34</sup> And of course, since modernity and "civilization" are frequently presumed to be connected with Western and white achievements, the dual function of the hillbilly is as much a matter of race as it is a marker of primitivism and poverty—and as much a matter

of race as of gender and sexual transgression. With such a history as this, the hillbilly helps explain America's ambivalence toward Appalachia and its residents.

### Overview

Recognizing how such an ambivalence played out in representing the textbook controversy is the next step in the examination of its various effects in Kanawha County and beyond. "Soul on Appalachian Ice," an introduction, provides voices in dialogue about the disputed textbooks and states the argument of *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right*. Chapter 1, "A Modern American Conflict," then examines the ways in which media and scholarship portrayed the controversy of 1974. Observers of the protest perpetuated the tendency to view events in Appalachia as symbolic of America, and to view Appalachians ambiguously as courageous resisters

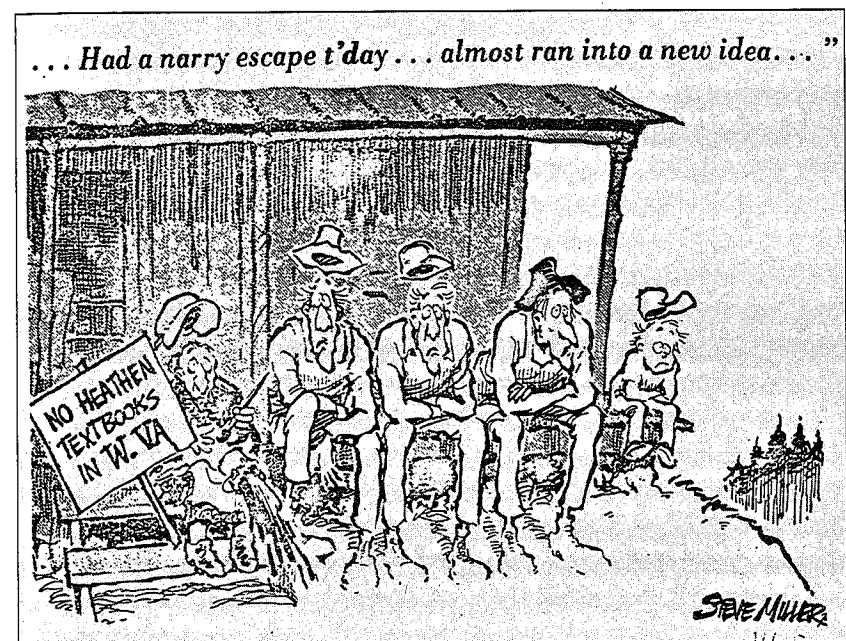


FIGURE 3. Supposedly allergic to new ideas, hillbillies represent antimodern intolerance. But textbook opponents were innovative and represented new alliances, tactics, and discourses. *Charleston Gazette*, November 18, 1974. Reproduced with permission.

of modernity's corruptions or as backward hillbillies incapable of social change. Scholars and journalists who claimed the Kanawha County textbook controversy was essentially "class warfare" too heavily relied on the icon of the white male coal miner as the representative subject of all things Appalachian. This approach ignored the important role that women and womanhood played in the protest and relegated issues of race to the margins of the textbook controversy.

Chapter 2, "True Sons of Appalachia," argues that white supremacist organizations were not as peripheral as they seemed to be. While the media mocked the Klansmen who opposed the books, the local John Birch Society bookstore owner, George Dietz, escaped scrutiny. Dietz's publishing house, which produced the libertarian *Liberty Bell* and the pro-Hitler *White Power Report*, also supplied protesters with hundreds of thousands of leaflets. The increasingly anti-Semitic discourses and the political alliances forged during the textbook protest indicate how the Right, including white supremacists, moved away from using the anticommunist John Birch Society and segregationist George Wallace as models. What eventuated by the end of the 1970s was more inclusive, national organizing among white supremacists that brought together pantheistic neo-Nazism with the Christianity-based Ku Klux Klan. This alliance was already operating during the textbook controversy and the avowed white supremacists in West Virginia were at the forefront of articulating the discursive shift to a more "Aryan" collectivity by deploying ideas about Appalachia.

Chapter 3, "Sweet Alice and Secular Humanism," examines the role that Alice Moore played, a role that reflected earlier and contemporary female conservatives and was reprised in later campaigns by New Right leaders. In terms of shaping discursive strategy as well as the actual tactics played out in the public sphere, Alice Moore was a model for Connie Marshner and countless other "concerned mothers" who, as idealized white women, contributed significantly to conservative politics.

Chapter 4, "Reproducing the Souls of White Folk," is a theoretical examination about what happened on the local level. Locally, the result of the textbook controversy was a production of ethnicity. This was not necessarily in the sense that white citizens rose up to denounce writings by people of color and the desegregated world they represented. Rather, the textbook conflict was a process that reified protesters' authority as white Christians without acknowledging that race was a factor. Expressing concern over "our" children's "eternal souls" was not only a spiritual issue. It was a concern about maintaining and promoting "Appalachian heritage"

as a white, Christian culture in an increasingly multicultural world. It was a way to express that concern so that it did not seem overtly political or racial, but only natural—as natural as a mother's love.

Chapter 4 therefore applies feminist readings of political theory and studies of whiteness to the 1974 Kanawha County textbook controversy for the purpose of examining how gender was integral to the late twentieth-century rise of American cultural conservatism. Specifically, Rey Chow's insights on the racialization of "soul" help illuminate the emergence of a spiritualized narrative of white ethnic struggle in which "concerned mothers" save "our children." Kanawha County was a discursive crossroads at which two narratives of soul intersected: one depicting ethnicity as alienated labor and the other depicting ethnicity as dominion over victimhood. The second narrative of soul was the one through which the historically progressive working class of Kanawha County became aligned with conservatives and, sometimes, avowed white supremacists—the narrative by which the "souls of white folk" were reproduced for generations to come.

Chapter 5, "The Right Soul," returns from the heady theories of ethnicity to a concrete example of pastor Avis Hill, whose personal story of becoming involved in politics also serves as a cautionary tale about seeing him and other evangelicals as simply dupes of right-wing organizers. It would be easy to claim that the Right began in the 1970s to "strip Appalachian soul" as some thought leftist volunteers did in the 1960s. But Hill's story reminds us that such a conclusion is too simple, even as we recognize how seductive the language of "soul" might be, and realize that the ongoing production of ethnicity in Kanawha County reflected and perpetuated a rightward turn in the culture of American protest.

As is evident by now, the analysis of *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right* relies on some particular terms, specialized language, and many quotations. It is important, therefore, to note that the appearance of quotation marks throughout *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right* indicates words and phrases from documentary sources and is not intended to signify sarcasm or derision. It is also important to recognize that vocabulary such as "Right," "fundamentalist," "conservative," "whiteness," and the like have been chosen with care and on principle. Borrowed from a multitude of disciplines, academic conversations, and specific scholars, definitions for such keywords appear in the appendix that follows an epilogue, which provides final insights into the pleasures and dangers of reading Appalachia and writing this book.