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TRACING APPALACHIAN ARCHETYPES DURING THE 1970s: A DECADE OF DEGENERACY, STOCKCARS AND THE CONFEDERACY

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Abstract:

The decade of the 1970s was not kind to the public image of Appalachia or Appalachians. Indeed, it was the most destructive decade in terms of motion picture and television portrayals during the entire Twentieth Century. The Seventies began badly with the hillbilly musical/comedy show *Hee Haw* and ended with a salute to the 'good side' of the Confederacy in *The Dukes of Hazard*. In between we catch glimpses of Appalachian folk as enterprising car racers in *The Last American Hero*, and earnest, but impoverished, farmers in *Where the Red Fern Grows*. But the overall aura is one of despair and cultural degeneracy.

Keywords: *Deliverance*, Moonshine, Stock Car Racing, Confederacy, Hillbillies

INTRODUCTION

Two earlier studies have examined the mass media archetypes and stereotypes associated with the Appalachian Mountains and the people who live there (see Hirschman 2121a, 2021b). This third study examines the decade of the 1970s. The 1970s were not kind to the public image of Appalachia or Appalachian people. Indeed, it proved be the most destructive decade in terms of motion picture and television portrayals during the entire Twentieth Century. The Seventies begin badly with the musical/comedy show *Hee Haw* and end with a salute to the 'good side' of the Confederacy in *The Dukes of Hazard*. In between we catch glimpses of Appalachian folk as enterprising stock car racers, *The Last American Hero*, and earnest but impoverished farmers, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, but in general the overall aura is one of despair and cultural degeneracy.

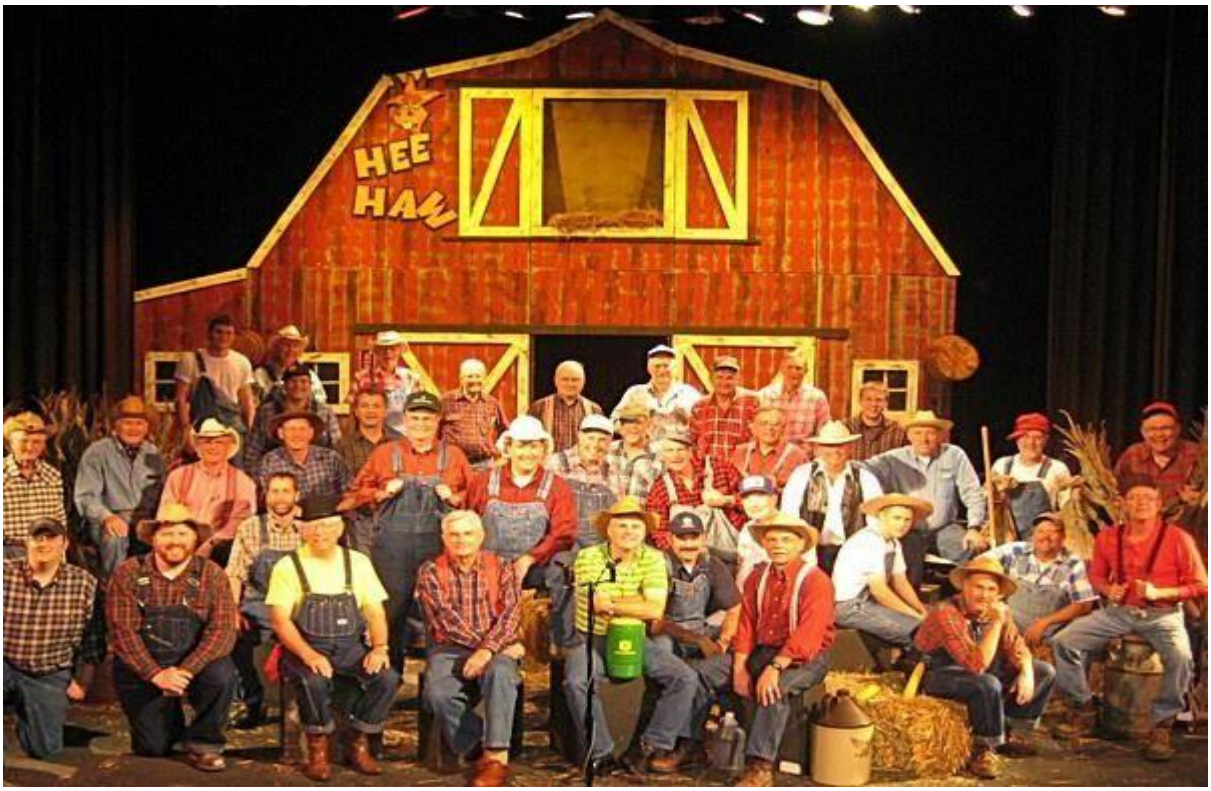
Hee Haw! (1969 – 1971)

Though running for only two seasons on national television networks, the musical-comedy show *Hee Haw* continued in national syndication for another twelve years (IMDB:HeeHaw). The show attracted large audiences in major markets such as New York City, Chicago, Boston and Los Angeles, as well as in the Southeastern US. This broad popularity was unfortunate, however, because the show presents a negatively stereotyped version of Appalachian life and people, featuring all the familiar negative images accumulated over the past 60 years (see Hirschman 2021a, 2021b).

Hee Haw was filmed in Nashville, TN but uses fictitious "Cornfield County" as its locale. Each episode opens with a cartoon of a laughing mule braying "Hee Haw" in a cornfield. The recurring hosts are Roy Clark and Buck Owens, both successful and talented Nashville musicians. The musical performers for each show include such prominent country stars as Tammy Wynette, (singing "Stand By Your Man"), George Jones, Loretta Lynn, Faron Young, and Merle Haggard. This portion of each show is well-produced and showcases current hits by each performer.

What is damaging to the image of Appalachian folk, however, are the 'filler' comedic portions inserted between the musical performances; these constitute a veritable encyclopedia of negative iconography.

For example, although the singers mentioned above are dressed in appropriate stage apparel, the comedic actors are often amateurish in delivering their lines and feature a smorgasbord of country-time apparel—shapeless felt hats, denim overalls, flannel shirts and straw hats for the men; while the women lounge in front of hay bales, moonshine stills, log cabin porches, jugs and wooden barrels wearing Daisy-Mae outfits of short shorts, tied flannel shirts, bare feet, and curly blonde hair. The sets include a log cabin with front porch and rocking chairs, and an old-time country store with a cast-iron coal stove.



Caption: The cast and set of Hee Haw. Note the overalls, flannel shirts, hats, hay bales and liquor jug.

Caption: And here we have the requisite bloodhound.

For ideological comparison purposes, let us consider the fact that the popular show *Soul Train* was running during approximately the same time period as *Hee Haw*. *Soul Train* originated in Chicago – a center for black music, just as Nashville is for country music—but its host Don Cornielius, the *Soul Train* set, and the dancers who appeared on the show were all well-groomed, spoke well and did not engage in mocking their own ethnic group (IMDB:SoulTrain). Indeed, it would have been a scandal if *Soul Train* had featured gang insignia, made references to drive-by shootings, used 'jive' language, and had backdrops of ghetto buildings and drug dealers. Blacks, like Appalachian-folk, were – and are – a derogated group; yet they did not stoop to using "Amos and Andy" or "Step 'n Fetch It" stereotypes in their show to draw laughs from a national audience.

Caption: Note the well-dressed presentation of the Soul Train dancers.

Deliverance (1972)

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a revolutionary time in the South. Long-standing racial barriers were slowly giving way after decades of Jim Crow repression. Atlanta, Georgia positioned itself as the center of this cultural and economic revival, branding itself 'The World's Next Great City'. The airport was greatly expanded, interstate highways surged through and around the city; commercial and residential real estate development grew exponentially, dramatically increasing the demand for public utilities such as water and electricity. By the early 1970s, Atlanta had attracted an inflow of professional persons – lawyers, physicians, real estate developers, retailers and university faculty. The days of *Gone with the Wind* were declared over and done with. It was time to embrace modernity and globalization (www.atlantaga.gov/visitors/history)

In 1970 Atlanta native, James Dickey, wrote a novel called *Deliverance* which immediately gained attention for its graphic contrasting of the New Atlanta with Rural Georgia – in particular that portion of North Georgia which is home to the Appalachian Mountains and Appalachian culture (Dickey, 1970). In 1972, director John Boorman bought the rights to film the story (IMDB.Deliverance.com). Using two emerging actors, Burt Reynolds and John Voight, and two novices, Ned Beattie and Ronny Cox,

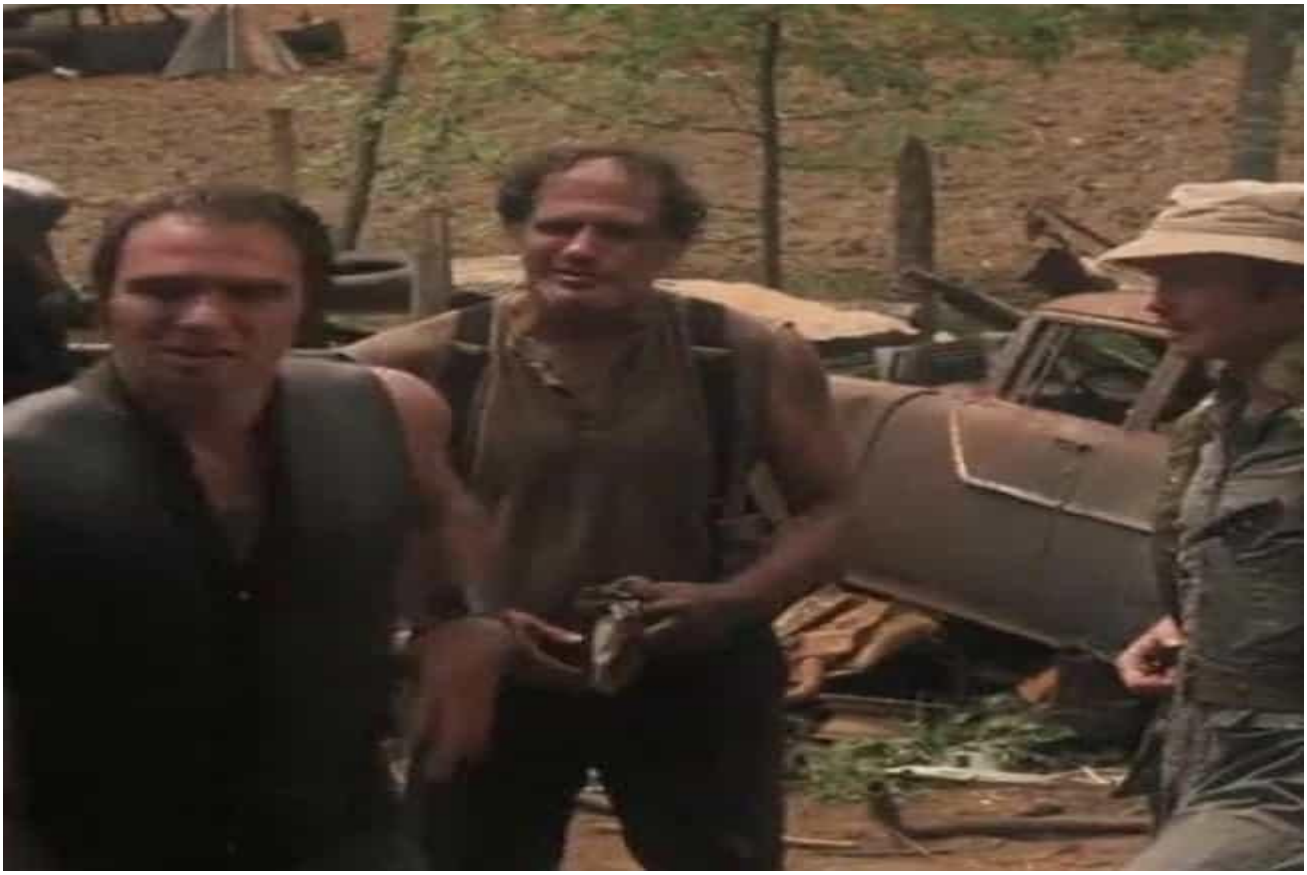
Boorman filmed the narrative in Appalachian North Georgia and created a set of images so disturbing and powerful that even today – five decades later – there are tourist t-shirts sold throughout the region that read "Paddle faster! I hear banjo music".

The motion picture *Deliverance* is extremely raw and troubling to watch – just as it was to film. With a low production budget, Boorman purchased no insurance to cover injuries to his crew or actors; the actors performed their own stunt work, which included speeding along winding dirt roads, scaling sheer rock cliffs, and paddling canoes down white water rapids. *Deliverance* was nominated for Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Director and made Burt Reynolds a star. Let's take a look at the story it told.

The narrative opens with widescreen shots of enormous excavations underway in North Georgia. Acres and acres of forest and field are being bulldozed and dynamited into a flat tableau of dirt and rock. We learn that a huge dam is under construction to block the Chattahoochee River and create a lake to supply drinking water for ever-expanding Atlanta. Wildlife, small towns, farms and much of the river, itself, will be under water, once the dam is built. An Atlanta resident and outdoorsman, Lewis (Burt Reynolds) has invited a friend, Ed (John Voight), an Atlanta attorney who is also an outdoorsman, and two of Ed's Atlanta neighbors, Bobby (Ned Beatty) and Drew (Ronnie Cox) to come on a camping and canoe trip down the river "before all this wilderness is gone forever".

The four adventurers drive their cars up to a remote area several miles past the North Georgia town of Aintry. They intend to hire local men to take their cars to Aintry while they canoe down the river. The home they pull up to closely resembles the Yokum's shack in Li'l Abner – only worse (Hirschman 2021a). Though we see only the exterior, the yard is filled with rusting junk, tires and weeds. An old man who lives there is dressed in ragged overalls, has few teeth, and is quite emaciated; however, he is friendly and directs them down the road to the Griner brothers, who do equipment repairs. He tells them, the Griners should be able to drive their cars to Aintry.

On the porch of the man's house sits a young boy with a banjo. Drew takes out his guitar and begins picking some notes. The boy—who has odd facial features—begins improvising on his banjo with Drew. Soon a remarkable musical collaboration evolves with Drew exclaiming at the end –"Amazing, he's lost me!" meaning the boy is more innovative in playing than he is. In the present day, we would recognize the boy as an autistic *savant*, but during the time period of the film he was perceived as a degenerate freak.



Caption: The Griner Brothers warn the Atlanta men not to "mess with the river".

Caption: An autistic-savant banjo player, meant to demonstrate the hereditary damage of Appalachian in-breeding.

While the two are playing music, the old man begins dancing a jig. Bobby, who has been obvious in his disgust for this whole way of life, comments, "These folks are too much". The foursome drive their car to the Griners' home and workplace – it too is filled with junk cars, machinery and rusting farm equipment. The Griner brothers are large, dirty and mean. Inside their home Ed sees an old woman and a deformed, sickly child. When Lewis asks the men if they will drive their cars down to Aintry, the larger brother warns him not to canoe down the river, "What the hell you wanna' go fuck around with that river for? You get in there, you're never gonna' get out".

At this point Bobby, who is overweight and out of shape, tells Lewis, "We ought to go back". But Lewis persists. The Griners agree to take their cars and leave them in Aintry, where the four can pick them up to drive back to Atlanta. (After one sees the entire film, it becomes clear that the Griners likely knew what the four adventurers were going to encounter as they venture down the river, but at this point, the viewer has no fore-knowledge).

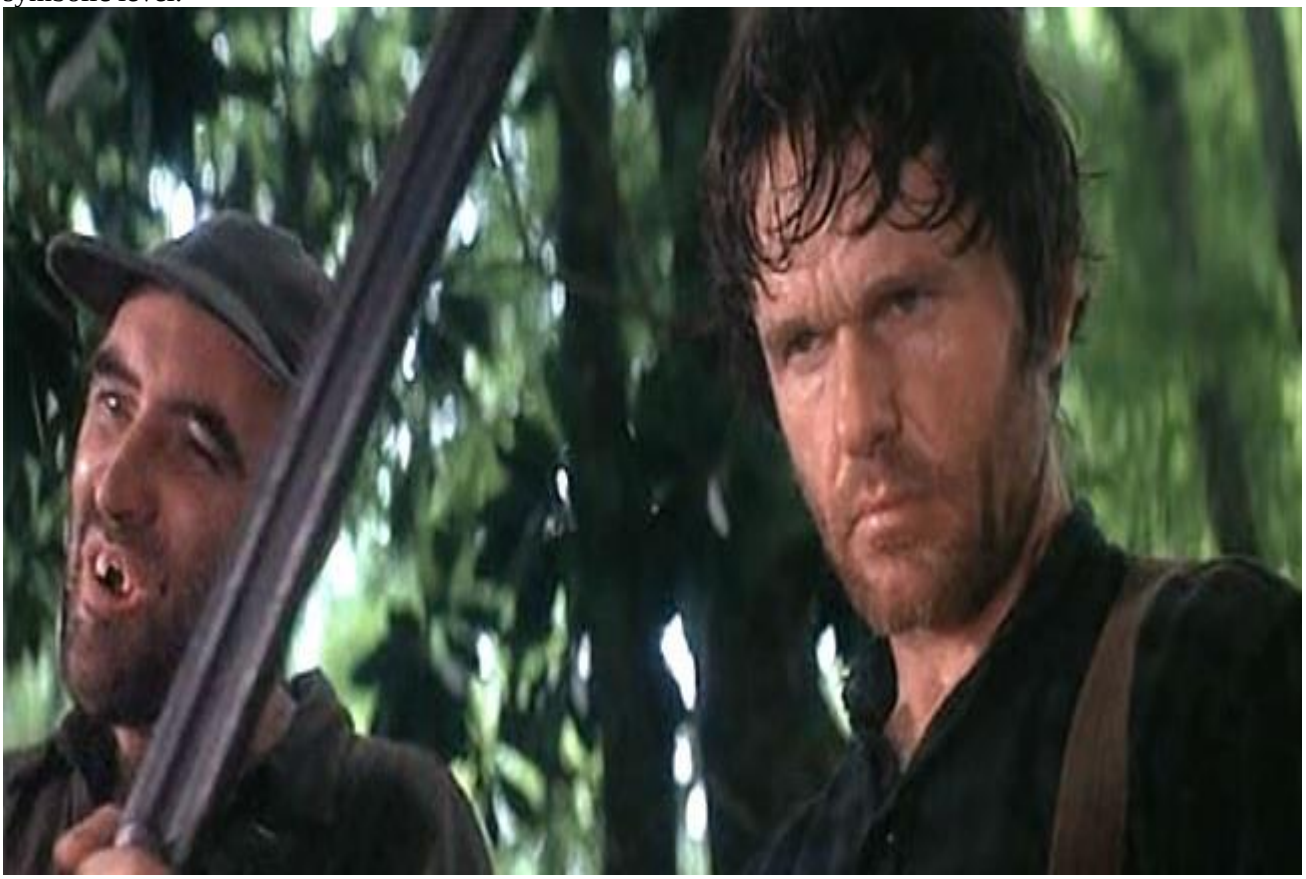
By this time we have gained a good understanding of the personalities of our four Atlantans. Lewis is the Warrior archetype; he resents having to live in the city and earn a living by doing business; he would much rather be in the forest fighting against nature and engaging in violence. Ed is a "wanna-be" Warrior. He lives a comfortable upper middle class life in an Atlanta suburb with a "nice house, nice wife and great boy". Drew is a humanist; he does not judge others, but searches for "the good" in each person and situation. Bobby is the stereotype of the soft, flabby, spoiled "city man" who obtains his taste of the wild-side while watching football games on TV and drinking a premium beer.

They reach the river's edge and launch their canoes. Lewis confides to Ed that he is "worried about Bobby"; Bobby is weak, cowardly, may not be able to "pitch-in" during the trip. Despite these misgivings, they begin their downriver trek. The Appalachian wilderness is exquisite – green, fresh, pure Nature. The group encounters some rough water, but successfully paddle through it. They exult in their ability to take on this challenge and succeed.

That evening, the four men camp on the riverside. Lewis shoots fish with his bow and arrows for dinner – it is apparent he is an expert hunter. Ed tells Lewis, "You want civilization to fail so you can prove you would survive". Later that night Lewis believes he hears "something or somebody in the woods", but they conclude "it's nothing".

The next morning, Ed unsuccessfully stalks a deer with his bow – he is unable to make the shot due to trembling hands, while Bobby complains that "those mosquitoes ate me alive last night". Bobby will be "happy to get back home". After breakfast, Ed and Bobby go downriver in the first canoe and stop along the bank to wait for the others.

Here they encounter what I have termed the Monster archetype (Hirschman 2000). The monster archetype is **any entity that disrupts or destroys the social order**, examples include the shark in *Jaws*, the Civil War in *Gone with the Wind*, the Night King in *Game of Thrones*, the Preacher in *Night of the Hunter*, etc. In *Deliverance*, the monster consists of the two "mountain men" whom Ed and Bobby encounter on the riverbank. Armed with a shotgun, these two Appalachia-dwellers are operating a moonshine still up the mountain. Although the film (and book) suggest that the pair view these Atlanta 'city boys' as threats to their livelihood and – at the very least—intend to kill them, that is not what the two men represent on a deeper symbolic level.



Caption: There be monsters in the forest!

Let's take a closer look at them. Both men are about the same age as the canoers, but they are strikingly different in appearance. Dark, unshaven and dirty, the men are dressed in dark, dirty clothes; one has missing front teeth, while the teeth of the other are badly stained. What they represent is *men-as-beasts* – they are the extreme end of what Lewis' character personifies – warriors who have completely given themselves over to violence and depravity. In short, they have lost all vestiges of humanness. Having lived in the mountains with wild animals, they have degenerated into animals themselves.

But even this description does not fully capture their meaning. They are actually *worse* than animals, because in the natural order, animals usually do not prey on their own kind, especially in a sexual way. Yet these two men's first intention is to sexually abuse the two people they have captured and then kill them. And they get part way there.

After tying Ed to a tree, the dominant mountain man then sodomizes Bobby, whom he views as soft, effeminate and weak, "a sow". The second mountain man intends to force Ed to perform fellatio, but at this moment the semi-civilized warrior, Lewis, appears on the riverbank with his bow drawn back. (At this point the film's audience is deeply grateful that we have our own semi-civilized warrior to pit against these human monsters). Lewis shoots the dominant mountain man in the back, killing him. The other mountain man runs off with the shotgun.

The four adventurers must now deal with what has happened. Drew, the humanist, states they must turn themselves in to the Aintry sheriff. Lewis argues that he will be charged with murder for shooting the mountain man in the back and that they will never get a fair trial "since all that man's relatives will be on the jury". Bobby does not want his colleagues in Atlanta to learn he has been raped. Ed sides with Lewis and Bobby, agreeing that what they did was justified self-defense, but a local jury would never acquit them.

The four hurriedly return to their canoes and begin paddling desperately to "get home", i.e., back to civilization. Now even Nature turns against them. They encounter severe white water rapids in a gorge; Drew, who is not wearing his life jacket, falls suddenly out of the canoe. Both canoes then capsize in the current, and one is destroyed. Lewis's leg is shattered. Ed and Bobby help Lewis to the shore and find that Drew is still missing. They realize Drew was shot by the second mountain man who had been waiting at the top of the gorge.

With Lewis incapacitated, it now is Ed's turn to be the Warrior. During the night, he climbs up the high rock wall of the gorge, collapsing exhausted on the grassy top edge. When he awakens, there is bright sun and just beyond some bushes stands the second mountain man, shotgun in hand, peering over the cliff. Ed steadies himself and draws his arrow; the mountain man sees him. Ed begins to shake just as he had done with the deer, but shoots his arrow, while also injuring himself. The mountain man staggers forward and dies.

Ed must then lower the dead man's body over the cliff. The three surviving Atlantans tie rocks to the body and 'bury' it on the river bottom. Ed and Bobby place the unconscious Lewis into the remaining canoe. On the way down river, they discover Drew's horribly mangled body, tie rocks on him and 'bury' him in the river. They concoct a story that Drew fell overboard without his life jacket and was lost "upriver".

Finally they make it down to Aintry. Their cars are parked on the river bank, just as the Griner brothers had promised. Also waiting for them is the Aintry County Sheriff who clearly disbelieves their account of the journey. He tells them that one of his deputies has reported that his brother-in-law is missing and believes the Atlanta men may be responsible. The three survivors deny it and, because the sheriff has no hard evidence of a crime, he cannot charge them. Aintry currently is being evacuated as the dam water rises to engulf the town; soon the entire area will be covered with water, washing away, they hope, all vestiges of the events.

At the close of the film Ed, now back in his suburban Atlanta home, wakes up from a nightmare – seeing a bloated human hand emerge from the lake.

Assessing Deliverance from an Appalachian Perspective

When compared to the five decades of Appalachia narratives preceding this film (see Hirschman 2021 a,b), it is immediately apparent that *Deliverance* is a radically new version of Appalachian iconography. With the exception of *Li'l Abner's* cartoon rendition of an Appalachian wood-frame dwelling, the houses depicted in *Deliverance* are not only ruder and uglier, they are also surrounded by rusted machinery, empty bottles and weeds – the detritus of a society in steep decline. Analogously, the inhabitants of these hovels are shown to be unwashed, virtually unintelligible, afflicted with degenerative physical and mental conditions, and consistently hostile to 'outsiders' (the 'foreigners' first mentioned in *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (Hirschman 2021 a).

While there are surely some few Appalachian people who fit this description, this film depicts them as the *only* inhabitants to be found in the mountains. Even when the three surviving adventurers from Atlanta arrive in Aintry, the sheriff and his men are depicted as hostile toward them.

The sheriff, unable to press charges, due to lack of evidence that a crime has been committed, tells them in no uncertain terms, "Y'all get outta' here and don't never come back".

An equally disturbing aspect of the plot is that one of the sheriff's deputies is the *brother-in-law* of the (now dead) man who sodomized Bobby. It is difficult to imagine how the deputy would have accepted such a violent sexual predator being married to his sister. In short, the beast-like aspects of the Appalachian men depicted in the film are so extreme as to be unbelievable. Yet they became (and remain) viewed as accurate depictions of Appalachian culture when the film appeared. We will see this 'degenerate monster' stereotype appear again in a series of films directed by Alan McElroy during the 2000s. But now we turn to happier images.

The Last American Hero (1973)

In 1965, Tom Wolfe wrote an essay in *Esquire* magazine titled, "The Last American Hero is Junior Johnson" (Wolfe, 1965). The story was a biographical account of the origins of Junior Johnson – one of stock car racing's most revered drivers. Johnson was born 'dirt poor' in rural North Carolina. His father, Glenn Johnson senior, was a farmer and moonshiner – occupations the family had been in for generations. The teenaged Junior Johnson drove the moonshine to customers, just as we saw Robert Mitchum's character, Doolan, do in *Thunder Road* during the 1960s(Hirschman 2021b)

Wolfe's article celebrated the independence, creativity and family loyalty displayed by Junior, who switched from driving moonshine to stock car racing in order to support the family when his father was imprisoned (for moonshining). In 1973, Wolfe's story was made into a motion picture starring Jeff Bridges and Gary Bussey in two of their first on-screen roles; titled *The Last American Hero*, the film was a fictionalized account of Junior Johnson's early life. As we shall see, the film narrative presents a largely accurate picture of life in rural Appalachia circa the early 1950s.

Using citizens band radio to monitor police activities, Junior Jackson drives his black sedan rapidly over the back roads near Hickory, North Carolina. Across the landscape we see barns, cattle, cornfields and white painted houses. He stops at one farm house and an older woman, his mother, comes out to help him inspect his engine. Junior's brother comes up to the car carrying plastic jugs of moonshine (in recycled milk containers) and loads it into the back of the vehicle. The two brothers next go to the woods behind their house to see their father, Roy, who is tending the family's still. That evening, Junior drives the car on a delivery run, eluding a police roadblock by putting a blue light and siren on his car. The sheriff is angry at Junior's deception and retaliates by blowing up the family's still and arresting the father.

This narrative follows very closely the storyline in *Thunder Road* (Hirschman 2021b) and accurately depicts moonshiners' practices. However, the story now moves in a different direction. Junior's father has been arrested for making illegal liquor many times previously, and by now has used up all 'good will' with the sheriff and his deputies (even though they do drink his liquor). Because of his lengthy record of prior offenses, Mr. Johnson is sentenced to a year in prison. Without the still to produce whiskey and without the income from selling it, the family is facing financial ruin. (Rural Appalachian farms rarely made profits; most were/are barely self-sustaining. This is why whiskey making was initiated in the 1700s and has continued ever since (Hirschman, Brown, Maclaran 2006.). The family needs to raise money to pay their father's attorney and to bribe the prison guards in order make sure he is not harmed in prison. As Mr. Johnson says cynically (and accurately), "Justice – you get what you pay for".

Desperate to earn money, Junior visits the local automobile "demolition derby", learning that he can make money if he has the winning car. (A "demolition derby" in Appalachia consists of 20 to 30 junk cars being driven into each other at top speed on an enclosed dirt field, while being cheered on by drunk, disorderly young men yelling from the sidelines. The last car still running after the carnage is declared the winner). Junior and his brother locate a solidly built junk car, repair the engine and enter the derby with Junior driving. Junior is by far the most aggressive and skillful driver; (he also cheats by inserting steel beams in his car); and comes in third at the derby, winning $200 – a lot of money for his family.

Caption: Junior Johnson and his mother look over his race car engine

Asked not to return by the derby manager (due to his use of "illegal equipment"), Junior next signs up for a nearby stock car race. The race track is a half-mile dirt oval with a wood grandstand and lights for night races. (There are many of these local race tracks in Appalachia). The brothers outfit his 'shine-running' sedan for this new task.

In early stock car racing, all four doors of the vehicle were bolted shut and the window of the driver's door is removed. The driver climbs in and out of the car through the window. A net is placed over the window, but provides little real protection from debris. The crowd at these races is large, and often includes families with children, women looking to hook-up with successful drivers, and the usual rowdy crowd of drunk men.

Junior wins several local races, earning enough money to support his family and pay his father's legal expenses. He admits to his mother that he made the money racing to which she replies, "Did you win?" His mother and brother come to the next race. Over the summer Junior wins 8 races, building quite a strong local reputation. Having earned enough money to tide his family over, Junior's mother and brother try to talk him into becoming a garage mechanic "It's a lot safer; you're going to get yourself killed". But Junior, like his father, hates 'working for someone'.

He sets his sights on NASCAR. Junior, his brother and their buddies locate a viable car—but it costs $3,000: "We ain't got that much money in the whole world!" To make the needed money, the brothers return to hauling moonshine, this time in an oil truck. Their father is disappointed in them, noting that liquor carried in an oil truck tank is not "top quality"—"there's no point in being second best". In other words, he does not want the family name tarnished by a low quality product. The boys agree, "Yes sir"

They make a down payment on the race car, fix it up, and take it to a NASCAR track. The track manager attempts to dismiss them, but citing the NASCAR rule book (which he has memorized), Junior insists on a trial run – his first effort on a professional, paved track. His run time is excellent. Professional race team managers recognize Junior's remarkable talent and approach him to 'sign on' with their team.

This confronts Junior with another set of ideological hurdles. NASCAR is fast becoming a big-business operation. Drivers, who at the beginning of stock car racing were independent owners/drivers, are now being pulled into corporate teams, due to the high cost of maintaining a top-level race car. Junior deeply wants to maintain his independence, but agrees to split his winnings with a powerful team owner in exchange for mechanical support at the races.

Caption: Junior Johnson (Jeff Bridges) at one of his early NASCAR races.

Concurrently, Junior is competing for the affections of a pretty, blonde race-track "bunny", who is kind-hearted, but 'sleeps around' with several top drivers on the circuit. Junior is further disturbed by the raw commercialization of the sport. Race events have become equivalent to professional football or basketball games where athletes, owners, wealthy attendees and celebrities drink, party and sleep-around. Junior and his brother consider returning to the moonshining business, but their father, now out of prison, tells them "This (moonshine) here's a losing game" , i.e., there is no future for their family in making liquor.

Junior drives in his first NASCAR race at Charlotte, North Carolina. The film does an excellent job of portraying the sheer emotional intensity of a NASCAR event: Tens of thousands of fans are screaming in the stands, while hundreds of support personnel are hectically servicing race cars along the center oval of the track. At the beginning of each race, a local chaplain says a prayer, the Star-Spangled Banner is played, everyone recites the Pledge of Allegiance to a huge American flag, and Air Force fighter jets fly over the field. Meanwhile, Confederate flags, hats and t-shirts adorn those in the crowd – a remarkable mélange of old-time religion, patriotism, militarism and racism: "There ain't nothin' else like it nowhere" as one fan said to me at a Bristol NASCAR race.

The Charlotte race covers a distance of 600 miles around the oval track and lasts for hours; it is grueling for the drivers, crews and automobiles. There are fiery wrecks, smoking engine explosions, flat tires and legions of drunk fans by the time the checkered flag comes down that evening. But Junior Johnson wins, jumping in front of the favored driver in the last two laps. The rest, as they say, is history. Junior Johnson goes on to win 50 NASCAR races between 1953 and 1966. His family still makes (legal) moonshine.

What do we learn about Appalachia and Appalachian people from this film? The most significant truth it communicates is the **centrality of family** to Appalachian life. These are people who lived relatively independently from the rest of the United States for many, many years. During this time, the primary source of emotional and financial support for individuals usually came from their families. Without the assistance of kin in times of trouble, many would not have survived hard times. During events such as the Great Depression, the 1918 flu epidemic, and periodic droughts and floods, one's relatives – not the Federal or state governments -- were the primary source one could count on to "tide you over". The Johnson family, like the Doolan family in *Thunder Road*, is very typical of the loyalty and dependence Appalachian folk feel for their kin.

Caption: The real Junior Johnson in his stock car.

Where the Red Fern Grows (1974)

Released in 1974, this film details events in the life of a 12 year old boy growing up during the Great Depression in the rural mountains of Arkansas – close to where the fictitious Jed Clampett family would have been living in the 1960s (see Hirschman 2021b). For the narrative to be fully appreciated, one has to be familiar with the Appalachian fondness for coonhounds and coon hunting: so it is appropriate to include here a brief tutorial.

A Brief Appalachian Coonhound Tutorial

The early settlers in Appalachia used hounds to hunt for game, including deer, bear, possums cougars, rabbits, bison, raccoons and elk. Hounds were also kept as home protectors and family companions. As time went by, hunting for raccoons became a popular mountain sport; hounds were bred for the purpose of tracking a raccoon through mixed terrain and then "treeing" the 'coon. The hunter would then either shoot the raccoon for its pelt (recall the *Daniel Boone* and *Davy Crockett* television series (Hirschman 2021b)) or let it go. Raccoon pelts, like deerskins, were valuable trade items from the 1600s forward.

In the early days, few, if any, breeding records were kept for these dogs; hunting hounds were valued for their abilities, not their pedigree. However, by the 1800s specific lines of coonhounds became recognized for their skills, and breeding records began being kept (www.ukcdogs.com/coonhounds.) From this time period onward, contests were held in Appalachia at which men would bring their coonhounds to compete against one another. Prizes – and bragging rights – were awarded. At the present time in Appalachia there are several registered breeds of what are colloquially called "coonhounds".

And now on to *Where the Red Fern Grows*. The story is set in the midst of the Great Depression in the rural Arkansas Mountains. The landscape consists of woodlands, open fields, wide rivers and rolling hills. A large farmhouse made of clapboard with a tin roof sits along a dirt road. A family of five lives here – a middle aged couple with their three children. They are a happy family, but financially struggling, due to the depressed economy. (Recall this era from *Night of the Hunter* discussed earlier (Hirschman 2021b)). Both parents are loving toward their children, monitor their homework and serve as good 'role models' of responsibility. Unlike many other Appalachia films, there is no sign of either firearms or alcohol in the neatly kept house.

The 12-year-old son, Billy, does his chores dutifully, but he longs to have a "coon hound", which the family cannot afford. In fact, any money coming into the house is put toward purchasing a new mule to plow the corn fields. Father and son both wear clean overalls with white t-shirts. The mother and two young daughters are dressed in worn-but-clean cotton dresses. Washed clothes are hung on a line outside to dry, and there is a large stone well for water. The house is lit with kerosene lanterns and furnished with a multi-burner wood stove. (This setting is largely appropriate for the time period and locale).

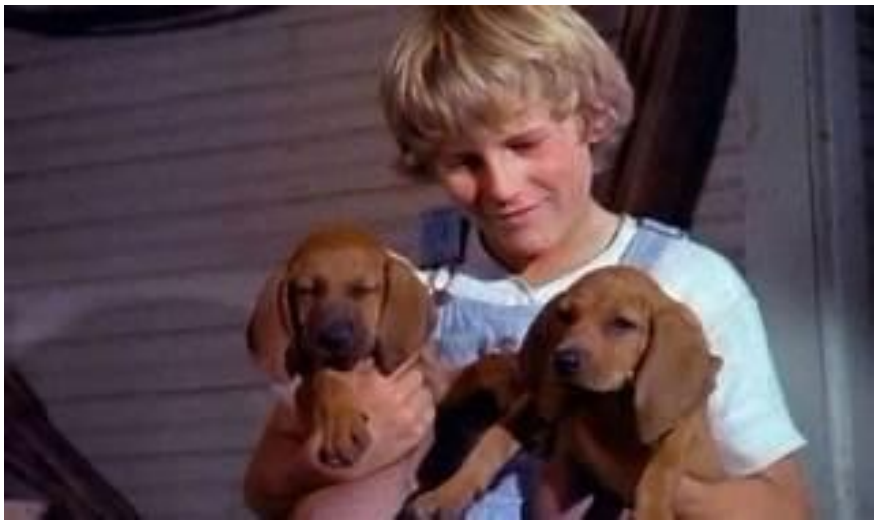
Billy's grandfather runs the nearby country store; he tells Billy there is a blue tick coon hound puppy for sale by a local resident. Billy rushes to take a look at the puppy, but a wealthier father and his two sons have just arrived, as well. They purchase the dog and the children make fun of Billy for not having the money needed to buy the puppy. (This family exhibits what Appalachian people would term "poor breeding", i.e., bad manners.) Billy's grandfather tells him that if he really wants a coon hound, he must "work hard to get it", instead of asking his parents for money. Billy spends the summer working at available odd jobs, very similar to Alvin York (*Sergeant York*) when he wanted to buy "the good farm land" (Hirschman 2021a).

By the end of the summer, Billy has made $50, enough to send away for two Red Bone coonhound puppies from Kentucky. They arrive by train in a nearby town, and Billy walks barefoot for half a day to pick them up. He learns that the puppies' price is now reduced to $40 ("due to the Depression"), so he goes to the town store and gets gifts for his family with his remaining $10. While in town, a group of older boys pick on him; Billy has to fight them, but is rescued by the local sheriff.

Because it is now too late in the day to walk back home carrying the puppies, Billy makes a campfire in the woods, and he and the pups sleep under a tree. He arrives home the next morning to find his family has been frantically searching for him. They soften-up a bit upon discovering that he not only earned enough money to purchase the pups by himself, but also brought them back useful gifts – dress fabric for his mother, new overalls for his father and toys for the younger sisters.

Over the next several months, Billy (with help from his sisters) trains his two Red Bones, Dan and Ann, to trail and tree raccoons. This is done by dragging a raccoon skin across the ground, through water, over fences, into the forest, and then lifting the pelt up onto a tree, teaching the dogs to follow the scent. The dogs prove to be excellent hunters and soon Billy has earned enough money selling raccoon pelts to help his father purchase the new mule.

As Billy's hunting reputation grows, the two boys from the wealthy family that purchased the Blue Tick puppy, bet him $2 that his Red Bones cannot tree the local "ghost" coon' which so far has eluded all attempts to catch him. Billy's dogs do "tree" the raccoon atop an old barn, but Billy – admiring the raccoon's intelligence and endurance—refuses to kill it. The older of the two brothers, Reuben. then starts beating Billy; this causes the Blue Tick hound to attack the two Red Bones. Reuben grabs Billy's hatchet and begins running toward the Red Bones, intending to kill them. He trips and the hatchet plunges into his chest, killing him. Billy is horrified at what has happened, telling his parents, "I ain't never goin' huntin' again".



*Caption: Billy and his Red **B**one coon hounds*

Months later, the family is having Sunday dinner at the grandfather's house. The grandfather shows Billy a flyer for the regional coon hunt. There is a large cash prize and a gold cup, as well. The grandfather tells him," Dan and Ann have a right to prove they are the best coon dogs". Billy agrees. The contest is a three day event in the mountains of northern Arkansas. Hundreds of people and their dogs are gathered, and tents have been set up on a large field. Most of the competitors arrive in horse-drawn buggies, but a few have trucks. The attendees wear denim overalls with flannel shirts and jackets, due to the cold fall weather.

A wealthy hunter, Mr. Billings, arrives in his truck with his champion Treeing Walker coonhounds; he usually wins the meet. The contest is run with different groups of men and dogs across three nights; kerosene lanterns are carried into the forest as the men follow their dogs. At the end of the three days, the dogs treeing the most raccoons are declared the winners, and their owner receives the cash prize and trophy – along with bragging rights for the year.

Billy and his dogs take their turn on the third night, which is wet and windy. The dogs have treed three raccoons when Billy's grandfather goes missing. Billy has to call his dogs off their tree and use them to locate his grandfather. This makes the wealthy hunter, Mr. Billings, the winner, as his dogs were able to "stay on their tree" for the judges. However, at the award ceremony, Mr. Billings acts very honorably by accepting the award and then handing it to Billy.

Sadly, however, the story does not end here. With the cash prize, the family now has enough money to consider moving to Tulsa, OK, where the mother's parents live, and they could "have a better life". But they decide not to go, because it would mean the dogs would have to be penned and could no longer go hunting. Days later, Billy and the dogs are out in the woods, when they come across a cougar. The cougar attacks the male hound, Dan, who manages to kill it, but is mortally wounded. The surviving dog, Ann, becomes despondent and dies a few weeks later, after refusing to eat. Billy buries them near the river; a red fern grows above the graves. The family then moves to Tulsa with their possessions packed on the wagon.

This narrative is deeply moving, because the characters lead bitter-sweet lives despite having genuinely noble souls. But it is exactly for this reason that the story resonates so well among Appalachian people. Tragic life events are often beyond even one's most well-intentioned efforts to prevent them. The path of the narrative also echoes the periodic out-migration of Appalachian folk to higher-paying jobs in cities; once there, some do indeed find a 'better way of life', while others, perhaps a generation or two later return to their roots in Appalachia. They miss the mountains.

The Dukes of Hazzard (1979)

This television series ran from January 1979 to February 1985 for a total of 147 episodes. The narrative focuses on the Duke family living in the North Georgia town of Hazzard where they have "been making moonshine for the past 200 years". Following the same storyline as "The Last American Hero", the family patriarch, Jesse Duke, agrees to give up making 'shine in order to obtain probation for his two sons, Bo and Luke, who have been convicted of "transporting liquor" in their stock car. The show also features their scantily clad, curvaceous, brunette cousin, Daisy Duke, who works as a cocktail waitress at the town's only bar, The Boar's Nest. The Boar's Nest is owned and operated by the mayor of the town, Jefferson Davis "Boss" Hogg. (For the uninitiated reader, Jefferson Davis was President of the short-lived Confederate States of America.) Notably, this is the first Appalachian narrative featuring a post-Civil War Confederate/Rebel theme.

The Duke family lives in the North Georgia mountains, the same area of Appalachia the character played by Andy Griffith in *No Time for Sergeants* hails from (Hirschman 2021b). The theme song to the show, sung by Waylon Jennings, carries the lyrics, "Just good ole boys, been in trouble with the law since the day they were born. Someday the mountains might get 'em, but the law never will. YeeHaw!" (Yeehaw is the infamous 'rebel yell' used during charges by the Confederate cavalry). This lyric brings to the fore an additional point regarding the relationship between Appalachian people and the government, especially the Federal Government. Since their earliest days occupying the Appalachian Mountains, the people who live there have been suspicious of – and largely independent from – the Federal legal system. Many do not respect, trust or obey the laws issuing forth from the US capital. The present day resentment of 'governmental' intrusion into what Appalachian people consider local and regional matters, especially as concerns alcohol, consumption and firearms -- is still very much in evidence.

The Dukes of Hazzard features additional Confederate symbolism, including the Dodge Charger stock car the two brothers drive. Named the *General Lee*, the automobile features a Confederate battle flag painted on its roof, and the horn plays "Dixie". Additionally, the surname of the family, Duke, was also the surname of the head of the Ku Klux Klan at the time the series ran. (This man, David Duke, is no longer leader of the KKK, but remains an ardent white supremacist (see, e.g., en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Duke)). In the present day, such imagery would be deemed grossly distasteful, but during the late seventies and early eighties, there was a resurgence of racism and Confederate idolatry in the South.

The opening episode depicts the Dukes' car chasing a police patrol car down a series of blacktop and dirt roads. The driving is fast, loud and reckless. Ultimately, it turns out that the patrol car was 'borrowed' for a joyride by one of their friends and they are seeing which car is faster. The *General Lee*, of course, wins the race.

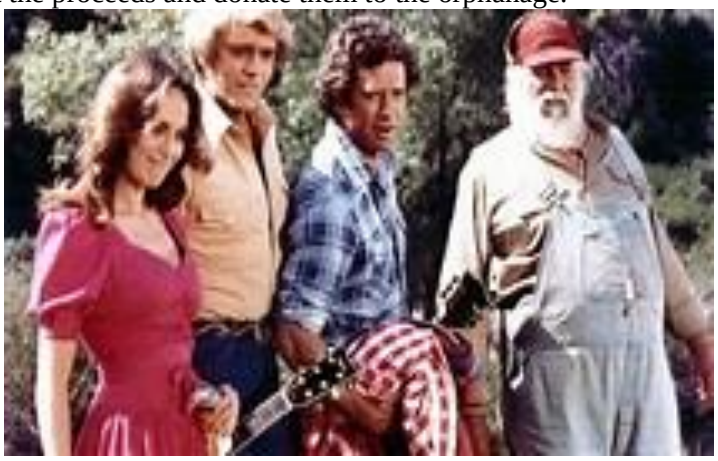
This initial episode is used to introduce the series' characters and ideology. We learn that Jesse Duke, the boy's father, was a moonshiner all his life, just as were his father, grandpappy, and great grandpappy all the way back to the early 1700s ("50 years before the US of A was founded", as Jesse puts it). However, two years ago Bo and Luke were arrested for "running 'shine" in the *General Lee* and in order to get them out of jail on parole, Jesse had to agree to give up making liquor.

The Dukes live on a small farm just outside Hazzard (fictitious), Georgia. Their farmhouse is nicely furnished with late 1970s appliances and décor. (Notably, in keeping with the positive image the series wants to provide for this pro-Confederate family, they are not portrayed as poor or illiterate). Along the road to their house, we see pastures of goats, chickens, and mules.

The town of Hazzard, itself, features 1970s contemporary architecture. It is depicted as prosperous; the municipal buildings are red brick and well-kept. The local sheriff, Roscoe Coltrane, is a well-meaning, if somewhat corrupt (i.e., "the best lawman money can buy") and unintelligent man.

Hazzard's political leader is the mayor, a short, plump man named Jefferson Davis Hogg, and nicknamed Boss Hogg, due to his regional influence. Hogg is thoroughly crooked and drives around town in a white Cadillac convertible. He consistently wears an all-white suit and smokes a cigar -- a caricature of the Southern political boss. (The same stereotype was used earlier in the opening scenes of *No Time for Sergeants* (Hirschman 2021b*)*).

The plot of one typical episode revolves around Bo and Luke's discovery that Sheriff Coltrane is bringing illegal slot machines into Hazzard in order to finance his re-election campaign. Notably, the Duke family and their friends view gambling as sinful – forbidden by their Fundamentalist Protestant religion, (whereas making corn liquor, of course, is a God-given right). However, when a pretty female friend of theirs, Julie, tells them that the money is desperately need to save the Hazzard Orphanage, they devise a plan to steal the slot machines and place them in the town's civic organizations, where they can be used for charity. The brothers will then collect the proceeds and donate them to the orphanage.



Caption: The Duke family.

The brothers discuss the idea with their cousin Daisy Duke, who waits tables at the Boars' Nest restaurant and bar. Daisy is very voluptuous and scantily clad, but is also able to shoot a rifle, fix car engines and deal forcefully with overly-aggressive men (in this she greatly resembles the earlier Appalachian female characters Ellie May Clampett and June Tolliver (see Hirschman 2021a, 2021b)). Daisy agrees to help them in the slot machine theft by dressing in a red bikini and flagging down the truck carrying the machines. When the drivers stop to pick her up, Bo and Luke steal their truck. They set-up the slot machines throughout the civic buildings and make good on their promise to give the proceeds to the orphanage. They also give Sheriff Coltrane public credit for the idea of helping out the orphanage, and he handily wins re-election.

Caption: The General Lee in action.

What are we to make of this? First, it is a fairly accurate representation of the late 1970s-early 1980s cultural binge on "muscle cars" – big engines, huge cars, huge tires, and lots and lots of speed and noise. NASCAR was at its peak of attendance during this time period and stock-car racing was very popular on dirt tracks throughout the Southeastern US. Bristol, TN in the center of Appalachia built one of the biggest and fastest stock-car racing tracks in the country, and it was consistently packed on race day. So the series was 'on-target' in its desire to appeal to an audience of young men, especially those living in rural areas.

As already noted, the series not so subtly appeals to 'white pride'; the plethora of Confederate imagery and the almost total absence of Black characters throughout the series indicates that the show's producers were not pushing a pro-integration agenda. Additionally, by featuring a woman, Daisy Duke, who wore very little apparel no matter what the occasion, as well as the character of Bo Duke who consistently dresses in tight jeans and a tight shirt, the series is also tapping into the 'beefcake' and 'cheesecake' fantasies of the time period.

But how does the series reflect on Appalachian people and their culture? Intriguingly, the series does depict both the people and town as modern, literate, and intelligent; there is no poverty on display, no missing teeth, no swearing, no guns, and no real violence, which is refreshing, Indeed, the Duke family is depicted as following a fairly strict moral code – they steal only from the genuinely corrupt and give the money to the genuinely (white) disadvantaged. They are depicted as modern-day Robin Hoods, living just outside the law, and doing good deeds to assist the less fortunate. What is unfortunate is that their personas in the series are so closely tied to the Confederacy; they embody the "Lost Cause" myth that many white southerners, and some white Appalachians, still embrace – that the pre-War South was indeed a happy place where everyone knew his or her place and the Federal Government had no right to mess with.

DISCUSSION

As is apparent from the above analysis, mechanical skills and liquor production still played starring roles in mass media representations of Appalachia and Appalachian people during the 1970s. These portrayals spanned the gamut from the truly grotesque behaviors in *Deliverance* to the heroic and honorable actions depicted in *The Last American Hero* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*. The narratives also presented widely disparate views of the everyday home life of Appalachian folk spanning the 'local yokel/ignorant hillbilly' images in *Hee-Haw* and *Deliverance* to the hard-working and honest farm family seen in *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Clearly, American audiences were being given two very different versions of Appalachia.

However, perhaps the biggest gap in the 1970s view of Appalachia was the virtual absence of women; indeed there were so few female characters it is hard to form generalizations about them. *Hee Haw* and *Dukes of Hazzard* put forward card-board cut-out views of the sexy, scantily-clad country girl reminiscent of *L-il Abner* and the *Beverly Hillbillies* (see Hirschman 2021a,b). While the mothers in *Where the Red Fern Grows* and *The Last American Hero* played very small supporting roles. Fortunately, this disparity will be mightily rectified during the 1980s.

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