

What are we getting wrong about Appalachia?

This month's newsletter is another issue about Appalachia. Remember, one of the goals of the Southeast Working-Class Task Force is to preserve the history and culture of those who have lived and are living in the greater Fountain Square area. See <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Southeast-Working-Class-Task-Force-2017-August-September-Newsletter-2.pdf>

Due to the publication of books like *Hillbilly Elegy* and *White Trash*, even more conversations and books are being published on Appalachians. Journalists are flocking to the region to extract sympathetic profiles of families devastated by poverty and abandoned by establishment politics. Headlines declared Appalachia ground zero for America's "forgotten tribe" of white working-class voters.

During the 1st (1916-1930) and 2nd (1940-1970) Great Migrations, Indianapolis became the home for many Appalachians. Most were white working-class who settled on the Southside of the city south of 16th St. and particularly the Southside of East and West Washington St.

Although many of today's southeast side residents may not identify as Appalachians as directly as their predecessors, the influence of the culture is still strong especially in language, diet, music, distrust of government (schools, police, social services), leery of being duped by banks and lawyers, strong family ties, a do-it-yourself mindset, and a sense of patriotism.

What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia is written by Elizabeth Catte an historian from East Tennessee. She challenges J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* version of Appalachia--describing the area as an "internal" American colony where powerful outside forces control the region's resources and shape its destiny, with the residents becoming mere pawns in their game. Her book:

- breaks Appalachian stereotypes with examples of writing, art, and policy created by Appalachians as opposed to *for* Appalachians;
- reveals the rich diversity and often radical activism that she sees in her native region;
- shows the culture is not mono-ethnically white and Scots-Irish, conservative, and culturally backward;
- explains most problems come from outside corporations exploiting both its natural resources and its workforce; and,
- notes while many white voters in the region supported Trump, as conservative white voters did elsewhere, there was also considerable support for the brand of populism espoused by Bernie Sanders.

Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia by Steve Stoll is sub-titled "How the United States underdeveloped Appalachia." *Ramp Hollow* reveals Appalachia as among the most storied and yet least understood regions in America having long been associated with poverty and backwardness. Stoll discusses how:

- until, beginning in the 19th century, extractive industries kicked off a "scramble for Appalachia" that left struggling homesteaders dispossessed of their land;
- generations of its inhabitants lived, worked, survived, and depended on natural resources (beauty, farm land, animals, lumber, rivers, fruit, and gains) held in common;
- as the men disappeared into coal mines and timber camps, and their families moved into shantytowns or deeper into the mountains, the commons of Appalachia were, in effect, enclosed, and the fate of the region was sealed; and,
- the rise of the Appalachian homestead and how its self-sufficiency resisted dependence on money and the industrial society arising elsewhere in the US.

Here's a link to the C-SPAN book TV discussion by authors Catte and Stoll:

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?442664-2/author-discussion-appalachia>

My connection to Appalachia comes from my father's side of the family who were North Carolinians. My dad was born in West Virginia in 1913 as my granddad Harrison sought work in the mines during West Virginia's coal mine wars (1912-1921). He, my grandma Hattie, my dad and his siblings arrived in Indianapolis in 1915.

The SEW-CTF newsletter is edited by task force Chair John Harris Loflin (john.loflin@seindy.org).

The task force meets the 3rd Wed. of the month at 6:30 on the 2nd floor at 901 Shelby St.