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"Is Kentucky a Southern State?"

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“IS KENTUCKY A SOUTHERN STATE?”

A Capstone Experience/ Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Bachelor of the Arts with
Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

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2010

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the cultural identity of Kentucky. Many people have asked, “Is Kentucky as Southern State?” Being the borderland between the North and the South, the Commonwealth has been viewed as Southern, as part of the Midwest, and something completely unique. To define Kentucky as Southern, I have examined the literary works of different regional authors. Looking at the character traits those authors have relegated to their manufactured people, I have decided, from the evidence provided, whether that author considers his or her setting as part of the South. One can tell whether the author identifies with the South if he or she employs the stereotypical Southern traits, like religiosity, hospitality, decorum, societal and familial responsibility, honor, dialect, and the importance of nature. Those demonstrated traits combined with historical events allow me to define the culture of the different regions. In this paper, I have divided Kentucky into three regions---Western, Central, and Eastern---and have examined and defined the cultural identity of each region.

Keywords: Kentucky, Cultural Identity, Southern Culture, Civil War, Literature, Kentucky Writers

Dedicated to my grandmother Faunda Cowan

This is for you, Granny.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Kentucky had been called many names----Kaintuck, the Dark and Bloody Ground, the Bluegrass State. Its many names reflected the multitude of cultures it possessed. A region's identity was best determined by investigating the culture that came from it, like literature and music. An examination of native regional authors could lead one to establish the culture of the area. A borderland between two different cultures, Kentucky's identity was debated as to whether it was Northern or Southern. Because of Kentucky's neutrality during the Civil War, its identity was more complicated than many other states.

Very geographically diverse, within the borders of the Commonwealth were rivers, plains, and mountains. Kentucky's geographical diversity created a location that had separate cultural identities associated to each physical region. The three regions identified were Western, Central, and Eastern Kentucky. Western Kentucky was the only region that culturally associated with the South. Kentucky was not a Southern state in its entirety. The three regions were constructed from regional divisions of the state.

Pertaining to the regions within Kentucky, Historian Thomas D. Clark described:

Within the borders of the Commonwealth there are several sub-states, and each of these comprises more or less a cultural and economically cohesive areas in which divisions in population exhibit a sense of community.¹

¹Thomas D. Clark, *A History of Kentucky* (Ashland, KY: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1988), 3.

Western Kentucky's borders were determined as including the south western part of the Pennyroyal region, Western Coalfields region, and the Jackson Purchase region--- the south western portion of the state. Central Kentucky was established as containing the Bluegrass Region, the Knobs, and the Pennyroyal region east of I-65. In this essay, the Eastern Kentucky region was identified as the Eastern Mountains and Coalfields area of the state. The regional divisions grouped together related physical areas to reveal the culture of those areas. A simpler version to classify the regions was the river region (Western Kentucky), the plains region (Central Kentucky), and the mountains region (Eastern Kentucky). With these regional divisions, one could specifically examine the culture of each area.

Three chapters were dedicated to the three regions of the Commonwealth. Within each chapter were three main subcategories: Literature, History, and Frontier. The literature category included two regional authors native to the stated area of the Commonwealth. With the cited work relevant to the stated region, the authors depicted the traits and culture of the region through both their settings and their characters. Through the characters and settings, the authors prescribed certain traits that reflected the culture of a region of Kentucky. By examining those traits, one could observe whether the region identified with the South. The characteristics that classified the South as Southern were the importance of religion, idea of societal and familial duty, decorum, dialect and its disparities, distrust between the city and country, and the close relationship with nature. However, one could note that the given characteristics were often associated with fundamentally rural areas, but the South, in nature, was chiefly agrarian.

Two writers were selected for each region determined by a difference in locality of the area and a difference in perspective. The two authors for the Central Kentucky portion were Ed McClanahan and Wendell Berry. They were selected because they resided in different areas of the set region and had different viewpoints----Berry was rural and McClanahan was not. In the Western Kentucky section, the two writers were Robert Penn Warren and Bobbie Ann Mason. They shared that they were both Western Kentucky natives, but they differed in that they were from varied periods of time. In the Eastern Kentucky portion, Harriette Arnow and Silas House belonged to eras of the region's history and represented different viewpoints. In each chapter, the designated two authors represented different possible perspectives that natives from the region had about their culture.

Each section contained important historical occurrences that happened in the region and influenced the region's culture. Those historical differences explained why one region connected with one culture rather than another. Such important historical events like the Civil War, Bloody Monday, and Bloody Harlan, represented different hardships that impacted the areas. The Civil War and its impact helped explain why Western Kentucky identified with the South. The isolated history of Eastern Kentucky clarified why the region seemed to identify the closest with other Appalachian people and not the North or South. The growing urbanism and the violence of Bloody Monday illustrated Central Kentucky's change from Southern and agrarian to urban and Midwestern.

The frontier period for each region demonstrated the concept of Kentucky culture. A description of characteristics of the state allowed one to differentiate between Southern

culture and Kentucky's culture. Throughout all the regions, Kentuckians were united as the native sons and daughters of the state. The Commonwealth became the new west for the American colonies. People claimed that Kentuckians possessed a set of traits unique to the state that reflected its frontier past. Examining the pioneer past of the Commonwealth, one can determine the characteristics that typify the state. By understanding that there were stereotypical traits assigned to Kentucky, one could identify the difference between Southern and Kentucky elements.

Kentucky was not a Southern state in its entirety. Its different regions, marked by varied environmental areas, possessed independent cultural identities. By undertaking a multi-facet investigation into the cultures, one could determine the culture of each region and why each region associated with that culture. Also, this examination illustrated what characteristics were associated with the South. While some of these traits seemed stereotypical, the region's traits were still telling of the American Southeast's culture and what regions shared that identity.

CHAPTER 2

WESTERN KENTUCKY

The American South was a region of states interconnected by a kindred culture. When delving into Southern culture, one could see the importance of nature, religion, and community. These characteristics helped define the residents of the South as Southerners. With a unique culture, the South possessed its own identity. In *Cracker Culture*, Grady McWhiney described, “In the rural South...will ever find a much heartier welcome, a warmer shake of the hand, a greater desire to please, and less frigidity of deportment, than will be found in any walled town upon the earth’s circumference.”² This extroverted hospitality was a trait that many associated with the region. Again, McWhiney stated that “In the South, the doors of citizens were open to all decent travelers, and shut to none.”³ This warm acceptance was a feature that distinguished the South as an independent region with an independent culture.

Western Kentucky stretched from the Mississippi River to the rolling hills of Barren County. It was the land of the lakes and rivers, and its own unique geographical region. Like the eastern part of the state, Western Kentucky had hills and coal mines. Coal was first mined in Western Kentucky. Coal mines had marked this region of the Commonwealth by creating an industry that employed a large percentage of the natives. Singer/songwriter John Prine told the tale of coal mining in the region with his song

²Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 96-97.

³Ibid., 95.

‘Paradise’. In the chorus of his song ‘Paradise,’ Prine sang, “And daddy won’t you take me back to Muhlenberg County/Down by the Green River where Paradise lay/ Well, I’m sorry my son, but you’re too late in asking/ Mr. Peabody’s coal train has hauled it away.”⁴ Coal mining in Western Kentucky led to the region being pockmarked with railroad tracks. To move mined coal, railroads were built across the landscape. As Edward Ayers wrote in *The Promise of the New South*, “Each [railroad] box brought another message as well; the South is behind the times, the consumer of other people’s ideas and products.”⁵ These railroad tracks ran across the countryside, connecting Western Kentucky to the rest of the state and the rest of the world. The railroads carried the coal from the stomach of Kentucky to aid in fueling the world.

Those railroads were vital arteries of Kentucky’s economy. Thomas D. Clark elaborated on the development of the economy for the western region of the Commonwealth. He wrote, “Both the mountain and the Pennyroyal in western Kentucky felt the impact of the new age of economic growth and sophistication. The broad rolling plains were hacked up into plantations of manorial proportions and there was developed in this area a planting society not unlike that of the lower southern cotton belt.”⁶ The planter life style arose with the large farming estates of various crops, like tobacco, that etched the native landscape.

Tobacco became an important crop and the livelihood of many from the region. The region’s arability had made Western Kentucky the home of a crucial part of Kentucky’s economy---tobacco. Tobacco was as essential to Western Kentucky as its

⁴John Prine, “Paradise” <http://www.jpshrine.org/lyrics/songs/jpparadise.html> (accessed January 19, 2010).

⁵Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 81.

⁶Thomas D. Clark, *Kentucky: Land of Contrast* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 37.

rivers. In the history of the Western Kentucky, the tobacco industry had been threatened, the residents, dependent on the farming of tobacco to feed themselves and their families, waged a war. The Black Patch War, beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, was the result of a coalition of tobacco farmers gathering together, as the Planters' Protective Association, to demand better prices for their crop.⁷ Placing their headquarters at Guthrie, Kentucky, the Planters' Protective Association created a resistance to defend their worth.

With rolling farmlands, one could easily see that agriculture was an important and essential part to the life of a Western Kentuckian. Men and women tended the arable earth of this region of the Commonwealth to turn a profit. Kentucky was also a land of dense forest, surrounded by rivers, making it ideal for the lumber industry. Edward Ayers described the apparent logging potential in the Western Kentucky region. He wrote, "For farmers where commercial crops were difficult to grow and market, as in the Cumberland River area along the middle of the Kentucky-Tennessee border, this logging was worth the risks."⁸ Being predominately a sparsely populated region, livestock and corn fields outnumbered the residents. These fields of corn and soybeans marked this region of Kentucky. River transport was used to move the rich agricultural goods of the region up and down the Mighty Mississippi.

Two major rivers defined the region's area line, the Ohio River and the Mississippi River. These rivers separated the state of Western Kentucky from Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. The great Mississippi River had influenced the western region of Kentucky since its settlement. With being adjacent to the Mississippi River, Western Kentucky's economy and the economy of the entire state had been entwined with the

⁷Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 280.

⁸Ayers, 123.

river. However, Kentucky was not able to open trade with major Mississippi River ports, like New Orleans, until, in 1803, the American purchase of Louisiana.⁹ The Louisiana Purchase was an important step to ensuring the economic longevity of Kentucky. Clark noted, “During the next few years Kentucky was transformed into a flourishing industrial and commercial commonwealth with a population of the state increasing from 73,000 in 1790 to over 200,000 in 1800.”¹⁰ With access to the important port of New Orleans, Kentucky merchants had full use of the mighty Mississippi.

Western Kentucky was a region of the western frontier that the founding fathers attempted to tame. One important region was formerly known as part of the Jackson Purchase---connecting the Commonwealth to the Mississippi River. The Jackson Purchase was marked by the rivers on three sides, the Ohio to the North, the Tennessee to the East, Mississippi on the West, and the Tennessee border on the other. With its proximity to key rivers, the Jackson Purchase was a quintessential factor to the economic health of the state.

The connection to the Mississippi River not only influenced the economy of Western Kentucky, but also the culture of the western region. More than the steamboat *The Delta Queen* came upstream on the waters of the Mississippi to Western Kentucky. The Mississippi River was a fountain of culture that spewed Southern culture up to the western region of Kentucky. With ports in cities, like New Orleans, on the Mississippi River, the river ports in Western Kentucky had a continual connection with the Deep South. This connection made Kentucky an active member of the American South. However, with the Industrial Revolution, Western Kentucky’s trade expanded to include

⁹ Clark, *Kentucky: Land of Contrast*, 34.

¹⁰Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 114.

the upstream realm of the North. In *A New History of Kentucky*, historians Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter stated that “The Mississippi River had provided a close bond with the South well before statehood. While, the steamboat had increased the river traffic, it had also weakened the tie with the South by increasing upstream trade with Pittsburgh and the North.”¹¹ Yet, Western Kentucky seemed to be marked by the scars and traits of Southern culture.

With the historical connection to the American South embedded in the past of Western Kentucky, one could observe modern Western Kentucky’s connection with the southeast. Thick accents, home cooking, and churches dotted the Western Kentucky landscape. While Western Kentucky’s connection to the American South was strong, it still contained its own unique character.

Literature

Culturally, Western Kentucky was rich. It was the home of Bluegrass music, with Bill Monroe born and raised in Ohio County, Kentucky. Also, great people of the state, like author Irvin Cobb and Vice President Alben W. Barkley were from Western Kentucky. This area was criss-crossed with cultural giants. Two of such giants were the literary minds of Bobbie Ann Mason and Robert Penn Warren.

An author from Mayfield, Bobbie Ann Mason was a native of the western region of the Commonwealth. Raised in the tobacco fields of Western Kentucky, Mason’s upbringing was evident in her novels. Mason’s characters reflected the traits that differentiated the South from other regions in the United States. In her novel *In Country*, Mason presented an array of Southern traits in her characters. She emphasized the sense of community that defined the South. In one scene of *In Country*, Mason wrote about a

¹¹ Harrison and Klotter, 181.

funeral that took place in Western Kentucky. She stated, “Oh, they [neighbors] just kept a-bringing good things to eat. It went on so long the people that brought food had to go home and cook more for us. Lutie Cunningham brought a ham and a gallon of potato salad and three pies.”¹² Mason depicted her homeland by creating characters like the people from Western Kentucky----Southerners.

Mason continued to subtly exemplify the Southern characteristics of Western Kentuckians in *In Country*. She showed how Western Kentuckians shared with people near them. Mason wrote about one character Emmitt, “He brought the muffedelatas in to Sam and Lonnie.”¹³ Small statements offering evidence of the sense of community in the town in *In Country* illustrated that while people did not have much, but they did share what they did own. Another truth about Western Kentucky was that it was a poor region. Mason observed the money woes of her fellow kinsmen. She described in *In Country*, “[Mamaw says] Fried chicken’s five thirty five, I could buy nearly two chickens at the grocery for that.”¹⁴ By depicting the tight budgets, Mason exhibited how many Western Kentuckians had to live from check to check.

Mason stressed the importance of family and honor in her novel *An Atomic Romance*. Another characteristic of the South was the sense of familial and societal duty. Mason described how one man cared for his mother on her sickbed. In the novel, Mason wrote that “Reed, in a daze of disbelief, took off work to stay by his mother’s bed.”¹⁵ Such a reaction to news of a sick family member was normal. In the South, people were expected to fulfill a duty or honor to their family and community.

¹²Bobbie Ann Mason, *In Country* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1985), 197.

¹³*Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵Bobbie Ann Mason, *An Atomic Romance* (New York: Random House, 2005), 34.

Another important characteristic of the American South was the appreciation of leisure. In *Cracker Culture*, Grady McWhiney quoted Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote in about that the “[taste of a Kentuckian] are those of an idle man.”¹⁶ Southerners had also been noted for their love of leisure and Mason exemplified this love in the actions of her character Emmitt. Mason described Emmitt as a man who just worked enough to get by and nothing more.¹⁷ Being able to spy these like characteristics of Southern culture allowed one to identify the region that Mason was writing about as part of the American South.

Mason described the rural world in which her characters live in *In Country*. She illustrated the importance of agriculture to the natives of Western Kentucky. In the world of tobacco, Mason depicted the connection between a farmer and his or her crop. She noted, “He couldn’t wait to get back home and put out a tobacco crop.”¹⁸ Agriculture was the livelihood of many, making an intimate connection between the South and nature. Mason wrote on the importance of country and nature to Western Kentuckians that:

Reed Futrell wound through a labyrinth of gravel roads, stirring up a dusting of memories. He had been coming to this place all of his life. His uncle Ed taught him to fish here in the large ponds...he killed his first---and only---buck here. He hunted squirrels with his cousins. He went on church picnics...he probably had camped in this woods three hundred times.¹⁹

Open fields, wilderness, and farmland were common sights in Western Kentucky that helped one understand why many natives were so connected to nature. With agriculture being very dominant in Western Kentucky, there was a lack of urban areas in the region. Edward Ayers described in *The Promise of the New South* how people from

¹⁶ McWhiney, 49.

¹⁷ Mason, *In Country*, 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹ Mason, *An Atomic Romance*, 5.

the city perceived people from the country. Ayers quoted one Kentuckian on his move from rural Kentucky to Louisville. Ayers stated, “Right into the city of Louisville we trundled with our furniture piled onto an old two horse wagon...I was piled on top of the furniture...’Country jakes! Country jakes!’ [shouted by onlookers].”²⁰ Ayers continued by providing an onlookers description of the newcomers:

When Griffith [new comer] first appeared among us we regarded him as a hick---as indeed he was. Tall for his age, loose-jointed and beak-nosed, he wore jeans that barely reached his ankles, red suspenders and rawhide shoes. He badly needed a haircut.²¹

These descriptions detailed how many urbanites viewed rural Kentuckians---as ignorant rednecks. The difference in lifestyles led residents from the country to have a distrust of cities. Mason illustrated this distrust in her novel *In Country*. She stated that “Mama’s walking on clouds cause he’s marrying that hoity-toity girl from Bowling Green.”²² With this quote, Mason depicted how many would perceive people from the urban areas as sophisticated and successful rather than the poor country folk. Continuing to illustrate the difference, Mason gave another example of this dichotomy. Mason described how the character Mamaw, a rural Kentuckian, was embarrassed about making a mess in her daughter-in-law’s, Irene’s, house in Lexington. She wrote, “[Mamaw] I’m still embarrassed, spilling dirt on Irene’s nice floor. I guess she thought I was just a country hick, dragging in dirt.”²³ Southerners were aware that they are often viewed as ignorant and backwards by outsiders, especially urbanites.

²⁰ Ayers, 63.

²¹ Ibid., 63.

²² Mason, *In Country*, 69.

²³ Ibid., 6.

Overall, Mason's novels depicted common life in Western Kentucky. *In Country* and *An Atomic Romance* demonstrated what this region held dear. Mason celebrated this way of life by creating characters that clearly epitomized the region's traits. With Mason's novels, one could plainly see that Western Kentucky was a part of the American South.

Robert Penn Warren was a literary giant. He was born in the town of Guthrie in the western region of Kentucky. Again, Guthrie was a small town full of farm fields and family run stores. Warren grew up in the town that now was home to a Jefferson Davis memorial and a Jefferson Davis Parkway that ran through the town. Warren depicted shared Southern characteristics in his novels. With his writing, he depicted Western Kentucky as a place that held many of the same values as the South. Warren's novels were full of characters that held a great merit to traits such as manners, honor, and duty. By reading Warren's novels and familiarizing oneself with his characters, one could easily see why the South extended to include Western Kentucky.

In his novel *Night Rider*, Warren's intention to define Western Kentucky as Southern was clear. Warren plainly believed that his characters were Southerners by giving them the drawl native to the region. An example was the *Night Rider*'s protagonist Munn's use of dialect. Warren wrote "[Mr. Munn] Too much likker, he thought, and wondered how many drinks he had that evening."²⁴ By phonetically spelling liquor as likker, Warren was promoting the idea to his readers that the setting of his novel being part of the South. Warren reinforced this idea by nicknaming one of his characters Sukie-

²⁴Robert Penn Warren, *Night Rider* (Nashville, TN: J.S. Sanders & Company, 1992), 108.

--a nickname frequently found in the South.²⁵ By these subtle additions allowed for Warren to state that he believed Western Kentucky was a part of the South.

Again, Warren depicted his characters as Southerners by adding other romanticized characteristics to them, such as being extroverted. Outsiders not from the South often hold romanticized, false images about how Southerners act. This image stemmed from the glamorized idea of the Southern cavalier---a man full of personality and chivalry. Warren described how his characters had a desire to perform and entertain in *Night Rider*. Warren noted, “And Mr. Christian, sometimes in the middle of a discussion, would rise and tramp the floor with his heavy, booted stride, and wave his arms, and exclaim, ‘By God, we got ‘em!’”²⁶ These characters liked to perform and garner attention, whether it was from Mr. Christian’s unpredicted exclamations or his daughter Sukie’s pretty dresses.

Wilbur Cash wrote of the people of the South that “The Southerner’s frolic humor, his continual violation of his strict precepts in action, might serve constantly to exacerbate the sense of sin in him, to keep his zest for absolution always at white heat, to make him humble amenable to public proposals of preachers.”²⁷ Cash reinforced the idea of Southerners being a vociferous people full of spirit. Warren utilized Cash’s Southern stereotype.

Warren stressed the importance of manners and honor in his novels. In the South, people upheld the existence of honor and duty. Warren observed the importance of family duty by creating scenes in *Night Rider*, akin to Benton Todd replacing his father’s

²⁵Ibid., 4.

²⁶Ibid., 41.

²⁷Wilbur Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1941), 57.

societal position.²⁸ Warren used parts of his novels like *Todd's* to show the societal constraints on his characters. This sense of duty created societal roles. Warren described these facets in *Night Rider* by showing how Civil War veterans later being prominent citizens in towns like Princeton, Kentucky.²⁹ These former soldiers performed their duty when their country was at war and now they were doing their duty for their home. Another societal constraint found in the South that Warren depicted in his Kentuckian characters was the importance of manners and decorum. In *Night Rider*, there was a crucial scene in which the characters Miss Burnhan and Mr. Munn had an altercation because of Munn's lack of decorum.³⁰ Munn's lack of decorum was considered a terrible act because he did not use proper manners when speaking with a lady.

Wooden, Christian crosses marked the landscape of the South. Fierce religiosity was an element that characterized the American South, past and present. The importance of religion was a trait that made the South unique. The South was the origin of state liquor laws. John Shelton Reed wrote about the role of religion in the South as:

A few of the more distinctive correlates of Southern religiosity---such as opposition to the sale of alcohol and support for Sunday blue laws---are waning, but much remains. For some time to come, Southerners will be characterized not only by religiosity but by religiosity of a distinctive kind.³¹

Religion was emphasized by Warren in his literary work. In *Night Rider*, Warren exemplified the importance of religion in the everyday life of a Western Kentuckian. He noted that “[the Captain] Why, Bill, the Lord Jesus was a pretty good picker. He just got stung on one out of a dozen. The only wonder is somebody didn't beat Judas to it and

²⁸Warren, *Night Rider*, 180.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 14.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 229.

³¹John Shelton Reed, *My Tears Spoiled my Aim* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993),37.

give a cut price.”³² With tying religion into the everyday life of his characters, Warren was illustrating the importance of Christianity to his characters and to the region. Christianity was the backbone of Southern culture. Its importance was demonstrated in the way the American South voted in elections. The weight of religion was evident from the morals to the biblical names given to Southerners. Edward Ayers wrote about the magnitude of Christianity in the South. He observed that in the South, “Religious faith and language appeared everywhere in the New South. It permeated public speech as well as private emotion...People viewed everything from courtship to child-rearing to their own deaths in religious terms.”³³ In the past, many Southerners used the Bible to mandate their lives and behaviors. The importance of religion in the history of the South was instilled in what Southerners culturally deem imperative. Warren showed this trait in the Kentuckians he cast as the characters of his novels.

Warren used Southern characteristics to define his characters. In *Night Rider*, Warren created characters that had lives entwined with nature. Without the constraints of urbanity, Southerners were still about to connect with the land in ways that other, more industrial regions cannot. Wilbur Cash wrote about the lack of industrialization of the South, saying that “It is impossible to conceive the great South as being on the whole, more than a few steps removed from the frontier stage at the beginning of the Civil War.”³⁴ The untouched land of the South was depicted in Warren’s Western Kentucky setting.

Warren’s Kentucky was given the same rural characteristics as the natural American South. Warren illustrated the importance of agriculture in his novel *Night*

³²Warren, *Night Rider*, 42.

³³ Ayers, 160.

³⁴ Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 10.

Rider. The center of the novel *Night Rider* was the tobacco wars of Kentucky. By writing about the tobacco wars, Warren emphasized the role of the farmer and of rural society in Kentucky.³⁵ Demonstrating the connection between his characters and the soil, Warren created a permanent tryst between Kentucky and the South. Edward Ayers observed about the rural life of the South. He stated that “In the parts of the Upper South where climate and soil provided more congenial circumstances for livestock and food crops, on the other hand farmers took advantage of the opportunities.”³⁶ Individuals traveled to the South to find success and make homes. People came over the Appalachian Mountains to settle Western Kentucky and to utilize the rich, fertile lands which were provided by nature.

Another trait often associated with the South was adamant loyalty. With clan like behavior, Southerners had great pride of not only their families, but of their home. Southerners had a fierce love of one another and their home. This loyalty stemmed from the fact that many of the original settlers of the South were of Scot-Irish descent. Grady McWhiney wrote about the heritage of the South. He said, “They [Celts] added nearly a million souls to the population of the South every decade and helped to expand its frontiers some twelve hundred miles west of the Atlantic seaboard.”³⁷ The Scot-Irish had been epitomized as a clan like people that passionately cared for their homes. In *Night Rider*, Warren demonstrated the clan like mentality of the tobacco growers of Western Kentucky.

³⁵Warren, *Night Rider*, 15-16.

³⁶Ayers, 191.

³⁷McWhiney, 12.

Warren wrote about the alliance of a region in *Night Rider*. He depicted this loyalty by creating the union of the Tobacco Association.³⁸ He described how, one by one, his characters formed an alliance that stretches across varying counties in Western Kentucky. He wrote, “Mr. Munn wrote down two names; Joseph Foster, Murray Mill Pike, Bardsville; and Kimball G. Snider, Strawberry Creek Ford, Morganstown Pike, Bardsville.”³⁹ These two characters had no other ties other than both were tobacco farmers from the same region. Warren illustrated the companionship of Kentuckians with the Tobacco Association, but with such an illustration, Warren also was crafting an image of Kentucky as part of the South.

Warren’s novel *The Cave* exemplified Warren’s connection with the American South. If authors were to write what they know, Robert Penn Warren must be a Southerner. In *The Cave*, Warren created a tale of small town in Eastern Tennessee.⁴⁰ In Johntown, Tennessee, the setting of *The Cave*, Warren created a world similar to the world he created in *Night Rider*.⁴¹ Warren crafted a fictional town full of the same Christian morals as one can observe in *Night Rider*.⁴² By creating like towns in two separate states, Warren showed how cultural similarities were shared between the two states. Warren viewed Tennessee and Western Kentucky as like regions that held the same values and morals. With writing about Tennessee, Warren illustrated a relationship between the Warren’s Kentucky culture and the culture of the state of Tennessee.

With the literary work of Robert Penn Warren, an essential bridge was built between the cultures of Western Kentucky and the American South. Novels like *The*

³⁸Warren, *Night Rider*, 146.

³⁹Ibid., 146.

⁴⁰Robert Penn Warren, *The Cave* (New York: Random House, 1959), 77.

⁴¹Ibid., 77.

⁴²Ibid., 392.

Cave and *Night Rider* obviously demonstrated that Warren felt as a member of the American South. Warren felt as comfortably writing about his native Western Kentucky as he did writing about Tennessee. Also, Warren continued to write novels with settings across the American southeast. He gave his characters thick accents, religious fervor, and the limitations placed by holding decorum and manners dear. Warren merged state lines and helped propel the western region of Kentucky into part of the American South.

History

The city of Bowling Green, Kentucky, was the state head quarters for the Confederacy during the Civil War. The state of Kentucky was a border between the two warring regions. While Kentucky was officially part of the Union, many Kentuckians fought for the Confederacy. Western Kentucky was the birthplace of the President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. Hailing from Guthrie, Kentucky, Davis would lead the Confederacy against another native Kentuckian, President Abraham Lincoln.

The western region of the Commonwealth hosted both Confederates and Yankees during the Civil War. However, much of the region had Southern leaning before the Civil War. Prior to the War, Western Kentucky had been home of its own large planter class. Yet, the Southern leanings were enforced by the destruction that the Union Army brought on the area. Josephine Wells Covington was a resident of Bowling Green, Kentucky, during the Civil War. In her letters to her father Judge Robert William Wells in Jefferson City, Missouri, she described how the city faired during the War. Covington recorded how both the Union and Confederate troops treated the city of Bowling Green and its residents.

Covington wrote about the destruction the Union army brought to Bowling Green. She stated, “The greater part of the town has been destroyed. The business houses on one side of the public square were more than half consumed by fire, and the second night after the Yankees came in the other side was also more than half destroyed by fire, the latter it is said accidentally by drunken soldiers.”⁴³ The actions of the Union troops in Western Kentucky were not respectful to the region or its residents. As Covington wrote, the Union troops destroyed much of the city of Bowling Green without due reason. Such action solidified Western Kentuckians resentment for the Union.

Covington continued in her letters to describe how even the strongest Union sympathizers were surprised that the Confederate Army did so little damage to their town. She wrote, “Even the strongest Union people admitted that they did not think it possible for so large an army to be about a place and do so little damage, and even among the [Texas] Rangers there were some as good men as ever lived.”⁴⁴ Covington continued to state how abrasive the Union troops were during their stay. She wrote that:

About daylight the morning after the Southern troops left this place, thirty Dutch soldiers rushed into our house, Albert [her husband] ran down to them as quick as he could, they insisted upon going up stairs and indeed started...told them they would frighten his wife and children to death and finally succeeded in keeping them down.⁴⁵

The obvious irreverent behavior of the Union troops branded them as villains to the natives of Western Kentucky.

The average residents of Western Kentucky were neutral during the war. Covington described how residents were subjected to abusive behavior, like pillaging of

⁴³Josephine Wells Covington. March 2nd, 1862. Manuscripts, Kentucky Library, Bowling Green, KY, 1.

⁴⁴Ibid., 2.

⁴⁵Ibid., 2.

personal goods, by the Union troops. Like Covington, natives of Western Kentucky reported how Union troops burned property and forcibly pushed themselves into people's houses. Such behavior led to a general distrust of the Union army.

However, Kentucky was still a member of the Union during the Civil War. Some Kentuckians from the western region of the Commonwealth united with their northern brothers and joined the Union army. John Atkinson was a resident of Bowling Green, Kentucky, during the Civil War. A Union sympathizer, Atkinson wrote that "They [the Rebels] defied the government and set up government for themselves."⁴⁶ Atkinson was against the secession of the Southern states and wrote about how he was glad when the Confederates were run out of town by the Union army. However, while Atkinson remarked that he would "hate there object as to destroy anything that would be of benefit to the Union army," he also disclosed the damage the Union army did to Western Kentucky.⁴⁷

Atkinson wrote that "[The Union soldiers] in the dead of the night with revolvers cocked and they took just what they wanted and about seven or eight hundred dollars in notes and threatened to burn the house and mill."⁴⁸ Thus, the Union army did not treat Union sympathizers with respect and dignity, but proceeds to abuse the property and rights of various Western Kentuckians. However, even with suffering abuse, many in the western region of the Commonwealth still retained their support for the Union cause.

With the heritage of the planter class in Western Kentucky, the allegiance of Western Kentuckians to the South during the Civil War could be predicted. However,

⁴⁶John Atkinson. Bowling Green Warren County Kentucky United States. May 10th 1866. Manuscripts, Kentucky Library, Bowling Green, KY, 2.

⁴⁷Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸Ibid., 5.

some natives of the western region of the Commonwealth related with their Union brethren and supported the North. The abuse of the Western Kentucky region during the Civil War was a reason why many of its natives considered themselves Southerners. Anger from loss and destruction of property that occurred from being a middle ground during the War left some political and cultural scars on its residents. Yet, Kentucky emerged from the Civil War intact.

Historians Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter wrote that “The Commonwealth thus emerged from the conflict hobbled, but strong enough to move ahead, to grow rapidly, [and] even to take a leadership role in a region where other states had much greater handicaps and devastation to overcome.”⁴⁹ Even though there was damage to the western region of the Commonwealth, the major wound that Kentucky suffered was the disunity of her residents. Thomas D. Clark noted on the morale of the general public of the Commonwealth, after the Civil War. He wrote that:

Even with only minor engagements occurring in the state, Kentucky’s people were bitter toward one side or the other. Individuals hated their former friends; brothers hated brothers; and families, which had been prosperous before secession were ruined by blighting of Kentucky’s trade. Even those facts became insignificant, however, when it is remembered that Kentucky was not the victim of continuous and destructive military campaigns fought on her soil...Kentucky’s position in the sectional struggle was unique. For her it was truly a Civil War!⁵⁰

Kentucky suffered because it was a divided state. Being placed on the border of a war, many Western Kentuckians were torn as to which side to choose. While the western region of the Commonwealth was culturally connected with the South, there were many Unionists in the region. In a neighborhood, one family could be Unionists, while their neighbors were Confederates. Families in Kentucky were split, possibly with the father

⁴⁹ Harrison and Klotter, 216.

⁵⁰ Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 335.

fighting for the Union, while his sons joined the Confederacy. While Western Kentucky only suffered mild property destruction, there was major damage done to families and friends torn apart by war.

Frontier

Before being marred by war, Western Kentucky was the wild western frontier of the fledgling United States. Western Kentucky was the furthestmost part of the state for immigrating pioneers to settle. Like the rest of the state, the untamed frontier had many dangers that only a tough, driven people could withstand. Explorers, like George Rogers Clark, surveyed the unknown land. David and Lalie Dick wrote of Clark's adventures:

On July 4-5, 1778, Lieutenant Colonel George Rogers Clark befriended a small hunting party and from its members he received information crucial to victory over the British at Kaskaskia...It [the victory] also resulted in 'Clark's Land,' an original patent of almost 74,000 acres, which became the site for present-day Paducah, forty seven miles upstream from the confluence of the Ohio and the Mississippi [rivers].⁵¹

Early Kentuckians faced many enemies: the British, Native American tribes, and the dangers of an alien habitat. The everyday Kentuckian became versatile, like Hannah Dunn of Henderson, Kentucky. Hannah Dunn, a pioneer woman, was described as "A tall, powerful woman, did the packing---the delivery of flour and meal to customers. She also worked in the tavern as bartender and bouncer and in her spare time chopped firewood."⁵² To survive such dangers, early settlers had to be resilient and able to fight back. The early pioneer days of carving one's way out of the wilderness marked Kentuckians as not only durable, but also wild, like the land.

⁵¹David and Lalie Dick, *The Rivers of Kentucky* (North Middletown, KY: Plum Lick Publishing, 2001), 31.

⁵²Harrison and. Klotter, 147.

Western Kentucky became the home of many highway men, who would rest their thieving selves in the rural and sparsely populated region. Men, of the same caliber as Jesse James, ruled the land. During the Prohibition, bootleggers used the tributaries, like the Tradewater, to float bourbon bottles to the Ohio River for sale.⁵³ Also, during the same era, the mighty caves of Western Kentucky became the home of illegal stills and other liquor haunts. The Lost River Cave in Bowling Green, Kentucky, served as a night club for thirsty individuals during the Prohibition.⁵⁴ Kentucky's hills and caverns became illicit places.

One infamous highway man, Big Harpe, met his end in the western region of the Commonwealth. The Harpe brothers' hideout was the 'Cave-in-Rock' which is across the Ohio River from the Kentucky county of Crittenden.⁵⁵ One night, the Harpes entered Dixon, the county seat of Webster County, for an unknown reason that ended in the death of some Dixon residents. As described by David and Lalie Dick, "On the night of August 20, 1799...the Harpe brothers used an ax to bash out the brains of a man sleeping in the loft of Moses Stegall's cabin. They slit the throat of the four-month-old Stegall baby boy, stabbed to death Mrs. Stegall, and set the house on fire."⁵⁶ Moses Stegall, when returning, gathered a group of men to hunt down the Harpe brothers. Legend has it that, after killing and decapitating 'Big' Harpe, Stegall carried 'Big' Harpe's head in his saddlebags, and once he reached Dixon he placed it on display.⁵⁷ Western Kentucky's history was bloodied with the crimes of men, like the Harpe brothers, who brought manufactured danger to the region.

⁵³ Dick, 175.

⁵⁴Ibid., 196.

⁵⁵Ibid., 164.

⁵⁶Ibid., 164.

⁵⁷Ibid., 165.

Grady McWhiney wrote that “one could scarcely fail to remark on how essentially the characters of the Northern and Southern people differ.”⁵⁸ The western region of the Commonwealth, an area containing the Pennyroyal region, the Western Coalfields region, and the Jackson Purchase, was a land that reflected mutual cultural traits with the American South. Western Kentucky was a region that was marked by the mighty Mississippi River, coalfields, and rich, fertile farmland. While it had residents whom identified with and supported the North during Civil War, Western Kentucky was a region that largely identified itself as part of the American South. It was a land of steamboats, tobacco, and ham festivals. Western Kentuckians spoke with drawls and twangs, reflected by native writers as Robert Penn Warren and Bobbie Ann Mason.

Religion ruled the land in Western Kentucky, like its Southern relatives. Churches blotted the horizon. Both spiritual and community life were centered on the church. Church was an important event for any Western Kentuckian and any Southerner, with dresses and slacks. The Bible was used to pick baby names and guided people’s lives. Revival tents littered the landscape and the streets of towns were quiet on Sunday mornings.

Western Kentucky also reflected the wild frontier side of the American South. Largely a rural place, Western Kentucky was a land of pioneers, like Hannah Dunn, and similar to the other settlers in the American southeast. Part of the regional history was its past of lawlessness of an untamed land. Grady McWhiney wrote that:

The Celts brought with them to the Old South leisurely ways that fostered idleness and gaiety, a society in which people favored the spoken word over the written and enjoyed such sensual pleasures as drinking, smoking, fighting, gambling, fishing, hunting, and loafing.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ McWhiney, 1.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 38.

Grady McWhiney continued to further describe a Southerner's ways. He stated, "The people here [in the South], are given to rambling about instead of attending to their farms."⁶⁰ This appreciation for nature is another Southern trait that defined Western Kentucky as part of the American southeast. With embracing nature, manners, and religion in its everyday life, Western Kentucky had branded itself as part of the American South.

⁶⁰Ibid., 12.

CHAPTER THREE

CENTRAL KENTUCKY

Central Kentucky or the ‘Great Meadow’ contained the bigger cities of the Commonwealth, such as Lexington, Louisville, and the capitol, Frankfort. This part of Kentucky stretched from the area nestled next to the state of Ohio called Northern Kentucky to Elizabethtown and finally to the Ohio River. It was the land on the east side of I-65. Culturally, Central Kentucky was torn between being a part of the South, a part of the North, or a part of the Midwest. Its cultural identity was unique and different from Eastern and Western Kentucky. It was the land of bourbon and horses of the highest quality, both of which often defines Kentucky. However, in Central Kentucky, accents were not as prominent and the marks of the rural South were lost in this urban region. The plains region has moved from associating with the South to the Midwestern. The urbanity of the area has left many towns pretending to relate with the American South.

Central Kentucky was referred to as “The Eden of the West.”⁶¹ Accordingly, as historians Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter wrote, “George Rogers Clark decided that Kentucky would be his home. ‘[Clark says] A richer and more beautiful country than this, I believe has never been seen in America yet.’”⁶² The discovery of the rich and

⁶¹ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 3.

⁶² Harrison and Klotter, 31.

beautiful land of plenty that existed in Central Kentucky is the catalyst that made many future Kentuckians settle the land.

People thought the lush soil of the Bluegrass was populated by mint juleps, belles, and horses. As Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter described, “Thus when the word Kentucky is spoken, the images in the America and the world mind are many and varied: bourbon, basketball, natural beauty and strip mines, Muhammad Ali and Colonel Sanders, the goateed Mountaineer and the log cabin, the Derby and more.”⁶³ Other stereotypes about Kentucky originated from the Bluegrass. Such other stereotypes were, “Not as persistent or perhaps not as prevalent, were 3 other images, which can be classified as beauty, boxing, and basketball.”⁶⁴ Other trite sayings about Kentucky were often associated with the Bluegrass, such as Kentucky being the “land of beautiful women, fast horses, fine whiskey and quick pistols.”⁶⁵ The beauty of the Great Meadow was what caused many people to pack up and move to the unknown state.

With settlement, Central Kentucky became the home of gentility and culture for the state. Race courses were quickly established after the success of the first settlements was sealed. Observing the region’s culture, Thomas D. Clark said, “In 1789 the first race course was established at Lexington, and from this beginning, organized racing has become one of the three state symbols, and proud boasts---whiskey, pretty women, and fast horses...on slot of immigrants brought eastern culture to the Bluegrass.”⁶⁶ Other cultural activities appeared in this region of the Commonwealth such as newspapers. The Kentucky Gazette was the first Kentucky newspaper and it was printed in Central

⁶³ Harrison and Klotter, 430-1

⁶⁴Ibid., 428.

⁶⁵Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 186.

⁶⁶Ibid., 73.

Kentucky region by 1787, when most of the state was still wilderness.⁶⁷ These early newspapers reflected the importance of agriculture for this region. Historian Thomas Clark noted, “Advertising columns of the newspapers indicated how important famous stallions and good bloodlines were in this horsy community. Bluegrass squires were sportsmen in every sense; many of them were not averse to whooping it up about local cockpits.”⁶⁸ Such modern newspapers as the Lexington Herald and the Louisville Courier-Journal stemmed from Central Kentucky, making this region the academic and cultural powerhouse of the state.⁶⁹ Central Kentucky was not only the epicenter of culture for the Commonwealth, but for the new west.

Great estates began to mark Central Kentucky’s cities like Lexington. The native son Henry Clay built an estate in Lexington, marking the change from a frontier state to a civilized one. Thomas Clark described the favorite native son and his estate, “Master Farmer of them all was Henry Clay. On his Ashland estate at the edge of Lexington he ran a model farm for his day. There he grew hemp, tobacco, and fine livestock.”⁷⁰ Clay embodied the idea of a Southern gentlemen and helped illustrated that originally Central Kentucky associated with the South. Timothy Flint, a New England preacher, described in 1830 the uniqueness of Kentuckians. He observed,

The Kentuckians, it must be admitted are a high-minded people and possess the stamina of a noble character...there is a distinct and striking moral physiognomy to this peoples an enthusiasm, a vivacity, and ardor of character, courage frankness, generosity, that have been developed with peculiar circumstances under which they have been placed.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Harrison and Klotter, 245.

⁶⁸ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 66.

⁶⁹ Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 249.

⁷⁰ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 34.

⁷¹ Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 279.

Other estates built in Central Kentucky reflected the region's ties with the South. As Thomas D. Clark stated, "Many Kentucky homes constructed during the early period when trade with New Orleans flourished show definite influence of this commercial relationship."⁷² Hospitality and its importance came up the mighty Mississippi with architectural styles. Thomas D. Clark asserted, "A source of pride with the Kentucky people has been the art of dining. Good food, beautifully served was a cultural triumph for the antebellum Kentucky hostess."⁷³ Antebellum Central Kentucky associated with the American South. The Clay family owned the greatest number of slaves in the state. Many farmers in the region lived plantation styled lives. Also, the societal duty and decorum evident in the South was present during the era.

Central Kentucky grew from a region of settlements to a land of cities. Thomas D. Clark portrayed Lexington's economic peak in 1810 as:

There were nail factories, copper---and tinsmiths, jewelers, and silversmiths, saddlers' shops, cabinetmakers, umbrella makers, hatters, dye masters, boot makers, brewers, textile mills, ropewalks, hemp mills, tobacco factories, Venetian blind makers, brickyards, and printing plants...Lexington is expected to become the largest inland town of the United States perhaps there is no manufactory in this country which is not known here.⁷⁴

Residents of Central Kentucky were urban become most of the state and would remain more urban. The growth of urbanization in the area began at the end of the region's ties with the South. Central Kentucky's identification as Southern can be marked by the Civil War. Antebellum Central Kentucky was largely agrarian with rampant Southern characteristics, like hospitality, religiosity, importance of decorum, societal and communal duties, and closeness with the land. Yet, post bellum Central Kentucky was

⁷²Ibid., 262.

⁷³Ibid., 266.

⁷⁴ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 63.

dominated by the cities, a desire to disassociate with the South, and to forget its past sins. Captain Thomas Ashe described antebellum Central Kentucky. He wrote, “The inhabitants show demonstrations of civilization; but at particular times, on Sundays and market days, they give loose to their dispositions, and exhibit many traits that should exclusively belong to unnatural savages.”⁷⁵ Central Kentuckians were qualified by other states as city folk, but were still considered inferior because they were part of the frontier, part of Kentucky. Many people view the entire state currently as wild and pagan---part of the Wild West.

Literature

Authors native to Central Kentucky reflected the culture of the region in their work. They depicted the mix of culture---the combination of the North and the South---making Central Kentucky unique. However, unlike Western Kentucky, Central Kentucky writers did not depict this region as Southern. The two modern writers presented Kentucky, both rural and urban, as more Midwestern than part of the South. Especially the northern area of Central Kentucky was considered by its writers as closely connected with its Midwestern cousin, Ohio. The writers from Central Kentucky reflected the mixture of cultural influence into their writings.

Ed McClanahan was a writer native to Central Kentucky. In his works, certain characteristics of the South were apparent, but the reader witnessed a description of a Midwestern town. With his work, he illustrated the close, physical ties with Midwestern states like Ohio to north central Kentucky. The stereotypical Southern traits were depicted in his novel *Natural Man*---hospitable, polite, and religious. Beginning with the notion of family and duty and its intimacy with the South, McClanahan demonstrated the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 62.

importance and honor of upholding family and societal duty. An example of such family duty was how the character Norbert decided to take in the troubled teen Monk to help his brother who runs an orphanage.⁷⁶ Norbert was called on by his brother to bring Monk from the city to rural Burdock County in order to help the young man stay out of trouble. McClanahan showed societal and familial duty through Norbert's adoption of Monk.

McClanahan depicted the importance of duty and honor again with the funeral of the protagonist's Grandmother Miss Lute. In detail, McClanahan described how the entire community came to pay their respects at Miss Lute's funeral.⁷⁷ McClanahan pointed out the influence of Southern traits in the novel's setting of the town of Needmore.

The importance placed on manners is another hackneyed Southern trait emphasized by McClanahan. Certain characters stressed the importance of manners to upholding Burdock County's societal norm. Although certain characters possessed Southern ideals, the number of those characters was few. The apple of Harry's eye, Oodles Ockerman, was a character who repetitively stresses the need for manners. In one scene, Oodles stated, "And I go, 'Well, don't be absurd, Mommy, you know I wouldn't go with no boy with would just set out in the car and blow the horn, and didn't have the common decency to come up on the porch and knock on my door like a gentleman.'⁷⁸ However, the desired decorum for dating was not the only type of manners wanted by the characters.

Another illustration of the importance of manners in the *Natural Man* was Harry's surprise at the foul language and lack of decorum from the outsider from Cincinnati

⁷⁶ Ed McClanahan, *Natural Man* (Frankfort, KY: Gnomon Press, 1983), 14-15.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

Nurse Radcliff. An example of the language that shocked Harry provided by McClanahan was, “‘Listen, hon,’ she said, ‘me and him’---she nodded toward the Johnny [toilet] --- ‘is gonna hit the road. We can’t sell no litterchoor to these illiterate sons of bitches...it’s a long way to Cincinnati in that god-damn little cold-ass Crosley. A person’s butt sets right on the goddamn blacktop.’”⁷⁹ McClanahan presented Nurse Radcliff as an outsider who spoke funny to the people of Burdock County.

McClanahan drew an apparent division between the city folk from Cincinnati and the people from Burdock County. He exemplified the difference between the two by creating Nurse Radcliff as a foul mouthed woman with no hesitation at saying God’s name in vain. Also, the division was clearly drawn by McClanahan’s phonetically spelling literature as ‘litterchoor’ to depict the difference in the regional accents. Yet, Harry’s surprise was noted more by him being from the country rather than him being Southern. By taking God’s name in vain, Radcliff was portrayed by McClanahan as different from the religious population of Burdock County. McClanahan used Radcliff’s usage of ‘god-damn’ as a tool to illustrate that she was different from the residents of Burdock County—different from the South. Also, Radcliff’s disregard for decorum and lack of religiosity were representative of the fact that she was from not only the North, but a city, drawing the deep difference between rural and urban that plagues most of Kentucky.

Granny or Miss Lute mocked the manners of the Yankees across the Ohio River. Granny said, “Muttering about little snips that put on all kinds of Buckeye [Ohioan] airs when they didn’t even know the blooming difference between dinner and supper.”⁸⁰ This

⁷⁹ Ibid.,182.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 44.

passage was important for determining Central Kentucky as Southern because McClanahan depicted clearly not only nuanced Southern language by stressing the calling of lunch dinner in the South, but also the contempt held by some Kentuckians of the North. Miss Lute was created as an oddity in the novel with no characters like her. McClanahan seemed to create her to provide a humorous image of a cantankerous old woman with inflexible habits. Possibly, McClanahan created Miss Lute to show that Central Kentucky used to be more Southern than now.

Another humorous episode of a Southern prototype was the creation of Mr. Ockerman. The character Mr. Ockerman embodied the stereotypical image of the Southern man---jolly and good natured. However, McClanahan created a satire of a gentleman out of Mr. Ockerman. In the *Natural Man*, this fat and talkative man was continuously talking about the way young ladies and gentlemen should act. Ockerman said, “Why, hell’s bells and little shells, Harry, what kinda manners is that? I swear I’d’ve smacked the c-r-a-p out of him right there, if he was a boy of mine.”⁸¹ Ockerman believed that manners were important enough to warrant punishment if abused.

This passage by McClanahan also illustrated how Ockerman thought it inappropriate to say the word ‘crap’ in public. He spelled out the word to allow for comprehension of his point, but did not say the word. A description of Ockerman’s actions and personality was, “Come bustling in, all harried and undone, apologizing extravagantly for being late.”⁸² With his creation of Mr. Ockerman, McClanahan embraced and mocked the Southern characteristics of Central Kentucky. Such mixed feelings over the regional cultural ties with the South demonstrated that those residents of

⁸¹ Ibid., 89.

⁸² Ibid., 88.

Central Kentucky, like McClanahan, realized they have intimate connections with their Southern cousin states, but also had a disdain for those connections.

McClanahan stressed religion in his novel. By accentuating the importance of religion in the everyday lives of his characters, McClanahan drew a clear connection between the South and Central Kentucky. An example of the significance of religion in the *Natural Man* was a statement by Norbert P. Sitckler, “The Good Book tells us a man stands the tallest when he stoops over to help a boy.”⁸³ This statement was incorporated into an everyday conversation delivered by Norbert. McClanahan depicted analogies to the Bible as mundane occurrences in Central Kentucky. Another example of McClanahan underlining the weight of religion in Central Kentucky was the general outrage at the educational sex movie shown. The community found the showing of the sex hygiene film a scandal.⁸⁴ The negative reactions from the public determined that the residents found the film distasteful and wrong, even though it was educational. By presenting the general reaction of the public as negative, McClanahan portrayed the residents of the community as conservative. With depicting the residents as conservative and religious, McClanahan emphasized two Southern stereotypes apparent in both his setting and characters in the *Natural Man*.

McClanahan’s setting was a rural town. He illustrated the difference between rural and urban and their distrust of one another. McClanahan presented the distaste the Northern urbanites had for rural Central Kentucky through Harry’s Ohioan parents. Leona, Harry’s mother, negatively described the residents as Burdock County. She said, “Worst of it by far was having to listen to ‘that old crewd hillbilly brogue’ all night

⁸³ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 194.

long.”⁸⁵ Leona, who had been living in Cincinnati, found the residents of Burdock County her inferiors. Harry was a kind of half breed, raised from an early age in Burdock County, but of Buckeye parents, was viewed by the residents of the community of Needmore as an outsider. McClanahan described Harry as “Harry, a Buckeye by birth and an urban sophisticate by breeding and inclination, whose encounters with the native population of Needmore and Burdock County during his early years had served mainly to remind him of his aloneness.”⁸⁶ Again, the residents of the community of Needmore and of Burdock County viewed people from Cincinnati as outsiders.

McClanahan also presented the sentiments that the country people had about the urbanites. An example of their distrust was their treatment of Harry’s dad, Benny, who was Buckeye born and bred. McClanahan stated, “Benny who, he correctly suspected, made fun of him behind his back for his Ohio accent.”⁸⁷ Like Nurse Radcliff, Benny’s accent made him an obvious outsider to the residents of Needmore. Accents tied a community together, creating a like cultural sphere for people to belong. Another trait of a rural community is that everyone was close knit and knows everyone’s business. McClanahan used subtle ways to depict how interconnected was the community of Needmore. One example was McClanahan description of how everyone at the local school was connected either by blood or marriage.⁸⁸ By using such subtle ways, McClanahan was able to illustrate the difference between urban and rural.

Miss Lute was another device wielded by McClanahan to depict the distrust rural individuals had for urbanites. Miss Lute refused to return with her daughter Leona to

⁸⁵ Ibid., 218.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 24.

Ohio. She explained her refusal to Harry, “She said she was Burdock County born and bred, by Godfrey, and anybody tried to make her leave she’d knock the waddin’ out of them, and if they was to make her go.”⁸⁹ With this statement, she refused to leave Kentucky because she thought it was better than any other place---depicting her Kentucky pride. She continued to explain her refusal and present her distrust of Ohio and the city. She said, “I would’ve went to Dayton with her [Leona] years ago, just to hush her up---but I didn’t want her raising my grandboy with a bunch of bloomin’ Buckeyes.”⁹⁰ Miss Lute’s feelings were unique, not Southern and not Northern, she refused to leave because of Kentucky pride and to her leaving would be a sin. Grandma Lute showed her distrust of the city and of Ohio by stating that she did not think that such was a place to raise a child. Grandma Lute portrayed that such urban places were inferior to Needmore and Burdock County---the exact opposite feeling of her daughter Leona.

With his presentation of Grandma Lute, McClanahan depicted the country versus the city mentality that was held. However, the distrust of the city by the country and its people was not strictly held to cities in other states. In the *Natural Man*, rural residents of Central Kentucky viewed urban residents of the same region warily. The city of Newport, across the Ohio River from Cincinnati, was described as a whole different world from Needmore by McClanahan. He stated, “Newport! Kentucky’s own sinkhole of sin...Debauched sister city of old-maid Cincinnati.”⁹¹ McClanahan used such a description to illustrate the difference between rural and urban even within the same region. To further underline his point of their difference, Newport was the place of origin

⁸⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 205.

⁹¹ Ibid., 54.

for Needmore's wild boy Monroe 'Monk' Mchorning.⁹²With Newport as Monk's home, McClanahan was able to show the difference between urban and rural and the discrepancy within Central Kentucky as to whether the region is Southern.

Wendell Berry was another author native of Central Kentucky. This eco-literary writer depicted the cultural norms of his homeland in his novel *A Place on Earth*. His fictional setting, the town of Port William, was located adjacent to the Kentucky River. Port William and Berry's novel was clearly set in Central Kentucky. In his novel, Berry was very reflective of the snug relationship between the community and nature. Because the South overall was largely a rural area, Southerners possessed close ties with nature. Men and women earned their livelihoods from the soil. The role of stereotyped Southern traits---religion, importance of nature, family, and decorum---in Berry's novel reflected how he considered Central Kentucky as rural, but not Southern.

With the Southern concept of upholding societal and family honor, Berry addressed in *A Place on Earth* as how his characters viewed social responsibility. Berry demonstrated the community of Port William as close knit. He increased the magnitude of the importance of societal duty. After trouble hit one of the families of Port William, the local pastor came to visit without being notified personally by the family. The pastor of the community said, "My friends, I've come because I know of your trouble."⁹³ The community believed it would be the honorable action to send the pastor to pay his respects and assist the family in need.

Another example of Berry depicting the sense of upholding duty and honor in Port William was the actions of the community to help one another after the local river

⁹² Ibid., 54.

⁹³ Wendell Berry, *A Place on Earth* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1983), 98.

floods the town. Berry's character Ida's daughter was drowned in the flood and, afterwards, her husband abandoned her. Margaret Feltner and other neighbors got to Ida to assist her in any way possible and lend their support.⁹⁴ Another example of expressions of Port William's sense of family and societal duty was depicted by Berry through the actions of his character Mat Feltner. Mat not only cared for his immediate family, but also another family member Roger who was elderly, ill, and a drunk.⁹⁵ He received no payment for his actions and his care, even though he devoted both resources and time to caring for Roger. Through Mat, Berry demonstrated that this community found it within its responsibilities to care for its members---a characteristic of a rural community.

In the South, upholding societal duty was considered a crucial element to a person's honor. Berry's novel reflected the importance of such a key Southern trait in the actions of the community of Port William. When Ernest died, the entire community not only went to his funeral, but helped in the preparation of it.⁹⁶ Residents of Port William believed that it was their duty to tend to their neighbor Ernest's final needs. Like McClanahan, Berry emphasized stereotypical rural traits. By showing the closeness of the community, Berry furthered his depiction of the magnitude of decorum by emphasizing family duty. Berry outlined the history of the Feltner family, "This was the first house that Mat's people built and lived in after they came to Kentucky."⁹⁷ Throughout *A Place on Earth*, the characters were constantly visiting one another, especially relatives. An example of such visits was normal when Mat's grandson Andy stops by, uninvited, to visit. Andy claimed, "After school, Daddy had to go down on Bird's Branch, and he

⁹⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 150.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 314.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 255.

brought us by...Mother and Henry and me. We're going to eat supper with you."⁹⁸

Simple episodes demonstrated that the members of the community expected their family and neighbors to stop in on them and considered such visits within the realm of normal activities.

Berry described such exhibitions like, "When they go into the kitchen supper is cooking. Margaret and Hannah and Bess Catlett are all sitting around the table, talking. Bess is holding her younger child, Henry, on her lap."⁹⁹ In the rural South, people had different forms of entertainment than one might find in an urban area. Also, with the smaller population, there were fewer people to meet and interact with. One's family became one's main source of entertainment. Berry's novel had a scene with Feltner family playing cards. He stated, "By now the card game in the empty store has become an institution, a kind of unnamed club that in the years since its beginning has acquired a fairly stable membership and meeting time."¹⁰⁰ Berry's descriptions about mundane and regular family gatherings were reflective of a rural community.

The intimacy between nature and the people was another trait characteristic of a rural area---like much of the American South. Being an eco-literary writer, Berry displayed the personal connection between the earth and the people of Port William. Within the novel, the characters earned their living from the land. The Feltners and many other families farmed the land in Port William. Describing such farm life, Berry said, "In one of the back corners of the barn he [Mat] finds an old ewe stretched on the bedding, her breath coming in grunts."¹⁰¹ Berry continued to observe how Mat delivered a lamb.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 88.

Another example of the existence of nature in Berry's novel read, "The mud at the edge of the water is packed with cow tracks, covered in places with a thin green skim of algae; in places it has begun to dry and only the earth in the cups of the tracks is wet. It is early afternoon. The sun is high."¹⁰² Throughout the novel, the characters Mat and Margaret and their actions on the farm were detailed for the reader---emphasizing their importance.

The role of the farm was not the only important connection. Being a land of rivers, residents of Kentucky often faced flood conditions. Like the rest of the state, the people of Port William had to deal with the troublesome rivers in the area. Burley remarked to his nephew Nathan, "Anvil didn't figure the river would get into his house, but I expect it surely was in his barn by this morning. They say the Ohio has got into a few of the house down at Hargrave. And the rain is falling right on."¹⁰³ Berry established how the might of nature governed the people of Port William. Its residents had to adapt and prepare for possible and upcoming floods to insure their safety and wellbeing.

Continuing to cast Port William with rural traits, Berry emphasized the distrust members of the community had for urban places. The character Old Jack was a man past his prime that needs to be cared for. Jack, untrusting of his daughter's new home in Louisville, refused to move in with her. Berry marked, "It was not that the old man had ceased to love his daughter. But, her marriage to a prominent Louisville banker had long ago set her apart from his world and out of his reach."¹⁰⁴ The distrust of the country for the city was common and the differences between the two evident in the emphasized values. However, because most of the South was rural, many of the characteristics of the rural life were shared as stereotypically Southern.

¹⁰² Ibid., 15.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 106.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 20.

Margaret Feltner exhibited the simple manners and hospitality that were expected of a person in Port William. When a guest stopped by and interrupts her work, she quit and simply said, “Make yourself at home a minute. I’ll go take this apron off.”¹⁰⁵ Such minimal acts were common in Berry’s novel. Old Jack’s lack of manners in his old age was a point of scandal. Berry recorded Old Jack’s actions, “His disregard makes a kind of bridge on which he tromps across the chasm of propriety that once supposedly protected them in their insular delicacy of their sex.”¹⁰⁶ Mrs. Hendrick, the proprietor of Jack’s boarding house, had another complaint about Old Jack, “Whatever the old ladies say to each other at meal times, it always has a tacit reference to the old man’s table manners.”¹⁰⁷ Berry depicted his characters as possessing the same stereotypical traits one identified with the South.

A few other details Berry used were more indicative of Central Kentucky’s relation with the American southeast. Employment of such details as the importance of religion, planter culture, and tragedy promoted a portrait of a region linked closely with the South. The planter culture concept was an idea that was often associated with the South. Berry described the plantation idea, “In the latter two thirds of his life Mat Feltner’s cousin Roger Merchant has memorialized his father as a cultivated and enlightened gentleman farmer---which Mat knows the old man never was, never thought of being, and would have refused to be if he had thought it.”¹⁰⁸ However, unlike Southern plantations, the cash crop in Port William was tobacco. As previously established, tobacco was as Kentuckian as thoroughbreds. Berry said about tobacco, “She walks along

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 109.

the ends of the tobacco rows, in which the young white-stemmed plants have begun to grow again after the transplanting. The field has just been plowed, and the earth between the rows is dark and fresh.”¹⁰⁹ Berry wrote grandiose ideas of plantation life into one of his characters; however, he made it clear that the crop of choice for the plantation and area was tobacco. Berry made the ideas of Southern plantation living in Port William distinctly Kentuckian.

Berry also stressed how important religion was to the people of Port William. Religion was a trait that identified the South uniquely because one could witness its conservative mindset often religiously inspired in how the states vote. He created a setting different from the more cosmopolitan urban areas of Central Kentucky, like Lexington and Louisville, and more conservative like the South. One example of religion in the novel stated that “Across the street from Jasper Lathrop’s store the white steeple ascends and narrows to a point above the green-shuttered belfry, higher than the tallest trees in town.”¹¹⁰ This description was important because it created an image for the reader. The image created was one that makes the church and its steeple the watcher of Port William. By stating that the steeple surpassed even the trees, Berry made the steeple and the place of worship the highest and most prominent point in the town. It exemplified that the religion and the church was a constant factor in the residents’ lives---the steeple there to remind them of its presence. Religion was an important part of the lives of residents from Central Kentucky, like the residents of Port William.

Religion was an important element in Southern literature, as well as the idea of the Southern tragedy. The American South had an odd position in the history of the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 241.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

nation because it was the only region in the United States that had lost a war. In its literature, the idea of failure and misfortunate was often reiterated in its Southern Gothic literature genre. Berry's character Jayber and his failure flirted with the idea of the tragedy of the South. Berry described Jayber's misfortune, "He had come finally into his fated inheritance, the failure of all purpose."¹¹¹ Jayber illustrated the misfortune often found in Southern literature, making Berry's novel possess a characteristic very indicative of Southern culture.

With both writers, Berry and McClanahan, Central Kentucky became a land of intrigue---neither Southern nor Northern. Being predominately rural, Berry's characters had Southern traits described. Berry's work demonstrated how Central Kentucky used to associate with the South. The influence of those Southern characteristics was apparent in his work, but Berry romanticized the agrarian lifestyle and his work might not depict the true sentiments of the region. However, McClanahan created a setting torn between the cultural ties of the North and South. McClanahan portrayed a region influenced by the South, but not Southern. The difference in character portrayal illustrated that Central Kentucky could not be simply described as Northern or Southern, but possibly as a combination of the two---similar to the Midwest of the United States.

History

Being the origin of settlement for Kentucky, Central Kentucky was the home of a large amount of Kentucky and American history. Central Kentucky was the location where many modern colleges were founded. This region also was marked by a history of politics, riots, and duels. Also, Central Kentucky had an interesting and diverse history involved with the Civil War, with the area having both Confederate and Union

¹¹¹ Ibid., 65.

strongholds. Again, Central Kentucky was marked as Southern ante bellum, but post bellum as more Midwestern. Central Kentucky had been the catalyst or the beginning of many historical changes in Kentucky history.

During the Civil War, Central Kentucky was the base for both the Confederate and Union. Men from the area joined both sections of the war. Not only was the Kentucky state militia involved in the war, but guerrilla groups like the Lexington Rifles formed in Central Kentucky. At the beginning of the Civil War, Kentucky declared itself a neutral state—neither Union nor Confederate. Clark wrote about the Civil War, “Seventy six thousand men served the Union while approximately twenty five thousand went to the Confederacy.”¹¹² It was obviously that Kentucky was tied to both sides during the Civil War and her native sons were torn between the two opposing factions. Historians Harrison and Klotter quoted the opinion the Union party had about who Kentucky should align herself with during the war. They stated, “[the] Union Party said Kentucky ‘ought to hold herself independent of both sides, and compel both sides to respect the inviolability of her soil.’”¹¹³ Kentucky was viewed as a territory crucial to victory in the Civil War. Both the North and the South wanted the Great Meadow.

Clark observed the division existent in Central Kentucky during the war. He remarked:

Grant and Sherman were as highly esteemed in many sections of Kentucky as were Lee, Breckinridge, and Johnston. Even yet, seventy years after the war, embers of the Southern cause glow bright. But, sentiment still divides Kentucky two ways, with the same independence which binds Kentucky loyalty to both causes during the war.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 143.

¹¹³ Harrison and Klotter, 187.

¹¹⁴ Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 402-3.

Recognizing the existence of sectionalism in Kentucky, Central Kentucky's residents were torn as to who to support. Sectionalism divided neighbors and homes---with one brother joining the Union, while another joined the Confederacy. Colonel Frank L. Wolford described Civil War Kentucky as "What with Abe Lincoln on one side and Jeff Davis on the other, our poor distracted country reminds me of Christ crucified between two thieves."¹¹⁵ Thomas Clark recalled the actions of the Confederacy in Central Kentucky:

The army of the rising Confederates had for them the tug of a Robin Hood romance. In the Bluegrass Kentucky, especially, the call to action was medieval in its appeal to the hot blooded. In the Pennyroyal and Purchase, nearer the Southern scene, decisions came even faster and more furiously for the southern cause.¹¹⁶

With both of the figureheads of the Civil War born and bred Kentuckians, Kentucky and its ambiguous position as the borderland between the North and South left its residents confused.

Being the urban region of the state, Central Kentucky was the ground zero for many of the ambitions of both the Union and the Confederacy. Thomas D. Clark stated, "The highhanded acts of Union military officers in their interference with political affairs in Kentucky were among the most disgraceful in American history."¹¹⁷ Clark continued to illustrate how Kentucky's governor was forced to resign by the Union. He wrote, "Beriah Magoffin was forced to resign the governorship in August, 1862, in favor of the more conservative James P. Robinson."¹¹⁸ Both sides wanted the state of the Kentucky, so control over prominent cities in the region changed. Harrison and Klotter noted, "The

¹¹⁵ Harrison and Klotter, 179.

¹¹⁶ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 127.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

Confederates captured Lexington on September 2 and Frankfort on September 3. Frankfort was only capital of a loyal state captured by the Confederates during the war.”¹¹⁹The capture of Frankfort occurred before 1863, when Kentucky changed its alliance with the Union to an alliance with the Confederacy. During the capture of Frankfort, the Union government relocated in Louisville.¹²⁰ After the Civil War was fought, Kentucky readjusted to the new, preserved Union.

Basil W. Duke, a Confederate, described the South after the war. He said, “The life of the post-bellum South no more resembled that of the other than the life of the early settlers...was that they had left on the other side of the ocean.”¹²¹ As Duke observed, Central Kentucky and the other Southern states were devastated by the war. However, during the reconstruction Kentucky became a focal point. Clark wrote, “This postwar era of social readjustment has attracted the attention of other states and Kentucky has been placed in the floodlight. Kentuckians have always proudly boasted of their home state.”¹²² Clark further outlined that pride as “Even as early as the beginning of the 19th century, Timothy Flint found Kentuckians closely rivaling the British in pride of their homeland...the years following the war between the states witnessed the creation and cultivation of even more local pride.”¹²³ Central Kentucky did not limit itself to action only in the Civil War.

“Bloody Monday” was a riot that occurred in Louisville, erupting from the xenophobic ideas that the natives had for the new immigrants flooding into the manufacturing town of Louisville. Harrison and Klotter described the riots as “Bloody

¹¹⁹ Harrison and Klotter, 199.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 199.

¹²¹ Ibid., 218.

¹²² Clark, *History of Kentucky*, 401.

¹²³ Ibid., 401.

Monday riots in Louisville on election day of August 6, 1855, to keep ‘undesirables’ from voting.”¹²⁴ The undesirables were people who did not fit the desired Anglo-Saxon

Protestant mold. Thomas D. Clark further called the riots:

This election day resulted in open battle between the two forces in which lives were lost and property worth thousands of dollars was destroyed. ‘Bloody Monday’ symbolized tear, on the one hand, and an ugly stain of shame and prejudice on the other. The orderly democratic process was dragged in the bloody gutters of Main and Eleventh streets in Louisville.¹²⁵

Like the Wild West, Central Kentucky was not simply a land of sophistication.

Feuds were not only rampant in Eastern Kentucky, but took place in Central Kentucky as well. Captain Thomas Hamilton called Kentuckians:

The Kentuckians maybe called the Irish of America. They have all the levity of character, that subjection of the moral to convivial, that buoyance of spirit, that jocular ferocity, that ardour, both of attachment and of hatred, which distinguish the natives of Emerald Isle.¹²⁶

However, unruliness did not govern the central area of the Commonwealth.

Prohibition even found its platform in the bourbon whiskey capital of the world. Carry Nation, the valkyrie of teetotalers, began her rampage of sobriety in Central Kentucky.¹²⁷ Her ‘Demon Run’ control started in the area and spread throughout the state. Central Kentucky was instilled with both conservative religious morals and the fighting spirit of the West.

Frontier

¹²⁴ Harrison and Klotter, 123.

¹²⁵ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 122.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁷ Harrison and Klotter, 278.

Central Kentucky was settled with the creation of Harrodsburg in 1775 and Boonesborough in 1776.¹²⁸ The accounts from Boonesborough read, “Early Kentucky, with all of its promise for the future, was no place for the faint of heart.”¹²⁹ While Central Kentucky was fertile, the hardships of the frontier still existed. Thomas D. Clark stated that “Most of Kentucky’s population has always been provincially minded...from the beginning the conquest of Kentucky’s soil demanded resourcefulness and individual prowess.”¹³⁰ Frontier Kentucky was a dangerous place, but the first two settlements, Harrodsburg and Boonesborough, were not only challenged by Native American raids, but also the Revolutionary War.

By motivating people to come and settle Kentucky, Central Kentucky was the first part of the state that went from wilderness to civilization. Before settlement, Kentucky was a land of hunting. Men came from other states with hunting companies and stayed and hunted the game Kentucky provided. The term long hunter was created to describe the hunters who came to Kentucky for long periods of time. Men, who would later come to explore the state and settle it, like Daniel Boone, were originally long hunters. The richness of the soil in Central Kentucky was described by historian Clark as “So fertile was the land of the Kentucky Bluegrass country that grain crops planted on unfallowed land grew too rank and became subject to smut and immaturity.” The dirt in Central Kentucky was realized as lucrative to frontier Kentuckians as well as modern. Clark furthered his description of Central Kentucky as “Kentucky’s meadowland formed an important link in the chain of the westward moving cattle industry.”¹³¹ With being the

¹²⁸Harrison and Klotter, 11.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁰Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 278.

¹³¹Ibid., 159.

earliest settled region in Kentucky, Central Kentucky moved from wilderness to civilization faster than any other part of the state.

Central Kentucky, in its entirety, was an area that could not be claimed as part of the South. Southern influences were afoot in the region; however, the area identified with the Midwest. The writings of McClanahan illustrated that both Southern and Northern influences were apparent in the region, but the lack of uniform recognition left one to declare Central Kentucky as not part of the South. Yet, Berry's work created a rural haven for the reader to observe with apparent Southern influences and traits. The disunity of agreement between the two writers depicted that the region was torn. Its identity could not be as simply realized as it can be in Western Kentucky. Therefore, the region was not united in its cultural identity, with the populous regions identifying with the Midwest and the rural regions with the South.

Central Kentucky seemed to identify in its cosmopolitan regions, like Lexington, Covington, and Louisville with its Midwestern cousin states, like Ohio and Indiana. However, in rural Central Kentucky the traits that rampantly define the South as Southern were apparent. The region was divided because one could identify the rural areas as Southern because the South is largely rural. Yet, the urban areas cannot be identified as part of the South. Ante bellum Central Kentucky was considered as part of the South. However, the equal numbers of young men choosing to fight for opposing sides during the war demonstrated that even then the area was not sure who to side with. Post-bellum Central Kentucky seemed to try and distance itself from the South and the negativity associated with that region of the United States. The stereotypical image of the Southern Kentucky gentleman owning a thoroughbred farm had morphed into outsiders owning

those iconic lands. Those areas held a different set of standards than Southerners and even the Southern drawls that were formerly part of the region had faded. Overall, Central Kentucky was not a part of the American South.

CHAPTER 4

EASTERN KENTUCKY

Jesse Stuart wrote of Eastern Kentucky that “When I think of God, I think of the evening sky in Kentucky.”¹³² Stuart, a native of the region, summed up of the largely agrarian area. The green hills of Appalachia were the common image of Eastern Kentucky. Those rolling hills and the untouched nature were common thoughts for one about the far eastern region of the Commonwealth. Currently, the area is considered rather primitive and pioneer. Being the home of the Cumberland Plateau and the Eastern Coalfields, Eastern Kentucky was geographically very different from the other two regions of the state. This area was defined as the land east of I-65, east of the Bluegrass Parkway, and east of the Kentucky River, all the way to the state line. The largest cities of the region were Ashland, Pikeville, and Whitesburg.

Eastern Kentucky was the last area of the state that was settled. Many settlers wanted to find a home in the flat, arable land in the Bluegrass rather than learn to farm on the knobby hills in the eastern part of the state. Since many pioneers traveled through Eastern Kentucky, it seemed odd that this region was settled even after Western Kentucky. However, Eastern Kentucky was nestled between the Kentucky River to the west, the Ohio River to the north, and the Big Sandy River to the east. Being part of

¹³² Jesse Stuart, *Beyond Dark Hills* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1938), 71.

Appalachia, Eastern Kentucky's cultural identity was unique. As historian James C. Klotter noted, "Appalachia was still Kentucky---just as it was not Kentucky."¹³³ It seemed to be neither Northern nor Southern. It possessed many of the same traits---hospitality, religion, closeness with the land---that one could find in the South. Yet, it appeared that those traits found the origins more in how rural was the area. Eastern Kentucky provided for its own set of characteristics that were repeated in other parts of Appalachia. Eastern Kentucky had been stereotyped as the lawless land of the rugged mountain man. He was described as bearded, thin, wearing patched clothes, and carrying both a rifle and a jug of moonshine. It was true that this area was still largely rural and somewhat isolated. The people of this part of the Commonwealth were of a strong breed, full of grit and determination. That grit was what made them willing to inhabit the wild mountains of Kentucky.

Eastern Kentuckians had been celebrated for their independence and perseverance throughout the state's and nation's history. Historian Thomas D. Clark described Eastern Kentucky, "Few places in North America produced so genuine a self-sufficient rural society as did 19th century mountainous Eastern Kentucky."¹³⁴ Clark continued to note the tenacity of the residents of the area. He observed, "Isolated from the world, this landlocked society placed a deeper impress upon individuals than did any other part of Kentucky; not even the proud Bluegrass stamped its people so boldly in habit, speech, dress, and philosophy."¹³⁵ The individuals of Eastern Kentucky had their own cultural identity that was different from the other two regions of the state.

¹³³ James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox, 1900-1950* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 1996), 34.

¹³⁴ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 35-36.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

Thomas D. Clark described the uniqueness of the area. He said, “Folk customs, attitudes toward social relationships, and community mores were indeed distinctive.”¹³⁶

The people of this region were different from the urban Bluegrass and the tobacco farming land of Western Kentucky. However, Kentuckians all did share certain traits.

Thomas D. Clark remarked:

A contemporary Kentuckian embodies in his personality most of the rugged influences which molded the lives of his ancestors. He is hospitable, independent, has a sense of humor, and is curious enough to get information from a stranger, yet shrewd enough not to tell a stranger too much.¹³⁷

The tenacity of Kentucky spirit was alive and well in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky. Yet, besides being stereotyped as Kentuckians, Eastern Kentuckians had been cast with their own set of traits. When thinking of the far eastern region of the Commonwealth, many think of coal mining. Those hills of the region hid a deep and vast quantity of coal. Coal mining had been a prominent source of employment for the area for many years. The importance of coal existed in the history of the land and its people. Cultural aspects native to Eastern Kentucky, such as music and literature, reflected the intimate tie between the land and its people. However, the tie between nature and people in Eastern Kentucky differed from that of the South. In the South, the relationship with nature was one of dependence. The land gave the people the food they ate, the money they made, and sometimes took it all away.

In Eastern Kentucky, the people were also dependent on the land, but the relationship differed. The natives of the area only took what was needed and one did not witness any large plantation like estates. In the eastern province of the Commonwealth, slavery was not as common as the South. Because no large plantations existed, slavery

¹³⁶ Ibid., 35-36.

¹³⁷ Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 285.

was not in demand in antebellum Eastern Kentucky. The lack of slavery was another discrepancy in the association between people of this region and the association with the land and the people of the South.

Coal was one material from the earth that one saw exploited in Eastern Kentucky. The mining of coal provided a different liaison with the land than the one held by a cotton farmer in Georgia. Rather than toiling with the dirt, miners walked into the deep, dark shafts and picked the rock underground. It was impossible to equate a farmer's link with the land to a miner's. By showing the difference between the two relationships, Eastern Kentucky had its own unique bond with nature that was unlike the South. The only likeness the region shared with the American southeast was that both areas were largely rural. The rural-ness was one of the few shared similarities.

Eastern Kentucky was a region that was heavily Protestant. The importance of religion was rampant both in the South and in Eastern Kentucky. Due the low population number in the majority of the region, communities were small and rather isolated. Churches became the epicenters for those communities. The place of worship became the social planner, with churches having vacation bible schools, potlucks, and creating its own networking system. Revivals given were the means for people to see others whom they would not see otherwise. Largely a Baptist and Presbyterian area, the men who were pastors were salt of the earth people that were cut from the same cloth as their congregations. In the South, churches remained largely segregated. Many claimed that the most segregated hour was the early time on Sunday mornings. Black and white churches dotted the Southern landscape.

Interestingly, from an early time, black men and women were allowed to join white churches during America's slavery years. In the region, men and women of different colors would convene together to worship. The lack of slavery in the history of the region might have been the cause for reaching across the color line. However, because the region was a very poor area, poverty trumped race and provided the two groups with a point of parallel. Religion was an important and essential ingredient in both Eastern Kentucky and the South, but the racial exclusion existed in churches in the South was not a part of spiritual Eastern Kentucky.

Another point of likeness between the far eastern region of the state and the South was hospitality. When thinking of the South, many imagined a person offering one homemade sweet tea in a thick, warm accent. Yet, when one thought of Eastern Kentucky the image was different---possibly involving a man, in stereotypical hillbilly attire, offering one a sip of moonshine. Being a broad trait to assign to a region, hospitality fluctuated between different regions. Because Eastern Kentucky was not a Southern region, one could observe the differences between the styles of hospitality in the South and in this native region. In the South, decorum and societal honor were stressed by the community. Country music legend and Eastern Kentucky native Loretta Lynn said of life in the hills of Kentucky, “[during winters] Where all we ate for weeks was bread dipped in gravy.”¹³⁸ A different honor system was current in Eastern Kentucky. Rather than stressing a certain system of decorum, in the region, necessity overcame the pyramid of manners.

The isolation of the area created its own culture and its own idea of hospitality that was original. The region was noted for having terrible roads. James C. Klotter

¹³⁸ Klotter, 34.

described, “When Franklin D. Roosevelt visited family-held lands in the Kentucky Mountains in 1908, he wrote back to Eleanor, contrasting the ‘horrible conditions of the roads’ with the beautiful country he saw.”¹³⁹ The poor roads and the poverty of the region made it hard for Eastern Kentucky to be connected with the outside world. James C. Klotter continued, “[Eastern Kentucky] was the only part of the United States where the automobile was not common.”¹⁴⁰ By modern standards, Eastern Kentucky’s late interest in the automobile exemplified that the area did not compare itself with the rest of the nation.

Literature

The Kentucky Mountains rested in Eastern Kentucky had been the inspiration for many literary works for many years. Great writers like Jesse Stuart came out of the wooded wilderness to rewrite American literature. The current Kentucky poet laureate Gurney Norman was an Eastern Kentucky native. Important Affrilachian poets, like Crystal E. Wilkinson, were born and bred in the eastern region of the Commonwealth. Crystal E. Wilkinson depicted her home in Eastern Kentucky:

I grew up on a farm in Indian Creek, Kentucky...I swam in creeks and roamed the knobs and hills. We had an outhouse and no inside running water...But it was a place of beauty---trees, green grass and blue sky as far as you could see. I am country.¹⁴¹

Writers from the region ranged from writing slightly political novels about life and poverty in the region, such as Harriette Louisa Arnow’s *Dollmaker* and *Hunter’s Horn*. While these literary works differed in intent and style, all were reflective of the originality of Eastern Kentucky. These native writers remarked on the area’s distinctive

¹³⁹Ibid., 20.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴¹ Crystal E. Wilkinson, *Blackberries, Blackberries*, (London: The Toby Press, 2000), 1.

culture. All stating how the people and how life was different for people in the far eastern region of the Commonwealth. The authors employed what had been defined as Southern characteristics, but they also distinguished that while similarities existed between the two regions, they were not the same.

Silas House was a modern novelist that hailed from Eastern Kentucky and resided in a town called Lily. With House's novels, the reader immediately recognized that Eastern Kentucky was a land with its own culture. The existence of some stereotypical Southern traits was apparent; however, House clearly emphasized that his Eastern Kentucky characters were not Southerners. The main similarity apparent between the South and Eastern Kentucky in House's writing was rural-ness. The characters considered themselves as country. Yet, the even the definition of country between the South seemed to differ. In the South, rural and country were the same. Southerners considered men and women who worked with the land for their livelihood as country. However, natives of Eastern Kentucky defined country as being one with the land---being at home with nature.

In the *Coal Tattoo*, House's character Easter was classified as country. He wrote, "Easter hadn't been fishing since she was a child, but the memory resided in her hands."¹⁴² Easter said to her husband El, "I can get my own fish off thank you very much... You seem to forget that I'm a country girl."¹⁴³ With creating episodes, like that between Easter and El, House defined the idea of what was country to an Eastern Kentuckian.

¹⁴² Silas House, *Coal Tattoo* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2004), 84.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 84.

In the *Coal Tattoo*, House established early the difference between Southerners and Eastern Kentuckians. He wrote how people from Tennessee could immediately recognize a Kentucky accent and how Kentuckians could recognize a Tennessee accent. One character, Matthew, was asked by a waitress in Tennessee, “You all from Kentucky?”¹⁴⁴ Matthew then replied, “How could you tell?”¹⁴⁵ The waitress stated, “I like the way Kentucky boys talk.”¹⁴⁶ The waitress addressing interest in the Matthew’s accent was reflective of it being different from the region. Tennessee was always claimed as part of the American South. By illustrating the difference between the two accents, House demonstrated the difference between the two cultures.

House used revelations of the characters to reflect the uniqueness of Eastern Kentucky. He alluded to the physical geographical distinctiveness of the area with a surprise had by the character Anneth. Anneth’s first trip out of her homeland indicated the isolation still evident in modern Eastern Kentucky. While driving to Nashville, she said, “There were no mountains in Nashville. Of this she was certain.”¹⁴⁷ With this declaration, House made the reader view Eastern Kentucky, like Anneth, as a different world that was untouched by the rest of the United States or the Earth. Anneth’s statement also suggested the intimacy between the mountains and Eastern Kentuckians.

The importance of nature was a trait that was stereotypical of the rural South. Southern authors intertwined the role of nature in their works. Many Southern writers created settings that were infused with agrarian characteristics. Literature from the area was reflective of farm life, whether on a plantation or a share cropper’s lot.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 74.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 82.

Predominately in House's work, coal and mountain imagery were used. House infused the importance of the mountains to his characters in his novels---even personifying the mountains as characters. In the *Coal Tattoo*, Easter looked to the mountains as a testament of inspiration and perseverance. House wrote, "She looked at the mountains, red with buds that promised to open and usher in spring, and felt a wave of gratitude was over her---because she had survived this hadn't she."¹⁴⁸ In his novel a *Parchment of Leaves*, House's character Vine observed the perpetual existence of wilderness around her. She said:

An owl screeched far up on the ridge. Its call slid out onto the night air like a ribbon being unwound. And then I was aware of the katydids in the weeds. The crickets called Pharaoh! Pharaoh! The children's little voices twinkled across the yard, and a slight breeze caused the corn blades to brush against one another like the whispers of men.¹⁴⁹

House depicted how coal mining and the mountains were essential elements in the lives of the natives of Eastern Kentucky.

Coal mining invaded everyday life in Eastern Kentucky. People lived in miner towns or camps and work in the mines. Coal mining was perceived as the livelihood of the area. Allusions to coal were repetitively made in the folk culture of the region, in its art, language, and music. In the *Coal Tattoo*, El defined a coal tattoo. He said, "My uncle had a coal tattoo...Right there, just a faint little hint of blue, like a permanent bruise...I knowed he had been in a mine collapse, that he had survived what had killed a dozen other men."¹⁵⁰ El defined a coal tattoo as a mark of strength and survival. By portraying the meaning of a coal tattoo, House demonstrated how mining not only marks the land, but its people in Eastern Kentucky. House described Anneth meeting her first husband,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 177.

¹⁴⁹ Silas House, *Parchment of Leaves* (New York: Random House, 2002), 262.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 167.

Matthew, in the *Coal Tattoo*. House stated, “She could see that they [his eyes] were outlined in black, like all of the coal miners’. Anneth loved the way the coal clung to a miner’s eyelashes like mascara and stayed there permanently.”¹⁵¹ Anneth associated the marks left by coal, like the darkened eyelashes, as signs of masculinity and virility.

Besides noting the physical marks coal leaves on the people of Eastern Kentucky, House observed the scars that coal left on the people through the land. Anneth stated why people from the region despised strip mining. She said, “Because strip mining tears up the land too bad...People there are used to deep mining because it’s hidden---back in the mountains. But strip mining, it’s too hard on the land.”¹⁵² When a coal mining bigwig that was in charge of running the mine replied that she did not know anything about mining, Anneth affirmed she did. She declared, “I’d hate to think I don’t. My daddy was killed in the Altamont mines...So I know plenty about mining, buddy.”¹⁵³ Anneth’s reply clearly demonstrated how intimately the people of the area were linked to coal mining. House revealed that the natives of Eastern Kentucky viewed different types of coal mining. They realized that deep mining is dangerous, but still saw it as an honest way of making a living. Yet, strip mining was considered bad because it tore up the mountains, their land, and their homes.

Anneth addressed another problem the area had with mining. The use of broad deeds was considered cheap and tricky way to take advantage of one’s land. A broad deed was defined as a deed that allowed one to sell one’s mineral rights, but still kept one’s land which meant the surface. This deed was first used in Kentucky by John C.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁵² Ibid., 180-181.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 180-181.

Calhoun Mayo, an Eastern Kentucky native and former school teacher.¹⁵⁴ Klotter described Mayo, “But the careful and hard-working Mayo went beyond that. His charming manner, his piercing eyes, his friendly face...all made him successful both in prying land from people in the mountains and in making deals in corporate board rooms.”¹⁵⁵ In the *Coal Tattoo*, Anneth attacked the use of broad form deeds, which became unpopular because the use of strip mining and the lack of compensation residents were given when they sold their mineral rights. She said:

Everybody is against them [broad form deeds.] Most of those deeds were bought for a quarter an acre or something. And then fifty years goes by before the company comes back and says they’re ready to mine the land. It’s not right.¹⁵⁶

House’s characters continued to portray traits that might have originated from the South, but were unique to the region. Those traits included the religiosity of the area, hospitality that exceeded throughout the state, and a sense of community that existed in rural societies. In a *Parchment of Leaves*, House continued demonstrating traits akin to a bucolic lifestyle. His character Vine in a *Parchment of Leaves* described the mundane practice of community involvement during the harvest season. She said, “One day that Spring, Serena come to help me can my kraut, as I had put out early cabbage... The next day I would go to her house and help her do the same.”¹⁵⁷ House wrote about a pig killing in the middle of winter that Vine called on her friends, families, and neighbors to help her with. Her mother-in-law described the event. She said, “Never seen six big women that couldn’t kill a hog.”¹⁵⁸ Vine continued to explain, “Esme [Vine’s mother-in-law] dipped a small kettle into the pot and poured the boiling water...we all lit in on scraping...It

¹⁵⁴ Klotter, 27.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵⁶ House, *Coal Tattoo*, 182.

¹⁵⁷ House, *Parchment of Leaves*, 69.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 112.

didn't take us long."¹⁵⁹ The sense of community that existed in Eastern Kentucky was demonstrated by House's description of various members of the area coming together, mainly to lend manpower to one another.

However, these episodes of community togetherness morphed into illustrations of the region's own form of hospitality. When Vine married a man named Saul, the two decided to build a house of their own. The whole community joined the effort in building the house. After the house raising, Vine and Esme showed their appreciation by throwing a party for the people involved. Vine imparted, "The next day, me and Esme lit in on cooking the biggest meal you ever seen in your life, and Saul went to round up every single person who had helped us."¹⁶⁰ After Esme's death, the entire community came bearing food and goodwill for Vine and her family. Vine said, "That evening everyone came up to the house. They all bragged on how good Esme looked. They came packing food...Her [Esme's] wake was a mix of emotion...It seemed like Esme's whole life was being played out by the people...spilling out onto the porch and yard."¹⁶¹ It seemed rare for an entire community to stop to say its final goodbye to one member. However, as House wrote, in Eastern Kentucky, people stopped by to see about a family who lost someone.

These episodes of hospitality and community duty created an idea of a distinctive social order. Knowing that Esme was a teetotaler, the men that came to her house after the house raising refused to drink in her house.¹⁶² Vine observed the pack of men, "A group of men stood in the front yard as I come around the other side. They were out there

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 113.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 41.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 230.

¹⁶²Ibid., 210.

drinking, as they knowed Esme wouldn't allow anything in her house.”¹⁶³ The abstention from drinking in the house was a demonstration of having manners. Besides creating a system of decorum unique to the area, Eastern Kentucky had different marks of societal distinction. In the South, racial issues had marked the history of the region for decades. Eastern Kentucky had its own set of racial issues. House wrote, “‘Just some people I guess,’ Aidia said... ‘Some people at home try to hide it. People treat you bad, over being dark, you know. But I never put on to be something I ain’t. Never used that word, though. My daddy hates that word, Melungeon.’”¹⁶⁴ Melungeons were a group from Appalachia whose genetic origin was undetermined, but considered to be a mix between white, black, and Native American. House discussed how some of the white residents viewed people darker than them, like the Melungeons and Native Americans, inferior. Eastern Kentucky did have influences from the South, but created its own distinctive interpretation.

Another regional author that made her home in Eastern Kentucky was Harriette Arnow. Arnow was a writer whose work reflected the political problems of the area. Her novels outlined the woes of Eastern Kentucky, like poverty, coal mining, and lack of education. In her novel *Hunter's Horn*, Arnow described the life of the Ballew family. The Ballews lived the life of Kentucky mountaineers before World War II. Like House, Arnow portrayed the people of Eastern Kentucky as matchless. Southern characteristics had influenced the culture of Eastern Kentucky in *Hunter's Horn*. Like House's characters, in a *Hunter's Horn*, those Southern influences were morphed into exceptionalities.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 210.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 123.

With dialect, the South is marked by its own language full of drawls. In *Hunter's Horn*, dialect repeated thorough out with Arnow observing the different way of speaking in Eastern Kentucky. Milly Ballew said, "That if'n it does git run down, somebody'ull come along place fine as it was when."¹⁶⁵ The language of the area was different than the stereotypical drawl of the South. Different vowels were stressed that created a varied way of speech. Another character, Willie Cooksey provided another example of regional dialect, "Pore I am, like you, Nunn. Me, I'm youngen pore, an you, you're youngen pore an land pore both."¹⁶⁶ The employment of words like "onct" depicted that with the unique dialect of the region by quoting the one of a kind words created by the natives.¹⁶⁷ A way of speaking culturally united a region. Arnow depicted her characters as different by making their dialects vary with the use of phrases like 'pore.'

Like House, Arnow illustrated the relationship between the people of Eastern Kentucky and the land. Arnow stressed the presence of coal in the region and its importance to the people. Arnow wrote, "The boy's hands were cold and they trembled, but he pulled on is miner's cap...He slung the miner's pick, hand down, under the bib of his overalls."¹⁶⁸ With this example, Arnow infused the existence of mining and its paraphernalia in the everyday lives of the men and women in a *Hunter's Horn*. Arnow continued, "He [Nunn] fell gradually into the pleasant dreaming state of mind in which, when he worked in the coal mines and saved to buy the farm."¹⁶⁹ Arnow showed that mining was part of life. She provided the reader evidenced that demonstrated the

¹⁶⁵ Harriette Arnow, *Hunter's Horn* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1949), 25.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

normalcy for young men to get jobs in the mines. Working in the coal mines was equated by Arnow as a coming of age event for young men in this region of the Commonwealth.

Arnow continued to stress the importance of nature for Eastern Kentuckians. In *Hunter's Horn*, the men and women farmed their land for their livelihood. Yet, a drought hit the area and the people had to deal with what the earth gave them. Arnow wrote:

Men watched the yellow rise in their corn, leaf by leaf, and the tender silks come out, not long and luxuriant, as in good years, but only a few, halfheartedly peeping from the withered shoots as if they knew the hot winds would bring death before they could catch a grain of pollen and give life to the waiting seed shapes below.¹⁷⁰

Arnow's description showed the dependence the men and women of Eastern Kentucky had on their land. The dirt was what fed them in *Hunter's Horn*. So, a drought could mean hunger for the Ballew family. In the South, its literature depicted imagery linked to farming to show the necessity of nature. Yet, in Eastern Kentucky, nature was not studied as the means of capital, but as the means of life. Arnow created her own method to stress the link between the two. Between the mountains, the mining, and the weather, Arnow demonstrated a nature that was powerful and omnipotent--both the giver and taker of life.

Another influence from the South apparent in *Hunter's Horn* was the religiosity of the characters in the region. Throughout the novel, Arnow cited scripture from the Bible. By citing scripture, she illustrated the role of Christianity in everyday life in the area. Milly Ballew said to herself at a moment of doubt, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth where."¹⁷¹ She continued saying in regard to Old John, "He ought to

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 246.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 25.

give himself to Jesus and learn to lean on Him.”¹⁷² This characteristic was Southern in influence. In the South, the area was predominately politically conservative and entrenched in allusions or references to Christianity. Arnow wrote, “But there was a life everlasting with sweet Jesus.”¹⁷³ Old John said, “You make up your mind that when this is all over you’re a goen to give your heart to God an settle down...I never prospered till I learned to live with God.”¹⁷⁴ Arnow observed how the people of the area used God as a path of hope and end of their troubles. Eastern Kentucky was both rural and isolated. The church became a town hall for the community where individuals got together to socialize and visit one another. The church became the epicenter of the society.

History

When thinking of Eastern Kentucky, many immediately hear banjo music. People associated the cultural stereotypes portrayed by the media with the area. Some of such stereotypes were that the natives of the region were ignorant, backward hillbillies. After the Civil War, Kentucky, like many other states, was in an era of change. The media stressed certain images of a culture. The media chose to depict both that region and the entire state as an unruly, backwards, lawless place due to feud violence. Kentucky always had a history of political corruption. Yet post-bellum Eastern Kentucky became the epicenter of feud violence for both the state and the nation. One county in particular began to be portrayed as Bloody Breathitt. Such negative language cast Kentucky, especially Eastern Kentucky, as a dangerous and unruly. However, many violent episodes occurred throughout the state and nation.

¹⁷² Ibid., 25.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 372.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 209.

Yet, the blatant feud violence in Breathitt County, Kentucky, did not help Kentucky be perceived by outsiders as civilized. Clark described Bloody Breathitt, “Breathitt County, 1890-1910, was to become so murderous as to fasten the adjective ‘bloody’ to both state and country.”¹⁷⁵ The Hatfields and McCoys became the legends of the United States. This feud absorbed newspapers and people’s imaginations.

The American public became increasingly interested in the matters of the mountains. Such illogical remarks were made by journalists during the early twentieth century. The reason for the feuding between the two families was debated with accusations of bestiality. Outsiders began to fabricate their own reasons for feuds in the area. Such reasoning included, “Sixteen different causes, including drunkenness, ‘hot tempers,’ the consequences of the Civil War, politics,, boredom, and a code of honor.”¹⁷⁶ Other feuds besides the infamous Hatfields and McCoys existed in the history of Eastern Kentucky. Another feud that occurred in the region is the Hargis-Cockrill feud.¹⁷⁷ This feud escalated and as historian Klotter described:

A reign of terror commenced. In the years 1902 and 1903, ‘the waters of the North Fork [river] ran red with blood.’ Estimates of the number killed in Breathitt County ranged from twenty seven to thirty eight.¹⁷⁸

The Hargis-Cockrill feud ended in the death of all of the parties involved. Including Judge Hargis, who had seemed to survive the feud, was killed by his own son.¹⁷⁹ The violence of the region marked Eastern Kentucky negatively for the rest of the nation. As the *Washington Post* said in 1903 that the region receiving so much

¹⁷⁵ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 208.

¹⁷⁶ Klotter, 53.

¹⁷⁷ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 210.

¹⁷⁸ Klotter, 55.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

unfavorable and hostile attention, “than any other section of the world.”¹⁸⁰ In 1927, the *Courier Journal* said of the violence in Eastern Kentucky, “Did more than anything else to give Kentucky a bad name and retard its material development.”¹⁸¹ While the rest of the state was fighting duels, Eastern Kentucky was branded as the land of feuds.

Besides feud violence, another event marked the history of the far eastern region of the Commonwealth. Between the period of 1900 and 1920, coal mining boomed in Eastern Kentucky. During that time, the United Mine Workers of America became a statewide union for miners in Kentucky. However, the coal boom ended and many mines closed across the state. Klotter described the changing atmosphere in Harlan County, “Between 1927 and 1932, one-third of Harlan County’s mines closed; in the decade before 1932, unionized mines’ share of the nation’s coal production dropped from 70 percent to 20 percent.”¹⁸² The lack of employing the union men of Kentucky took the livelihood from many of the families in the region. The region became poor and without a source of income.

Bloody Harlan came from the hate and poverty created from the lack of jobs. Because coal mines were fearful of the retaliation from the union miners, they began to hire deputies to guard the mines and equipment.¹⁸³ The frustrated men and women in Harlan County decided to organize a strike against the mines. From 1931 to 1941, the battle for coal miners’ rights continued. The death toll from strikes was nineteen.¹⁸⁴ The violence between the coal companies and the striking miners was another episode of violence in Eastern Kentucky being widely covered by American media. Such writers

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 56.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁸² Ibid., 139.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 140.

¹⁸⁴ Harrison and Klotter, 366.

that covered Bloody Harlan were Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, Waldo Frank, Edmund Wilson, and Malcolm Cowley.¹⁸⁵

Minutes from questioning Harlan County's Prosecuting Attorney demonstrated the distrust the coal companies had for union men. The minutes included, "Is Arnold Johnson [man on trial] a member of the United Miners Union?"¹⁸⁶ The coal companies equated being a union man negatively akin to being a communist. The minutes continued with the defense of the man on trial, "He is not a member of National Miners Union but he is a member of the Civil Liberties Union. He is not a member of the Communist Party."¹⁸⁷ However, many others viewed Bloody Harlan as another episode casting a negative light on the state of Kentucky. Clark noted on another negative part of the coal mine wars, "Bloody Harlan added considerably to its unsavory reputation because of the Barkley-Chandler feud."¹⁸⁸ Barkley and Chandler were two former governors of Kentucky.

Besides occurrences of violence in Eastern Kentucky, the region was marked by a long list of cultural achievements. Berea College was located in Eastern Kentucky. This progressive school was found in the hills of what the public had previously marked as the lawless land. Yet, Berea College is one of the first schools to allow both white and black students entry. Thomas D. Clark writes, "At Berea College, an institution founded in the 1850s as an opportunity school for enslaved Negroes and poor whites alike."¹⁸⁹ However, the radical ideas of racial equality of Berea College were not supported by the rest of the

¹⁸⁵Klotter, 141.

¹⁸⁶"Harlan Miners Speak," *Report on Terrorism in the Kentucky Coal Fields*, Ed. Members of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), 257.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁸⁸Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 159.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 115.

state. Clark continued, “There was difficulty and even intimidation.”¹⁹⁰ Yet, in the wild mountains of Eastern Kentucky, one of the first steps towards racial equality and integrated learning was made.

Frontier

Looking at modern Eastern Kentucky, one could still envisage the image of frontier Kentucky. The area was sparsely populated and natural. Clark described the life of the mountaineer:

The mountaineer, like his other agrarian brothers of the United States, has made his living solely from the soil. Since his natural environment has land locked him, he has been denied a sufficient amount of legal knowledge and protection until the past few years. If a crime was committed in an isolated eastern county, it proved an expensive and trying ordeal to transport prisoner and witnesses to the ‘outside’ for trial.¹⁹¹

Eastern Kentucky was an isolated land. Kentucky had been considered a barbaric state, but the Mecca for that barbarism, as considered by outsiders, was Eastern Kentucky. Yet, the people of the area realized with pride the beauty and majesty of their still wild home. David and Lalie Dick quoted a native from the region, “If you get your feet wet in the Red Bird River you’ll always come back.”¹⁹² The men and women of the region realized the full power of nature. They were reminded of how intimately they were linked when nature showed its force through floods, droughts, and other elements. Big John Blankenship, a native of the area, recalled such an event, “The 1960s tide came suddenly during the night, sweeping through Salyersville, blocking roads and threatening

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 115.

¹⁹¹ Clark, *History of Kentucky*, 413-414.

¹⁹² Dick, 137.

lives.”¹⁹³ Yet, the people of the region did not give up in the 1960s and do not give up now. The area reflected what being a Kentuckian was---tough, resourceful, and vigilant.

Eastern Kentucky was perceived by outsiders as a wild and unruly place. Some such outsiders that negatively viewed the region were Kentuckians who considered it a blemish on the image on the state. Yet, this region of the Commonwealth was more culturally dense than any part of the state. Its rich cultural history combined with its isolation from the outside world made it the possessor of its own cultural identity. Eastern Kentucky was not Southern. Its identity was unique and associated with the Appalachian region of the United States. However, the same Kentucky spirit seemed to rest in the region that does in Western and Central Kentucky. Kentuckians might culturally identify with different areas, but they all seemed to agree that being a Kentuckian was a matchless label that united them all.

The distinctive culture of Eastern Kentucky illustrated its own personality. It was the origin of great literature and of a genre of music. Thomas D. Clark addressed the birth of old-time in the hills of Kentucky, “Campfires, fortress commons, and solitary homesteads were enlivened by recreations of narrative ballads and songs transmitted from the ‘Old Country.’ This explains the existence today of the ballad in the Kentucky Mountains.”¹⁹⁴ That music depicted the exclusiveness and the pride of Eastern Kentucky. Lyrics from Eastern Kentucky native Loretta Lynn demonstrate that uniqueness of the area, “I never thought I’d leave the Butcher Holler/But a lot of things have changed since way back then/ And it’s so good to be back home again.”¹⁹⁵ Regional authors from the

¹⁹³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁹⁴ Clark, *History of Kentucky*, 270.

¹⁹⁵ Loretta Lynn, “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” http://www.aldielyrics.com/lyrics/loretta_lynn/coal_miners_daughter.html (accessed April 8, 2010).

area never considered themselves as Southern or Northern, but something completely different. Therefore, Eastern Kentucky was culturally part of Appalachia.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Thomas D. Clark called the Commonwealth, “The thoroughbred of the continent. It had direct connections with almost 17,000 miles of navigable water, beginning across its upper border, in its mountain fastness, and leading out to the great arterial Mississippi Valley system.”¹⁹⁶ Kentucky was not a Southern state. The only region that culturally associated with the South was Western Kentucky. The urbanization of Central Kentucky had changed its cultural identity from Southern to Midwestern. The isolation of Eastern Kentucky led the region to develop its own identity unique to the Appalachian Mountain range. The regional authors supported the different cultures of the separate areas of the state. With the local writers reinforcing the varied cultures, one could observe that Kentucky was not completely a Southern state.

Southern identity was unique. James C. Cobb quoted Eudora Welty’s description of the South, “Crossing a line you couldn’t see but knew was there, between the South and the North---you could draw a breath and feel the difference.”¹⁹⁷ The American Southeast possessed individuality distinctive from other regions of the United States. Carlton J.H. Hayes stated, “A people may be more united and nationalistic through grief

¹⁹⁶ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 123.

¹⁹⁷ James C. Cobb, *Away Down South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 239.

over defeat than through celebration of triumph.”¹⁹⁸ Robert Penn Warren further strengthened that argument by writing, “Only the moment when Lee handed Grant his sword... [The] conception of Southern identity truly bloomed.”¹⁹⁹ There was a clear distinction between the North and the South. Yet, Kentucky could not easily identify with one region over another. One could observe the varying cultures of the different regions of diversity of Kentucky.

While the three regions of the Commonwealth possessed different cultural identities, their residents were all united in the fact that they were Kentuckians first.

Thomas D. Clark wrote that:

A contemporary Kentuckian embodies in his personality most of the rugged influences which molded the lives of his ancestors. He is hospitable, independent, has a sense of humor, and is curious enough to get information from a stranger, yet shrewd enough not to tell a stranger too much.²⁰⁰

Kentuckians were influenced by Southern culture, but could identify uniformly as Kentuckians. Clark continued, “The gregarious rural Kentuckian went with equal zest to picnics, burgoos, and barbecues, camp meetings, and the mineral springs.”²⁰¹ The state was the home of highwaymen like Jesse James, Harp brothers, and many other infamous men. It was also the home of race horses, bourbon whiskey, tobacco, and beautiful country. Most natives of the state viewed their state with a great pride. Kentucky was the land of rivers, plains, and mountains---physically diverse and unique.

Through a combination of the literature of regional authors, historical events, and frontier lives one could determine the regional identity of Western, Central, and Eastern Kentucky. The evidence illustrated within each section the different cultural selves. By

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 60.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 60.

²⁰⁰ Clark, *A History of Kentucky*, 285.

²⁰¹ Clark, *Kentucky Land of Contrast*, 240.

examining that evidence, one could compare and contrast the areas. The only point of comparison between the three environmental regions was that they were all within the state's borders. David and Lalie Clark stated, "It's nice to be remembered by something as noble as a mortal Kentuckian."²⁰² Therefore, Kentucky may not be a Southern state and may possess a multitude of cultures within its state lines, but all of those cultures and regions are united in the fact that they are all Kentuckians.

²⁰²Dick, 29.

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