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The Commission on Religion in Appalachia and the Twentieth-Century Emphasis on Rural Identity

Joseph K. Spiker
East Tennessee State University

The Commission on Religion in Appalachia and the Twentieth-Century Emphasis on Rural
Identity

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Joseph Spiker

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Dr. Tom Lee, Chair

Dr. William Burgess

Dr. Ted Olson

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ABSTRACT

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The Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA) was a mission organization founded in
1965 to bring economic and religious uplift to Appalachia. CORA focused on rural areas and
relied on prevalent stereotypes to define the region as homogenous and backward, and its
definition permeated its mission work. CORA members were influenced by 1931 and 1958
religious surveys that largely reinforced established Appalachian stereotypes of poverty and
isolation.

However, Appalachia's urban areas offered a broader definition and understanding of the region.
By 1900 there were examples of Jewish communities in Appalachian urban areas that persisted
throughout the twentieth century. Urban areas also experienced trends that were seen throughout
the south and the rest of the United States.

CORA was a mission organization that was founded on an Appalachian identity highlighted by
stereotypes of rural homogeneity and poverty, and they excluded urban areas from their
definition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am a native Appalachian, but it was not until college that I began to notice the complexities of the region and its people. The Appalachia that I saw differed from the Appalachia that was often described to me. I was inspired by personal experiences and observations to explore the history of Appalachian religious diversity. The inspiration that initially struck me wound up leading me toward a different direction. The story I encountered was about the creation of Appalachian religious identity by missionaries, the creation of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA) in the 1960s as a renewed missionary effort founded on that created identity, and the absence of urban areas and their impact from understandings of that identity.

Appalachia became identified as a distinct region around the latter half of the nineteenth century. William Harney's "A Strange Land and a Peculiar People," published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in October 1873, was one of the earliest and most important Appalachian pieces.[1] Harney's account detailed his travels through the area and characterized Appalachia as a distinct region with specific traits. However, his use of terms such as "strange" and "peculiar" and his overall treatment of the subject had a negative connotation.

Published in 1860 in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, "A Week in the Great Smokey Mountains," presents a contrast with Harney's article.[2] This written account of a man sent into the mountains for fresh air to cure his ailments did not seek to characterize the region as Harney did. The unnamed author detailed his stay in the mountains and some of the people he encountered. He seemed to view Appalachians with a certain respect that was not apparent in

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[1] William Harney, "A Strange Land and a Peculiar People." *Lippincott's Magazine* (Oct. 1873).
[2] "A Week in the Great Smokey Mountains." *The Southern Literary Messenger* (1860).

Harney's account. The tone and descriptions present in "A Week in the Great Smokey Mountains" romanticized the ruggedness of mountain life. The two major themes of early Appalachian studies can be seen in these two accounts: the first was generalizations of a homogenous population that was isolated and backward, while the second was a romanticization of mountain life, independence, and ruggedness.

Emma Belle Miles shared in the romanticization of mountain life. She had lived in Appalachia for most of her life when she wrote *The Spirit of the Mountains* in 1905.[3] She wrote this book to describe her perception of Appalachia. She had a high regard for traditional mountain life despite the poverty and isolation that had typically been attributed to the region; her conclusions were not conventional. She rejected the idea that modernization and outside influences were the best thing for Appalachia. She thought that the best way to help Appalachia was to hone and perfect the tools and resources that were natural to the region. Miles's writing reflected a mixture of Appalachian upbringing and outside education to become one of the earliest examples of an Appalachian voice in the genre.

Although a native of Pennsylvania who grew up in Iowa, Horace Kephart lived among Appalachians before he wrote *Our Southern Highlanders* in 1913.[4] He used a mixture of reverence and condescension when discussing Appalachia. He relied on overbroad examples to highlight Appalachia's educational and economic problems. Unlike Miles, he thought that outside influence was absolutely necessary to bring Appalachia to its full potential. He proposed training Appalachian leaders and using model farms to show Appalachians how to get the most out of their own land. Economic attention in Appalachia's resources increased and coincided with the social ideals of Progressivism that led to outside interest in the region. Kephart's theme

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[3] Emma Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains* (Knoxville: UT Press, 1985).
[4] Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlander* (Knoxville: UT Press, 1976).

would be essential to the Commission on Religion in Appalachia's endeavors in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Writers like Miles and Kephart played a central role in providing descriptions of Appalachia. In Henry Shaprio's 1978 work *Appalachia on Our Mind*, he examined the impact that local color writers and missionaries had in creating the popular image of Appalachia, which resulted in Appalachian " otherness."[5] The image began with descriptions by writers such as Harney and eventually ended up in the hands of the uplift movement that described a region that had fallen behind the progress and growth of the rest of the nation. The creation of Appalachian otherness resulted in missionary and uplift groups coming into the region. Shapiro's notions of a created Appalachian identity and its impact is an important theme in Appalachian studies and this work. Elements of Shapiro's arguments can be seen with the formation of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia and its reliance on the rural and depressed Appalachian definition.

Missionaries had a profound impact on creating Appalachia's image in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the earliest and most influential works that came out of the home mission movement was Edward O. Guerrant's *The Galax Gatherers: The Gospel among the Highlander,* originally published in 1910.[6] Guerrant's career as a leading missionary in eastern Kentucky led him to write this account of his work. He characterized the region as isolated and uneducated to argue that mission work was needed. In 1933, Elizabeth Hooker echoed Guerrant's characterization of Appalachia in *Religion in the Highlands*. She added that previous

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[5] Henry Shaprio, *Appalachia on Our Mind: the Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1978).

[6] Edward O. Guerrant, *The Galax Gatherers: the Gospel Among the Highlander* (Richmond: Onward Press, 1910).

missionary efforts had been inadequate and that an updated effort would be necessary to help Appalachia reach its full potential. [7]

In the 1950s and 1960s, Earl Brewer and W.D. Weatherford produced works that detailed Appalachia by focusing on poverty and backwardness; along with their individual works was the collaboration *Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia* which updated Hooker and Guerrant's arguments.[8] They agreed with Hooker that previous missions had not succeeded and argued that renewed mission work was needed by emphasizing the economic conditions and isolation in rural Appalachia. Their ideas helped create the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, and Weatherford in particular was influential in many of the Commission's early phases.

In the last sixty years, Appalachian scholars increasingly focused on Appalachian religious history. In his 1965 *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier,* Walter Brownlow Posey examined the seventeenth and eighteenth century religious history of the Appalachian mountain region. Posey applied the isolation theory of Appalachia to its religious history. He argued that the formation of Protestant churches in and around Appalachia was largely marked by infighting and a lack of cooperation which made Appalachian religion isolated from both mainstream religious trends and denominations within the mountains. [9] Many of Posey's arguments attempt to show Appalachian religious isolation. However, he discusses disagreements between Appalachian and non-Appalachian churches as well as Catholicism's presence in the area in the mid-eighteenth century, which indicate continued contact outside of the region.

Studies in the late 1970s and 1980s took a different approach to Appalachian religion. Loyal Jones and Howard Dorgan were at the forefront of scholars who showed the complexity of

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[7] Elizabeth Hooker, *Religion in the Highlands* (New York: Home Mission Council, 1933).

[8] W.D. Weatherford and Earl Brewer, *Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia* (New York: Friendship Press, 1962).

[9] Walter Brownlow Posey, *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier* (Louisiana State University Press, 1965).

Appalachians while also examining technical aspects of their religious beliefs and practices. Jones portrayed Appalachians as a multifaceted people with a deep understanding and awareness of themselves and the world around them. He also examined their understandings of religious practices and theology. His portrayal of Appalachians as academically intelligent, especially in terms of religion, set the precedent for later scholars to follow. Dorgan's several works are diverse contributions to various facets of Appalachian religion. He tended to focus on Protestant groups and the larger importance of religion to Appalachian culture, but his overall theme always came back to the uniqueness of Appalachian religion.[10]

Jones was particularly significant because he offered a counter to pro-mission works with his description of religious life in Appalachia in *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands*.[11] Jones argued that missionaries operated on prevalent stereotypes and did not understand the Appalachian people that they were being sent to save. He concluded that Appalachians exhibited signs of theological intelligence that many missionaries did not attribute to them. Further, Jones suggested that Appalachians had a deep awareness of their spirituality and faith before missionaries came to educate them about those things. That argument can be applied to CORA's missionary work in Appalachia in the 1960s.

Deborah McCauley continued in the same vein as Dorgan and Jones. *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* is a sweeping account of Appalachian religion. In it, McCauley examined the history and formation of Christianity in Appalachia and the trends that made Appalachian denominations distinct from mainstream Protestantism. She also looked at Appalachia's important role in the Pentecostal, Baptist, and revival movements in the nineteenth

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[10] Dorgan's major works include *The Airwaves of Zion: Radio and Religion in Appalachia* (Knoxville: UT Press, 1993); *In the Hands of a Happy God: The "No-Hellers" of Central Appalachia* (Knoxville: UT Press, 1997); *The Old Regular Baptists of Central Appalachia* (Knoxville: UT Press, 1989); and *Giving Glory to God: Worship Practices of Six Baptist Subdenominations* (Knoxville: UT Press, 1990).

[11] Loyal Jones, *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands* (Urbana: UI Press, 1999).

and twentieth centuries. McCauley argued that the similarities between mainstream

Protestantism and mountain religion contribute to what she calls the role of Appalachian religion

as the "missing link" in the changes of American Protestantism.[12] McCauley also argued that

Appalachia's role in shaping mainstream religion is misunderstood partly because of its oral

religious traditions and partly because of its people being stereotyped that led to the trivialization

of Appalachian religion. She concluded that the region's religious traits contribute to southern

religiosity and mainstream religious trends.

Scholars have increasingly looked at Appalachian religion in the context of homogeneous

pluralism. Most studies have described Appalachian religious pluralism as a diversity of

Protestantism with little mention of non-Protestant Appalachians to be found. The most

significant study of non-Protestant communities in Appalachia is Deborah Weiner's *Coalfield

Jews*.[13] She tells the story of the impact that Jewish communities had on Appalachia's cities and

boomtowns in the early twentieth century as well as their lasting impact and legacy. Weiner

views her study as neither an Appalachian nor a Jewish history, but both, acknowledging

Appalachian religion's potential to be understood without being characterized by a single set of

dynamics. She argues that cities and boomtowns attracted Jewish communities by providing

economic opportunities that were not present in rural Appalachia.

Weiner's study linked religion with another dynamic of Appalachian studies: the impact

of urban areas. John Inscoe examined the role that urban areas played in Appalachia. He focused

on the area of western North Carolina where cities such as Asheville emerged by the 1840s to

become cultural and economic hubs. He argued that few Appalachians were so isolated as not to

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[12] Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: a History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995): 465. Among other things, Appalachia has also been a focal point in the Pentecostal, Baptist, and revival movements.
[13] Deborah Weiner, *Coalfield Jews* (Urbana: UI Press, 2006).

be influenced in some way by mountain cities, a concept that railroads such as the Western North Carolina Railroad only reinforced. Cities were dynamic centers that attracted a wider population range than their rural counterparts. [14]

Ronald Lewis was influenced by Henry Shapiro's concept of Appalachia. Lewis's arguments are based on a theory of two Appalachias: Appalachia as it was and the "Appalachia" that was created by local color writers in the late eighteenth century. He argued that the images used to portray the region were often over-characterized in an attempt to glamorize Appalachia as a "last frontier." The true Appalachia was a land of resources that played an integral role in American industrialization between the Civil War and World War I. Urban Appalachia has played an essential part in helping keep Appalachia from being isolated from both the rest of the nation and from internal inaccessibility. Appalachian cities were community hubs with diverse populations that often resembled other cities outside of the region. Urban influences made the need for uniquely Appalachian endeavors such as nineteenth-century missions and CORA in the 1960s seem unnecessary, but they were attempted because of the perception of a rurally isolated Appalachia.[15]

David Whisnant addressed the impact of urbanization efforts in Appalachia in *Modernizing the Mountaineer.*[16] He explores the motives that drove uplift groups including missionaries and government organizations. He describes two separate clusters of motivation: cultural and developmental. Cultural motives include mission work and socially progressive intervention; developmental motives include resource interests such as mining and economic

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[14] Inscoe's works in this area include *Mountain Masters* (Knoxville: UT Press, 1999) and "Diversity in Antebellum Mountain Life: the Towns of Western North Carolina." in *The Many Faces of Appalachia: Exploring a Region's Diversity* (Appalachian Consortium Press, 1985): 153-173.
[15] Ronald Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America* (University of Kentucky Press, 1987)*, and *Transformation of the Appalachian Countryside* (UNC Press, 1998).
[16] David Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer* (Knoxville: UT Press, 1994).

uplift. He connected the two clusters and concluded that regional development could best be described as a "cultural drama." He argues that cultural values and assumptions controlled the development process in Appalachia; CORA's efforts in the 1960s fall within the framework of Whisnant's argument. Many of CORA's founders had preconceived notions about Appalachia based on an image that had been created in the late 1800s, and those notions dictated their operations.

Appalachian religion can be understood in larger themes of both southern and national religious trends as well. For example, in *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* Anne C. Loveland discussed the early formation of Southern evangelicalism in terms of both its deviation from 'Old South' religious traditions and its active role in social and political movements, advocating what would become later a Victorian model of a moral life.[17] The moral and religious traditions that Loveland described became one of the dominating characteristics of the south as well as Appalachia, especially when viewed by outsiders. Those characteristics were also used to help characterize Appalachian religion as a homogenous, singular entity that inspired similar experiences for all of its inhabitants.

In *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* Kenneth Bailey examined southern religious trends by tracing the evolution of Southern Protestantism during the first half of the twentieth century.[18] Bailey explored various Protestant denominations, their dominance in the realm of southern religion, the characteristics that distinguish them as southern, and their contribution to the characterization of southern religion. Appalachian religion fits in Bailey's arguments because it exhibited similar trends and outsider characterizations.

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[17] Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1980).

[18] Kenneth Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

Two other southern historians help give Appalachian religion a context beyond the mountains. Samuel Hill examined the issues that were facing southern churches both in the late sixties and in the early 1990s. He argued that the most pertinent issues facing southern churches in the 1960s were social but that by the 1990s the major issues were theological. Hill concluded that southern churches needed to reform to keep up with a changing southern cultural identity. This argument can be applied to Appalachian religion and shows that it has characteristics that are shared beyond the limits of "Appalachia."[19]

Charles Lippy includes Appalachia in the broad movement of American religious pluralism. He sees no distinction between trends in the region and the rest of the nation. He argues that some of the mystical elements of religion, such as the presence of angels and the ability to conjure supernatural powers, remained present in the twentieth century. These practices, often seen as backward in nature, can be found not only in Appalachia, but in mainstream Christianity as well.[20] Lippy argues that the religious trends in Appalachia are not necessarily unique to the region but that they also occur in mainstream religion. He concludes that the denominational pluralism that characterizes Appalachian religion makes it part of the broader American religiosity.

My original goal with this project was to explore Appalachia's religious identity, but I ultimately wanted to go further than that. I decided that in order to understand Appalachian identity it was important to examine the perceptions of Appalachia and the ramifications of those perceptions. However, I wanted to go beyond the early depictions of Appalachia by home missions and writers such as Harney. I wanted to see why works that began emerging in the

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[19] Samuel Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis* (Beacon Press, 1968). Hill reevaluated his own work to look at the changes and current trends in southern religion with an updated study: *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (University of Alabama Press, 1999).
[20] Charles H. Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).

1800s provided the dominant traits used to describe the region in spite of much more recent works that attempted to repel some of Appalachia's myths. Therefore, I looked at attempts by late nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries to characterize the region in a certain way, the results of that characterization, and the traits of urban Appalachia that undermined the perception that had been presented outside of the mountains.

I first examined two different religious surveys that were conducted in the region. The first was conducted in the early 1930s and the second came in the late 1950s. The first survey looked at seventeen rural counties in southern Appalachia and the conclusions drawn from its results were ascribed to all of Appalachia. The first survey reiterated many of the stereotypes that had been established in the late 1800s, and their basic result was that Appalachia came to be defined as a homogenous region that was characterized by the traits seen in the rural counties of the survey.

The 1950s survey built upon the original in an effort to examine some measure of change, and its conclusions were similar to the first survey. Mission groups from outside the region and many of CORA's founders based their notions of Appalachia on the results of these surveys. The frame in which they worked was incomplete because the surveys did not portray accurately the complexities of Appalachia. However, their presence in the region might not have been required if that certain perception of Appalachia had not been reinforced. The Commission on Religion in Appalachia formed as an interdenominational missionary and regional uplift effort in response to the results of the second survey. Thus, CORA in the 1960s operated on the same premises as those of missionaries in the late nineteenth century.

I examined the formation of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia in the 1960s and its similarities to previous missionary efforts. Churches had a renewed sense that they needed to

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address the "Appalachian Problem" by boosting their presence in the region. CORA's mission was to come into the region and foster change with a top-down approach. Their goal was to target and educate church and community leaders so that they could pass the right tools down to the laypeople, ultimately leading to social and economic change in Appalachia. Thus, Appalachians themselves would perpetuate the changes, but the nature of the changes would still reflect CORA's aims. The major flaw in their approach was not only their tendency to focus on rural areas that exhibited the economically depressed and socially backward characteristics that had been described by missionaries for decades, but their disregard for the role of urban areas in the region.

The Commission's missionary approach overlooked the urban areas in the region. Therefore, CORA failed to respect or account for the complexities of the Appalachian region. They also did not address the urban characteristics that existed. If they had then Appalachia would have been identified as a region with distinctly rural and urban areas rather than a homogenous and backward region with single and simplistic characteristics. CORA maintained the latter characterization because that justified its existence. Their actions, therefore, perpetuated many decades-old Appalachian stereotypes.

The final aspect that I examined was the role of urban Appalachia in conjunction with CORA's definition of Appalachia. Missionaries and early Appalachian writers did not identify Appalachia's urban areas which resulted in some elements of Appalachian society being excluded from its narrative. For example, the pre-1960s presence of small numbers of Jewish groups were largely centered in boomtowns and urban economic centers. That trend reoccurred when CORA continued to overlook Appalachia's urban areas and promote its own definition of a rural, depressed Appalachia. Changes in federal immigration laws during the 1960s resulted in

an influx of Asian groups into the U.S. that introduced religious beliefs such as Buddhism and the practices of new cultures into communities across the nation; by the 1970s the South had several Buddhist communities, and a small Buddhist presence began to emerge in Appalachia as well. Appalachia's urban areas did not represent the isolated and economically depressed area that required unique missionary efforts. The early impact of coal towns as well as population growth and interactions with urban areas indicate that Appalachia was not an entirely rural, depressed region. However, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia did not seek to expand the understanding of Appalachia as a complex region.

The primary urban areas that I examined were Asheville, North Carolina; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Bristol, Virginia. I also included Deborah Weiner's study of early coal towns like Beckley, West Virginia. The first three cities were in counties that were adjacent to at least one of the counties that were included in the original survey. Beckley was one county removed from a survey county. The proximity of these urban areas to the counties that were surveyed helps contextualize Appalachia's urban characteristics against the popular perception of the region, especially with the Jewish presence in Knoxville and Bristol before the first survey.

The results of the religious surveys of the 1930s and 1950s reinforced the perception of Appalachia that had been created by nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries and writers. Urban areas were left out of both early descriptions and the survey results. The surveys echoed earlier missionary efforts and described an Appalachia that allowed the Commission on Religion in Appalachia to be created. The Commission did not include urban Appalachia in its description of the region or in its mission statement, but it was Appalachia's urban areas that made it a more socially and economically complex region than the perception that had been created by missionaries. The Commission benefited from stereotypical descriptions of Appalachia because

those descriptions helped justified CORA's presence, but Appalachia suffered as a result of being

continually misunderstood and unable to shed its century-old perception.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGIOUS SURVEYS 1931-1959

In 1931, the Institute of Social and Religious Research conducted a survey to identify the

religious tendencies of people in the Appalachian region. This survey looked at over a thousand

churches in seventeen counties across West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North

Carolina, and Georgia to examine both the religious characteristics and the state of mission work

in the area.[1] Specific items were examined such as denomination, population percentage, church

attendance relative to population, and the structure of the church. The survey area of seventeen

counties focused on rural areas and was used to represent the entire region. The results helped

define the religious traits of the area by relying on the perceptions of Appalachian backwardness,

isolation, and poverty that were popularized at the turn of the century. Another survey conducted

in the late 1950s reaffirmed the original survey's conclusions. These surveys defined the

religious characteristics and population of twentieth century Appalachia, and the Commission on

Religion in Appalachia used these characterizations as the basis for its mission efforts.[2]

Appalachia already had a certain mystique in American culture by the 1930s. The

"rediscovery" of the region in the late 1800s by writers and missionaries shaped Appalachia's

image in an almost inalterable way; many of the terms and the imagery used to describe

Appalachia in the century since are still used. The stereotypes are not as prevalent now as they

once were, and the stigma tied to the region has been chipped away due largely to the work of

Appalachian scholarship since the 1970s. However, the early work on the region that portrayed a

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[1] The counties included in the survey were Nicholas, Pendelton, and Webster (WV); Allegheny, Grayson, and Greene (VA); Knott, Laurel, and Leslie (KY); Blount, Cumberland, Overton, and Sevier (TN); Avery, Madison, and Transylvania (NC); and Towns (GA). Guide to the Appalachian Religion Survey Records, 1931-1933, Berea College (BC).

[2] Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Bureau of Home Economics, and the Forrest Service. "Economic and Social Problems and Conditions of the Southern Appalachians." *U.S. Department of Agriculture Miscellaneous Publication no. 205*, January 1935. 1935 Religious Survey Collection, Accession 34, Box 6, Series IX, Folder 13 (B.C.).

romantic, isolated region of backward people in need of help survived with assistance from periodic reexaminations and studies. The religious surveys of 1931 and 1958 are examples of two of these studies.[3]

The 1931 survey discovered that the strongest denomination in the region was Protestant, with Baptists and Methodists making up the largest percentage of those surveyed. Baptists made up 39.8 percent of the Protestant population while Methodists comprised 33.4 percent. The 2 percent of the population that was listed as non-Protestant is only mentioned as being "mainly Catholic and Jewish."[4] The survey's summarization of the strong Protestant presence in the region reflected the impact of Great Awakening ideals, Scots-Irish heritage, and Protestant missionaries that have been attributed to Appalachia's religious culture.[5] Even though the survey only looked at rural counties, the results were used to describe the entire region. As a consequence, Appalachia as a whole would be defined by traits identified in only some of its rural counties.

Urban areas around towns and larger cities would have been more likely to have a larger percentage of non-Protestants. In *Coalfield Jews,* Deborah Weiner shows a significant Jewish presence in Appalachia as early as the late nineteenth century. She examines the arrival of Jewish settlements in Appalachia, especially among the boom towns that were created by the emergence of industries such as coal and railroads. Her study focuses on coalfields, economics, and religion,

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[3] Appalachian scholarship has certainly expanded over the last 40 years, and scholars have made great strides in attempting to demythologize the region to the point that there have been debates as the whether there is a such place as "Appalachia." All of the prior work in the region is important, including the works that have been damaging, and I can only hope that this study can make a contribution of some merit.

[4] "Economic and Social Problems," 169-172.

[5] The religious traits of rural Appalachia are covered in Walter Brownlow Posey's *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier* and Deborah McCauley's *Appalachian Mountain Religion: a History,* among other studies.

and she blends them together to show that Appalachia was more heterogeneous than often shown to be.[6]

Weiner's study certainly adds more to the understanding of the early twentieth century Appalachian religious landscape; it also serves as a supplement to the survey of 1931. Appalachia may have been dominated by Protestant forms of Christianity, but there was also a small yet influential Jewish population in the region. Although the percentage was greater in urban areas rather than the rural counties that were surveyed, the presence in both undercuts the notions that arose as a result of the survey. According to the survey only 2 percent of the population in the rural counties that were surveyed were non-Protestant, defined as Catholic or Jewish, while the urban areas around boomtowns and other cities saw up to 10-15 percent of the population that was Jewish. Often times, that 10-15 percent was at the economic and political center of the city giving members of these groups a good deal of power and influence.[7] Protestantism was at the heart of Appalachian religion.

However, if a broader range of counties were surveyed, then a different picture of Appalachia in the 1930s could have been produced. For example, if Knox county in Tennessee or Washington county in Virginia had been surveyed, then the cities of Bristol and Knoxville would have been included. Among other things, those two cities would have greatly increased the non-Protestant percentage from the 2 percent found in rural areas.

One of the goals of the survey was to try to compare Appalachia's data to the rest of the nation. The Appalachian data varied considerably by county; therefore, it was difficult to draw accurate conclusions, especially when applying them to the whole region. This was due largely

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[6] Deborah Weiner, *Coalfield Jews: an Appalachian History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[7] Deborah Weiner, "Lecture" (9/23/10): East Tennessee State University. On September 23, 2010, Weiner gave a lecture on ETSU's campus where she discussed her research, Appalachia's Jewish heritage, and Appalachian Jewish Identity.

to uneven distribution among the mountain counties because of population density variances.[8]
Applying Appalachia's data unilaterally was problematic. Using the average to draw national
comparisons was useful because it could provide a general idea to see how the region resembled
the rest of the nation. However, the problem was that applying unilateral data found that many
areas were either far above or below the statistics especially because of population
inconsistencies.

According to the survey, Appalachia was behind the national numbers in most categories.
For example, church membership by percentage to population was 36.7 percent in Appalachia's
mountain counties while it was at 47.8 percent in other parts of the rural United States.
Appalachia was only slightly behind in the percentage of churches that had Sunday Schools with
81 percent compared to 85 percent nationally. However, Appalachia was considerably behind in
other categories. Only 21 percent of Appalachian churches had young people's societies while
that number doubled nationally. There was even more disparity when it came to women's
societies; only 18 percent of churches in Appalachia had them compared to 63 percent
nationally.[9]

The Home Missions Council used this data to conclude that missionary efforts were
needed to bring Appalachia up to the national level. They decided that the church was to become
the tool that would save Appalachia. The Home Missions Council believed that Appalachians
themselves were not doing enough to maintain mountain churches which only increased the need
for outside presence to come into the region, an idea that was reflected in the Department of

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[8] "Economic and Social Problems," 172.
[9] "Economic and Social Problems," 172-179.

Agriculture's Economic Report.[10] If Appalachia was to change then the church would have to be able to keep up with that change.

The results of the survey were published in 1931 by Elizabeth Hooker and reported to the Home Missions Council. In her publication, Hooker reports on the isolation, poverty, religious primitivism, and inadequate home missionary endeavors among mountain people.[11] These characteristics reflected those that were applied to Appalachia before the first wave of missionaries swept into the region in the nineteenth century. They would likewise contribute to the notions of the problems plaguing Appalachia again in the 1960s and the need for an outside solution.

The 1931 survey laid the groundwork for a revamped Appalachian mission in the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, it served as the foundation for a second Appalachian religious survey. The second study was undertaken in 1958 to reexamine the religious characteristics of Appalachia and how they might be related to the rest of the United States. It was also designed to expand the original results by broadening the questions. The original 17 counties that were examined in 1931 were looked at again to measure any possible changes, while additional counties were included in an effort to provide a more expansive survey. [12]

There were some structural differences between the two surveys. The second survey attempted to have more complete coverage by including more denominations; it also covered a broader range of area and topics. The 1958 survey again dealt with religion, but it also looked at the larger secular community. This shift in focus led to missionaries heavily addressing issues

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[10] "Economic and Social Problems," 181. One of the concluding statements about the survey and the condition of Appalachian religion was this: "Whether proportionate gains in enlistment can be maintained is uncertain, for the facts presented in this section show that the churches, set in the midst of rapidly changing conditions, are doing almost nothing to adopt themselves to their altered environments."

[11] Hooker, Elizabeth. *Religion in the Highlands* (New York: Home Mission Council, 1933).

[12] Earl Brewer, *Religion and Church Life in the Southern Appalachian Mountains*. Emory University (Atlanta): n.d. From Brewer and Weatherford Manuscripts, Records of the Southern Appalachian Studies, Accession 3, Box 89, Series V-Religion, B.C.

such as education and social welfare in the 1960s. By identifying religious and community

identities, the survey allowed home missions to come up with a plan for Appalachia. [13]

The results of the second survey were published in Earl D.C. Brewer's *Religion and
Church Life in the Southern Appalachian Mountains*. While the results were treated

independently, some of the conclusions were described comparatively since the survey was

partially designed to look at the changes that occurred in Appalachia between 1931 and 1958.

For example, based on results the general conclusion was made that church membership had

declined overall from the first survey.

Two significant groups were characterized by distinctions made in the results of the

second survey. The first group is "lay people," and the second is "leaders;" the former included

the general population, non-Christians, and non-church members, and the latter included

ministers and community leaders. The survey results that best reflected those divisions related to

identifying community problems and deciding what extent the church should be involved in

fixing them.

A correlation permeated the survey's conclusions about the Appalachian community, and

it can be clearly seen when the survey looks at measuring potential problems. The basic

correlation is that the number of identifiable problems increased according to each group. For

example, lay people did not find as many community problems as leaders did. Subsequently,

leaders saw both more and different problems than lay people, and all of the groups had different

ideas about what solutions would be the best. When asked to "consider the major problems

facing this community," there was a marked difference between lay people and ministers.

Looking first at lay people's responses, 33 percent were unsure if there were any problems or

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[13] Brewer, 17-21. The first part of the book, "Home Missions in the Mountain," identified religious characteristics of Appalachians as indicated by the survey.

saw none, 33 percent named only one, and 33 percent named two or more problems. Interestingly, 50 percent of non-Christians saw no problems within the community. This was in stark contrast to the response given by ministers and leaders, nearly 75 percent of whom named two or more problems.

The problems that were identified in the survey offer an interesting perspective into how Appalachia was understood, especially in regard to possible problems and potential solutions. While the percentages on what group identified which problems were not available, the general frequency and identified problems were provided. Starting with the least-frequent problem identified they are as follows: marriage and family life; drinking and personal immorality; political problems including law enforcement, crime, delinquency, etc.; lack of adequate school facilities; lack of social and recreational facilities in the community; religious problems including inadequate church buildings, programs, etc.; economic problems including job opportunities, income, etc.; and general community-wide types of problems including lack of adequate community organization, lack of community spirit, problems with physical facilities such as roads, etc.[14] Some of these problems fell clearly in the realm of religious issues and could be addressed by home missions and various denominational interests. However, several of these problems were generic community issues that were unrelated to religious matters and could be seen in most typical communities across the nation. It would be interesting to see the percentages on which groups were identifying as the most pressing problems, but they were not provided.

Looking at the percentages that are present is very beneficial. Essentially, the ministers and leaders saw Appalachian communities as being in dire need of fixing, whereas much of the lay population saw few problems. These different points of view are even more critical when it comes to identifying organizations that were either working with these problems or able to work

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[14] Brewer, 22.

with them. When proposing solutions, the division between lay people and leaders was just as evident as it was when perceiving problems. The role of churches was an integral part of solutions for ministers. However non-Christians did not know of any church actions that had been taken in the community, and three-fifths of lay people and non-Church members either did not know what churches could do or thought that they could do nothing. Leaders and ministers thought that churches should play the most important role, but they were only about 33 percent of the total; an equal percentage thought that political or civic organizations were the most important institutions.[15]

The results of the second survey were illuminating. Many Appalachians were allowed to have a say in how they identified their community, its problems, and what role the church should play. Ministers and community leaders were also allowed to have a large hand in identifying those same issues. Church leaders' views on community problems and solutions were in line with survey administrators. Their definition would therefore be accepted even though it was not necessarily the majority opinion; the input of non-Protestant church members was marginalized. Although Protestant Christianity was the majority religion in Appalachia, it did not necessarily mean that there was a majority voice on what role it should play in the community, and it definitely did not dictate the definition of community problems to all Appalachians. A majority of both Protestant and non-Protestant Appalachians, church-goers or not, did not perceive many community problems and did not see what role churches could or should play in addressing what problems did exist. However, the impact of the survey's results came from the definitions and characterizations provided by the ministers and leaders which would result in a missionary movement in the following decade.

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[15] Brewer, 22-25. The data used in this and the preceding paragraphs were taken from the summary listed on these page numbers in Brewer's study.

The second survey had a more profound impact in the region. The 1931 survey was reported to the Home Mission Council, and the Council and other groups continued to engage in missionary work in the region. However, no new significant action was taken. When the 1958 survey results were published there was a greater sense of urgency among church organizations. Appalachia was described in the same terms as it was at the turn of the century. After the results were published numerous councils, meetings, and lectures were held to identify Appalachia's problems; by 1965 the Commission on Religion in Appalachia was formed and presented as the best possible solution.

During the post-survey meetings that would form into the Commission, there was an examination of the relationship between Appalachian churches and minority populations. Unlike the original survey, minority populations were examined in 1958. This issue was addressed in a lecture on "The Rural Church and Minority Groups," given by Reverend O. Worth May. In his lecture, he spoke of what he called his "limited experience with minority groups in the church," saying that contact with minority groups was an issue that rural churches did not have in the past. The largest minority group that he identified was African-Americans, and although they resided within the community, white and black congregations seldom intermingled.[16]

With the idea in mind that interactions with minority groups within the church were new to Appalachia, May reasoned that there were three major obstacles to solving them. The first problem was that communication between the groups was poor. He relied heavily on using African-American relationships with white people as an example, and understandably so. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, civil rights was a dominant issue that had to be addressed and dealt

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[16] O. Worth May, "The Rural Church and Minority Groups." n.d:1-7. Records of the S. Appalachian Studies (1962 survey), Box 91, Folder 15-Religious Lectures. B.C. Special occasions such as weddings and funerals would occasionally see white people attending African-American churches and vice versa; it was definitely not the normal circumstance.

with, especially in Appalachia and the U. S. South in general. He also acknowledged the gradual increase of Greeks, Syrians, Russians, Chinese, and Japanese into rural Appalachian churches. When May asked members of a small town congregation about their contact with minority groups—"Educated Negros" in particular—only two in forty said they had had any contact. May concluded that the best chance for improved communication was increased contact.[17]

There were two other problems that May addressed; the first was ignorance and prejudice among both the majority and minority groups, and the second was impatience.[18] May sees ignorance and prejudice from both sides towards each other. He defines impatience as both the desire to accomplish too much too quickly in changing social and cultural patterns as well as impatience with any program that dealt effectively with the problems of desegregation. The two-part solution that May offered is significant because it was echoed in the efforts of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, which emerged shortly after May gave his lecture.

May suggested that the first step should be to make plans to improve communication between minority and majority groups; the second should be to seek concerted action. He stressed denominational unity based on an interdenominational clergy meeting.[19] He also stressed the importance of leaders of groups and churches of both majority and minority groups to be at the forefront at building better communication, thus building a better community. As soon as the leaders organized, lay efforts would follow, and after denominational unity was obtained then groups such as the Council of Church Women and the United Christian Youth

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[17] May, 2-3. May concludes that since "rural areas do not offer a living to educated Negroes, there are even fewer people in rural churches who have had contact with educated, cultured Negroes. The more such contacts we have, the better chance there is for effective communication."

[18] May, 3-4. May is effectively showing that both the majority and minority groups have symptoms of impatience.

[19] May does not name the meeting. He refers to the meeting as "a meeting of 300 southern clergy which met in Tennessee."

Movement would follow and begin to help. Interdenominational events were also proposed as a way to encourage unity.

May closed his lecture with an interesting quote from an English theologian: "I am not one to speak on the Negro problem, for I am an Englishman living in New York. But if labor unions solve this problem and the Church does not, labor unions will become the new redemptive society." This epitomized the fear that May had for the condition of the church in the wake of a changing Appalachia. May saw that Appalachia was changing, but his sole concern was ensuring that the church would change with it so that the church's presence could be preserved.[20]

Interestingly, May was the reverend of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Beckley, West Virginia, which was one of the major centers for Judaism in Appalachia in the early 1900s. Although the city's Jewish population fluctuated over the decades, it still maintained a Jewish presence in the 1960s. This is an example of some of the surveys' shortcomings in terms of understanding Appalachia and the ineffectiveness of transplanting data universally across the region; with its focus on missionary aspects and rural areas it can overlook some of the impact that non-Protestant church members were having in the community, especially in non-rural areas. If you look at the 1931 data and say that 2 percent of Appalachia is non-Protestant, defined predominantly as Catholic and Jewish, that hurts regions such as Beckley, which had upwards of 10 to 15 percent Jewish population in the early 1900s. Towns like Beckley were easily overlooked in the 1931 survey which focused solely on rural areas, but trying to understand Appalachia without considering its urban centers was a flawed approach that failed to capture the complex dynamics of the region.

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[20] May, 3-7.

There was a slight nod to a Jewish presence in the second survey. In a religious attitude and opinion questionnaire that was part of the survey, there were references to ministers as well as Rabbis.[21] This brief acknowledgement signifies that there was at least some notice of a Jewish presence, but its location was not identified and its impact was not examined. Non-Protestant church members of rural communities did not get a chance to voice their opinion in the questionnaire, either. The questionnaire itself was based solely on fundamental Protestant beliefs. The questionnaire categorized "lay denominations" and its style minimized the impact of non-Protestant religious voices. For example, it would ask about an aspect of Protestant belief such as the authority of the Bible or the relationship of Jesus to God, and there would only be three answer choices: agree, disagree, or undecided.[22]

There are two negative consequences to using a questionnaire of this sort. First, any non-Protestant presence would be diminished and subsequently unable to contribute to the religious understanding of Appalachians. Second, limiting the survey to rural areas created a certain image of Appalachia; it also allowed a mission effort in the region to seem more necessary. Based on the questionnaire's design it functioned more to measure Protestantism in rural areas instead of the religious traits of the entire region, and any voice that did not answer in line with Protestant beliefs would register as non-Protestant. Therefore, if the questionnaire was going out even to a few members of non-Protestant Appalachia, their answers would help skew the results to a Protestant stronghold that was deteriorating with a population that was losing touch with its religious beliefs. A particular religious and social identity emerged; based on the methodology, the surveys ensured the need for missionaries into the region.

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[21] "Religious Attitudes and Opinions Survey." n.d. There were also references that signified the presence of Catholics. Religion of Appalachia Study Collection, Box 94-5, Series V-Religion.
[22] "Religious Attitudes and Opinions Survey."

The two twentieth century religious surveys of Appalachia helped portray the region as a homogenous, declining Protestant region in need of reform, missionaries, and "saving." The first survey laid the foundation of the region's identity as largely rural and backward, while the second reaffirmed those notions and paved the way for mission work that would come in the region in the 1960s. The limited focus and over generalization of the surveys were detrimental to Appalachia's actual complexities. The survey results provided an incomplete understanding of the region because they did not include urban areas. The imagery created by these surveys was used to spearhead a mission movement in the 1960s. The Commission on Religion in Appalachia would be formed in 1965, inspired by the ideas of men like Willis Weatherford, O. Worth May, and Earl Brewer. Since CORA would operate in the same parameters as the religious surveys, the same shortcomings would be present.

CHAPTER 3

THE COMMISSION ON RELIGION IN APPALACHIA

The Appalachian religious surveys of the twentieth century reinforced the backwards and

isolated image of Appalachia that was popularly perpetuated by color writers and missionaries in

the late 1800s and early 1900s. Missionary interest in Appalachia renewed after the second

survey was completed, and in 1965 the Commission on Religion in Appalachia was formed. The

Commission's main goals were to bolster the role of the church in Appalachia, update and

improve the economy and economic conditions in the region, and ultimately act as the tool that

would finally update Appalachia with the rest of the contemporary United States. However, the

Commission resembled previous Appalachian missionaries, and CORA's mission work was

based on the image of a rural, homogenous Appalachia that had been reinforced by the survey

results.

Upon the completion of the second survey, two key figures emerged in promoting the

need for updated mission work in Appalachia: Earl Brewer and Willis D. Weatherford. Brewer

and Weatherford were Appalachian scholars and their work on the region in the mid-1950s and

subsequent efforts to summarize the results of the religious survey put them at the forefront of

leading a new wave of outside mission interest into the region. Their work directly impacted the

organization of CORA's mission efforts in the 1960s.

Brewer was influential because he published the second religious survey's results in

Religion and Church Life in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. He offered his personal

conclusion that churches should take the lead role in fixing Appalachia's religious and

community problems. He suggested that each denomination that had a presence in the region

needed to take its own approach based on the survey's findings because he could not envision an

interdenominational coalition that could cooperate enough to tackle the region's issues. He did

stress that there should be cooperation among religious groups, and it is that suggestion that was

at the heart of CORA. Although Brewer did not think it could succeed, he nevertheless can be

credited with many of the suggestions that led to that group's formation and the definition of its

mission.[1]

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Brewer referred to Appalachia as a heterogeneous

region, describing it as a "land of contrasts" between urban and rural, modern and old, science

and folk beliefs. He retained some of the old descriptions such as the "last frontier" but he also

saw it as a region that was changing and, with the help of outside groups, one that could be a part

of the American mainstream. He emphasized the notion that outside help was important, but it

would ultimately be up to Appalachians to complete the transition to be a part of that

mainstream. "Outside programs and pressures can help or hinder, can be received with open

minds and arms or resisted with closed minds and fists. Yet, in the long run, only the mountain

people themselves can change their churches and culture."[2] He thought the best course of action

was to have outside interests manifest themselves through the ministers and community leaders

so that Appalachians themselves were making the effort, but their ideas and training would still

be coming from outside groups.

Brewer's impact was significant, but Willis Weatherford was the most integral figure in

CORA's formation. The efforts he took with the 1950s surveys and his subsequent publications

provided the justification for mission work in the region. He characterized Appalachia in the

same terms that were used in the early 1900s, describing the region as a poor, rural, fallen

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[1] Earl Brewer, *Religion and Church Life in the Southern Appalachian Mountains*: 101-105.
[2] Brewer 102.

Protestant stronghold in need of serious attention. Weatherford's language would be used again during CORA's infancy.

Weatherford's importance began immediately when he both proposed and administered the second surveys with funding provided by the Ford Foundation. He then collaborated with Brewer and they released *Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia* following Brewer's publication of the religious survey. In the collaborative effort Brewer examined the religious impact of the survey and Appalachia going forward while Weatherford looked at the Appalachia of that present and past. They both concluded that an outside presence was needed to help bring Appalachia up to the rest of America.

Weatherford examined some of the recent trends in medicine, economics, and education, and he saw a depleted region that was overpopulated and under-resourced. One of his proposals was an encouragement of out-migration to decrease population, then farm expansion to increase production. He saw the economic struggles of the region and the need to commute—sometimes outside of the region—as the source of Appalachia's problems. Weatherford's picture of Appalachia and his definition of its problems coincided with Brewer's, and their combined conclusions laid the intellectual groundwork of CORA and its goals for the region in the following decade.[3]

Weatherford was the prominent figure because he also established the link from the surveys to the organization. He administered the second survey which was used as the basis for establishing the need for renewed Appalachian missions. He worked tirelessly to promote that need after the results were published. The Ford Foundation funded the second survey and lobbied for its staff to work closely with Weatherford because they shared many of his ideas. After

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[3] W.D. Weatherford and Earl Brewer, *Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia*. This and the preceding paragraph provide a general overview of this work.

CORA was founded, the Ford Foundation helped fund some of the Commission's proposals. [4]

Thus, the Commission's interests were closely tied to its outside funding during its inception.

Weatherford was influenced by twentieth century mission efforts, most notably the Southern Mountain Workers Conference (SMWC). By the start of the twentieth century missionaries and industrialists regarded Appalachia as a region that was not meeting its full potential, and groups began to come into the region to take advantage of the vast stores of resources such as coal and timber. In 1913, an interdenominational uplift group called the Southern Mountain Workers Conference was founded. Their objective was to encourage cooperation among the competing uplift organizations working in Appalachia including mountain schools and church mission boards.

In the early 1900s, John C. Campbell's travels laid the groundwork for the Conference. His trip was funded by the Sage Foundation and his purpose was to write about the social and economic conditions of Appalachia. He focused on rural areas, and he concluded that there was a need to ease Appalachian isolation from both themselves and the outside world. Campbell planned with John Glenn and the Women's Christian Temperance Union to organize an interdenominational federation of mountain workers.

The Conference had its inaugural meeting on April 24, 1913, in Atlanta's Fourth Avenue Baptist Church. Participating members included representatives of several Protestant denominations as well as uplift workers from mountain schools and organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union. At this first meeting, the group discussed social and

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[4] George M. Stephens, Jr. "Appalachian Problems and Program Recommendations: a Report to the Ford Foundation" (September 28, 1967): 8-9. CORA Vertical File (CORA), East Tennessee State University Archives of Appalachia (AA).

economic conditions that were plaguing the region. They decided that the SMWC should be at the forefront of addressing and correcting Appalachia's problems.[5]

Campbell thought that the Conference would work best as a collaboration that would rely on its members to continually provide an updated account of the region and whatever problems faced it. He did not think that the group should start acting with a singularly defined platform in mind. However, after Campbell's death that is precisely what happened. The group began to have socially conservative leanings and started to act more as a mission group rather than an organization meant to monitor and observe. Their mission increasingly focused on the need for outside intervention to help mountaineers reach their potential.[6] The Commission's actions would reflect the post-Campbell SMWC ideology, especially since CORA was a mission-minded group from the onset.

When the Commission officially launched with its first meeting in November 1965 its mission was to act as a tool to strengthen the church in Appalachia and catch the region up to the rest of America. CORA's structure was shaped at numerous conferences and lectures both before and after this first official meeting. The founding contributors to the Commission revealed their definitions of Appalachia at these organizational meetings, and the driving force of CORA's organization and operations would prove to be the contributing members' perception of the region.

As interpreted by its administrators, the results of the two religious surveys described an Appalachia that needed the aid of missionaries. Willis Weatherford and Earl Brewer analyzed the

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[5] Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*: 2-33. Whisnant dedicates part one of his book to outline the background, formation, and organization of the SMWC.

[6] According to Whisnant, Campbell feared a strong conservative lean for the SMWC from its inception. At some of the early meetings Campbell would try to seek outside council with unconventional ideas. One such contributor was U.S. Commissioner of Education Philander Claxton, who sought to demythologize Appalachia's stereotypes and placed a large burden of blame on missionaries for the way Appalachia was portrayed.

survey results, and they used imagery that permeated CORA's operations. However, John L. Sweeney provided the direct definition of the Appalachia that CORA would work to save.

In 1966 John Sweeney, chairman of CORA's Federal Development Planning Commission for Appalachia, gave a presentation that outlined his vision for the future of Appalachia. In this excerpt from the presentation, Sweeney clearly stated his definition of Appalachia:

> Before even talking about it, I'm going to define Appalachia in a way that I think was suggested in Dr. Nesius' talk this morning. It obviously is not all of the square miles nor all the people that are defined in the Appalachian Regional Development Act, that section of the United States that's up on the map on the wall in there, because so much of that Appalachia is just like the rest of the United States. The great cities of the region, the college towns of the region—they have problems and they are similar to the rest of the United States, but they are not the kinds of problems that demand a special Appalachian effort, and we'll eliminate them from this discussion now.[7]

Sweeney's definition would become the heart of the Commission's mission; its operations and proposals would stem from this image of a rural Appalachia with unique needs.

Sweeney identified two items that he saw as major problems for Appalachia. The first problem was that, with the increased importance of technology and communication, Appalachians were too isolated and dispersed. The second problem was what he called a traditionally homogenous population. Sweeney proposed that progress came through a population's changes, and that the isolated and rural Appalachian region lacked exposure to such change.[8] He concluded that Appalachia was naturally inhibited to foster progress for a population, and his conclusions would be used in CORA's understanding of the region.

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[7] John Sweeney, "Appalachia in 1984." *Proceedings, CORA 1966:* 37-48. CORA AA. The Dr. Nessius reference is Ernest Nessius, the CORA's first chairman.
[8] Sweeney: 37.

Sweeney himself stated that he was offering a secular view of how best to shape the region and that his main goal was to ensure job security.[9] Sweeney's biggest shortcoming was overlooking the impact of Appalachia's urban areas. He acknowledged that Appalachia had large cities that resembled others across the nation, but he agreed with CORA chairman Ernest Nesius that "Appalachia" should not include these urban areas. Appalachia's urban regions were similar to those found in other parts of the nation, but Sweeney's mindset further contributed to the construct of "Appalachia" that had already been established.

Now that the Commission had a working definition of Appalachia, its mission and its goals could take shape. CORA attempted to unify the various denominational endeavors that had permeated Appalachia for decades. The founding members included seventeen Christian denominations as well as Appalachian state church councils. CORA's chairman, Ernest Nesius, stated that the Commission's aim was to "improve the relevance of the Church to the society of Appalachia." He stated that the four major project areas that would be focal points to achieve improved relevance were poverty, community, leadership, and religious understanding.[10]

The Commission also wanted to address "the religious, moral, and spiritual implications inherent in the economic, social, and cultural conditions in the Appalachian region."[11] CORA was designed to go beyond merely increasing church presence in the region and eventually offer economic salvation to Appalachians. Education would be a key aspect to this part of CORA's plan, and education was another area that showed how much Willis Weatherford impacted the Commission.[12]

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[9] Sweeney, 39.

[10] Ernest J. Nesius, "Preface." *Proceedings, CORA 1966.* CORA, inc. (Oct. 1966). CORA AA.

[11] James Sessions, "The Commission on Religion in Appalachia." *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism* (University of Tennessee Press, 1999): 165-174.

[12] Sessions, 165.

In the early 1960s Weatherford gave a series of lectures and speeches on the topic of getting Appalachia to where he thought it needed to be. In 1962, he gave one of his most influential lectures, "A Program for the Future in Appalachia." In this lecture he proposed the idea of giving Appalachia back to Appalachians. According to Weatherford, "we should not think of this as a program for 1962, but as the beginning and demonstration of a program which should continue for many years, until we had discharged our full share of responsibility to the whole Appalachian Mountain people."[13] The idea was that Appalachia needed change, and former uplift efforts failed because outside interests tried to impose their own image onto Appalachia.

Weatherford's approach focused on educating local leaders in Appalachian communities so that they themselves would be the agents of change. However, Weatherford's approach resembled earlier missions. Weatherford was proposing that Appalachia's changes should be initiated through education while local leaders acted as the agents of change. However, if the leaders' education reflected the interests of a mission group, then Appalachia would in fact be changed to suit the educating organization—which, in this case, would have been the Commission on Religion in Appalachia.

Weatherford also felt that education was essential to preserving the Protestant church in Appalachia.[14] He saw education as the key to improvement and that the church could and should play an active role in it.[15] Weatherford thought education should be the bridge between narrow ideals of Appalachia's small communities and the broader, more progressive outside world.[16]

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[13] W.D. Weatherford, "Lecture IV: A Program for the Future in Appalachia." 1-7. CORA AA.
[14] CORA's essential function was in line with uplift efforts and it sought to use religion as a medium. Weatherford was in line with that, but he leaned heavily toward the missionary side of strengthening the church's presence and position in the region.
[15] Lecture IV: 2-4.
[16] Weatherford and Brewer: Chapter 5, "Education."

Earl Brewer thought that the solution should be for both schools and churches to share the responsibility of improving Appalachian life. They both agreed that Appalachia's educational and religious institutions had become "so closely blended with the community that they think as the neighborhood thinks, and therefore are apt to have little new inspiration to share with their neighbors."[17] CORA based its emphasis on the need for outside assistance within the region on Weatherford and Brewer's conclusions.

The Commission integrated Weatherford's ideas into its mission. Their Appalachian education plan was outlined in a report produced by development consultant George Stephens. In 1967 Stephens issued a report to the Ford Foundation entitled "Appalachian Problems and Program Recommendations". Stephens thought that "the development of the people themselves" was a key issue.[18] The Commission's plan centered around a top-down approach, with the top being either re-educated current local leaders or outside teachers who would remain in Appalachia in leadership roles if necessary and the bottom being rural Appalachians who would receive their teachers' vision.

CORA readily administered the approach of educating leadership. In one of their earliest official meetings, CORA incorporated elements of education and discussed the limited presence of non-Appalachians in leadership positions as part of its mission. Max Glenn, who spoke on the origin and purpose of the Commission, stated that CORA's core principles were similar to the principles that motivated 19th century mission work while acknowledging that a change in approach was needed. According to Glenn, uplift, improvement, and outside influence would be just as present as in previous mission efforts; however, CORA's main difference was to have its

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[17] Brewer, 32.
[18] Stephens, 3-6. Stephens describes Appalachians as being defeated, poor, and without hope.

outside interests maintained through the training of native leadership.[19] This reflected Brewer's proposal to use ministers and community leaders with education coming from outside the region.

Education alone would not be the key to giving Appalachia back to Appalachians. The first step was to change the "defeated attitude" of Appalachians and instill them with hope.[20] According to Stephens's report, Appalachia was a region that was populated by the descendants of humble, resourceful pioneers whose spirit gave way to disillusionment when the world changed around them. The Appalachians of the 1960s had become "a people apart whose communities, institutions, and ways failed to adapt." They were also portrayed as people ignorant of the economic, technological, and cultural advancements that had taken place outside of their region.[21] Stephens's portrait of Appalachians as noble frontier folk left behind in another time resembled previous Appalachian characterizations by writers like Harney and Kephart.

Weatherford's and Stephens's descriptions of Appalachia were similar.[22] It was necessary for such a portrayal to permeate through CORA so that when it needed funding or increased mission efforts they could readily offer the neediness of Appalachians depicted much earlier by local color writers. CORA's approach made it seem like missions were necessary in the region. And, according to Stephens, "The stimulus for change must come initially from the outside. It must come from highly-qualified people who know how to get their message across. It must reach the potential leadership throughout the region in such a way that the leaders and followers feel that the changes are their idea."[23]

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[19] Max Glenn. "The Commission on Religion in Appalachia: Its Origin, Purpose, and Present Status." *Proceedings—CORA, 1966* (Knoxville, 1966):15-35. CORA AA.
[20] Stephens, 4.
[21] Stephens, 3-4.
[22] Stephens, 13.
[23] Stephens, 5.

Funding letters provide one example of the Commission using its definition of needy Appalachians to generate funds and reinforce the need for mission work. In the 1980s, several letters were issued by then-president James Sessions that detailed CORA's accomplishments, needs, and goals. In these letters, Sessions described Appalachia as the "toughest U.S. region" and an area with "massive problems." He described CORA members as doing a "deserving job" while being asked "to do more with less." Sessions also stressed empowerment in each letter, saying that many of Appalachia's issues were the result of a powerless population. He stated that CORA's aim was to empower Appalachians and give them a voice. Sessions claimed that CORA was enacting social progress in Appalachia, and he was asking for extended donations to help cover costs.[24]

The Commission also raised funds from members with forums such as 1986's three-day convocation "Not Because You Were Greater in Number." This event was composed of lectures and presentations on Appalachia's issues, including a presentation by James Sessions that suggested understanding Appalachia as a third world subculture within the United States. Charges for participation in this program ranged from $105 to $155 per person.[25]

There was a subtle indication that CORA's funding, mission work, and its definition of Appalachia were all intertwined. Two articles appear alongside each other in the October 1971-January 1972 edition of the *Tennessee Churchman*.[26] The first article, "$5000 Church Grant Aids Appalachians," detailed funding for a CORA project to generate new wood industry in eastern

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[24] James Sessions, "Letters." CORA AA. Three letters, one each from 1983, 1984, and 1989, were issued by James Sessions with the idea of generating donations for the Commission. For each year he described some of CORA's achievements, shortcomings, and needs for continued funding. He also relied on CORA's definition of Appalachia, noting in the 1983 letter that "recoveries have a way of not reaching Appalachians."

[25] "Not Because You Were Greater in Number: a Convocation on Appalachian and Town and Country Mission Perspectives, Nov. 2-4, 1986" (1986). CORA AA. This program outlined the timeline of events and detailed the participation costs. The cost range differed based on number of days attended, meals included, and nights stayed. Sessions' presentation was titled: "Appalachia and Third World Perspectives."

[26] *The Tennessee Churchman* was an Episcopalian newspaper publication that discussed issues relevant to the Episcopalian church and mission work.

Kentucky. The Human and Economic Development arm of CORA worked alongside the Grass Roots Economic Development Corporation and the Appalachian South, Inc.—an Episcopalian interdiocesan agency and CORA affiliate—with the aid of an Episcopalian church grant.[27]

The second article, "Amidst Devastation and Desperation, Appalachians Celebrate Life's Wholeness: Powerless People Describe How it feels to Live Poor," described harsh rural economic conditions in Appalachia. Reverend R. Baldwin Lloyd, author of the second article, could have been an early color writer: he discusses high unemployment rates and the "bypassed land of isolated valleys and hollows" that defined 1960s Appalachia. Reverend Lloyd also happened to be the executive director of Appalachian South, Inc.[28] The second article makes the case for the necessity of the grant and mission work described in the first article, as well as a need for any future endeavors.

The Commission sought funding to help with economic development plans, which was another key component in its mission; communities would play an important role in CORA's economic development plans for the region. Earl Brewer had called for a stronger church role within the community. He felt that mission work was the best way to achieve that goal partially because of the limited network that existed between Appalachian churches and their communities [29] The Commission took Brewer's lead and tried to increase the role of the church in fixing community problems identified by church leaders, although the community that was surveyed did not necessarily agree that there were problems or that the church was the best choice for fixing the problems that existed.[30] That portion of the survey represented the greatest divide

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[27] "$5000 Church Grant Aids Appalachians." *The Tennessee Churchman* (Oct. 1971-Jan. 1972): 2. CORA AA.

[28] R. Baldwin Lloyd, "Amidst Devastation and Desperation Appalachians Celebrate Life's Wholeness." *The Tennessee Churchman* (Oct. 1971-Jan. 1972): 2-3. CORA AA.

[29] Brewer, 25 . He felt that the internal network that existed in Appalachian communities prohibited it from growth.

[30] Brewer, 22-25.

between Appalachians and CORA officials; CORA leaders saw a need for mission intervention whereas Appalachians generally did not.

As executive director of Appalachian South, Inc., Reverend Baldwin Lloyd was active in fund raising. He outlined CORA's funding process as well as the need for continuous funding to maintain long-term success. First, he argued that funding should be used to address basic support needs: immediate and long-range. Immediate support included crises such as floods and natural disasters. Long-range was more relevant to CORA because it included development and projects related to mission work. CORA members would work with other organizations to apply for funding. After the application was filed, there would be on-site examination, recommendations, and reapplication the following year, if necessary. This design would help keep relevant projects funded by an annual basis of reevaluation.[31]

Lloyd argued that continuous funding was necessary to address the complex problems that permeated Appalachia. Lloyd proposed that long-term projects would address problems such as unemployment, technology, industry, etc. and eventually link together to create a network of projects that would address aspects of CORA's economic mission.[32] Lloyd's argument centers around the poor conditions of Appalachians, concluding that several years of continuous funding would be necessary to properly address Appalachia's issues.

The continuous funding described by Reverend Lloyd was applied to the economic development aspect of CORA's mission. The Commission sought economic development through a series of projects proposed by both Commission leaders and member organizations.

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[31]R. Baldwin Lloyd, "The CORA/APDC Funding Process." CORA AA.

[32] Lloyd, "The Need for Continuous Funding." CORA AA.

The Appalachian Development Projects Committee (APDC) was the division of CORA that evaluated proposals and handled project funding.[33]

In 1979 the APDC approved $456,000 in funding for 29 requested ministry projects. The smallest project in terms of funding was $2000 for the Virginia House Coal project, which was designed to decrease dependence on mining and provide house coal for low income households. In addition to funding its own projects CORA also leant financial support to other organizations. For example the APDC's largest allotments were $70,000 each to mountain community unions and the Council for Southern Mountains; the Council for Southern Mountains monthly publication, *Mountain Life and Work,* also received funding.[34]

James Sessions broke down funding percentages for CORA's operations in 1983: 62% went to people's organizations in the region; 19% went to administration, travel, and education; and 19% went to issues and ministry programs within each member denomination. He stated that $400,000.00 had been raised in 1983, a figure which rose to $500,000.00 in 1989. CORA's image of a needy Appalachia helped generate many of these funds. [35] Although Appalachians were benefiting from these projects, so were CORA and its members.

The Commission's economic development strategy also included evaluatory committees such as the Economic Transformation Committee (ETC), created in October 1986. The ETC was part of the Commission's Working Group on the Appalachian Economic Crisis. The Committee examined Appalachia's economic situation and issued a report to CORA.[36] The ETC was designed to plan an economic strategy for the next decade of activity in Appalachia, and it

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[33] Lloyd, "The CORA/APDC Funding Process." CORA Vertical File, AA.
[34] CORA, "A Change to Keep, a God to Glorify" (1979.) CORA AA. This included a list of ADPC projects and funding for the year of 1979.
[35] Sessions, "1983 Letter." CORA AA. He also examines similar figures in his 1989 Letter.
[36] CORA. "Report of the Economic Transformation Committee to the CORA Commission." (November 1, 1988):1. CORA AA. The ETC was created as a response to the report: "Economic Transformation: the Appalachian Challenge."

continued to stress the need for economic uplift via outside help and mission work. In the report, the committee talked of its "wide range of consultations" as a means of testifying to the attempt to make the project as widely participatory as possible.[37]

However, in the section of the report that includes the details of the groups that were consulted, no other groups were described besides CORA affiliates.[38] This particular section was less detailed, especially compared to the rest of the report. This leaves a lingering question about the extent of involvement non-CORA members were experiencing. The Economic Transformation Committee strictly consulting Commission members exemplified CORA's plans to be at the center of Appalachia's economic development.

The Commission on Religion in Appalachia was clearly interested in the Appalachian region, but through its formative years and first two decades of operation CORA failed to listen to the Appalachian people that were surveyed. A significant percentage of Appalachians surveyed in the twentieth century did not feel that there was anything wrong with their communities outside of common problems. That sentiment was similarly expressed during the previous century in western North Carolina. In the 1850s, Appalachians did not view themselves as a separate region with special problems. Appalachia may have had more rural areas than other parts of the nation, but by the mid nineteenth century there existed within it a varied, complex, and vigorous society that was best reflected in towns and cities. Although many mountain cities were smaller than their southern contemporaries, they helped generate the Appalachian region's progress while also serving as a link to outside communities. Mountain towns became Appalachia's strongest force against internal isolation or alienation from the outside world; few

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[37] "ETC to CORA:" 1-3. The report states that "Every constituent part of the CORA family, along with other church and community participants in the region" were consulted.
[38] "ETC to CORA:" 3-5.

mountaineers were so secluded that they did not have access to or feel the impact of an urban community.[39]

There were CORA members who recognized that Appalachia was not necessarily a unique, wholly rural entity. For example, John Sweeney acknowledged that increased urban impact might have already been making changes to Appalachia's economic and social identity before CORA began its mission. However, he did not explore their impact and the Commission excluded urban areas from its definition of Appalachia. Also, in his report to the Ford Foundation, George Stephens's proposed some economic development models that had been used in other regions including the Upper Peninsula in Michigan and parts of Missouri.[40]

Stephens's Michigan and Missouri models indicate that there were similar problems in Appalachia as other parts of the country, particularly in predominantly rural regions. It also suggests that CORA was made aware of these patterns when planning their economic development strategy, which begs the question as to why such a special emphasis was placed on Appalachia in particular. The answer: there was already a national stigma concerning Appalachia which the Commission on Religion reinforced. The Commission did not create the Appalachian stereotype, but they did rely on it.

Reverend Lonnie Hass acknowledged that there were changes taking place in Appalachian religious life and suggested that a reworking of mission efforts in the region was necessary. Like Brewer, he acknowledged more of the presence of urban elements and their potential for changing Appalachia than other CORA members. He also suggested that traditional

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[39] Inscoe, "Diversity in Antebellum Mountain Life: the Towns of Western North Carolina." *The Many Faces of Appalachia: Proceedings of the 7th Annual Appalachian Studies Conference*. Edited by Sam Gray (Boone: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1985): 154-156. Inscoe's description's of urban areas in western North Carolina and their importance to a larger Appalachian and national network undermined the constructed idea of Appalachia based on isolated rural imagery.

[40] Stephens, 12-13.

mission work was not the most effective tool for Appalachia. However, his view of a different mission approach still included the need for outside assistance in the region, and like Weatherford he emphasized the reeducation of Appalachian religious leadership so that they would be able to take up the mantle of reform for themselves.[41]

CORA and its leaders were influenced by previous Appalachian missions and relied on religious surveys to generate their definition of Appalachia. However, they did not account for the urban areas that had acted as agents of change within the region for over a century. As urban Appalachia continued to grow, so did its impact on the complexity of Appalachian communities as a whole. If color writers, missionaries, and organizations such as SMWC and CORA had examined Appalachia's urban areas more closely, then perhaps the popular stigma attached to the region would have faded away. Although urban characteristics were usually left out of Appalachian characterizations, urban Appalachia added depth to the oversimplified vision of Appalachia that CORA may not have originally created, but had certainly reaffirmed and helped maintain.

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[41] Lonnie Hass "Mission to Appalachia," Presented to the Council of the Southern Mountains," (1962). As quoted in Max Glenn, "The Commission on Religion in Appalachia: its Origin, Purpose, and Present Status.": 15-35.

CHAPTER 4

OVERLOOKED BUT STILL APPALACHIAN: URBAN APPALACHIA

In 1965, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia began its mission work in Appalachia. CORA based its approach on the version of Appalachia that had been reaffirmed by two twentieth century religious surveys, most notably the one conducted in 1958. The Commission relied on established stereotypes of isolation, backwardness, and a homogenous Appalachian population, and its own definition of the region did not include Appalachia's urban areas. The Commission's approach resulted in a misrepresentation of the region. The reality was that Appalachia was not a wholly rural, homogenous region. Appalachia's population had ties both within the region and with the rest of the nation. Census data indicated that Appalachia was a more complex region than the surveys and the Commission had portrayed. Appalachia's urban areas included pockets of small, influential Jewish communities that appeared before the first survey in 1933. Fledgling Buddhist communities also began to emerge after the Immigration Act of 1965—which coincided with CORA's infancy—was passed. Appalachia's urban areas provide a contrast to the popular stereotypes about the region, and they could have added dimensions to the Commission's definition of Appalachia.

Appalachia's urban areas had the potential to provide a more complex image of the region; at the very least urban dynamics could have supplemented the Commission and its predecessors' Appalachian definitions. Appalachia's Jewish population—which tended to be located in urban areas—was initially drawn to the Appalachian region by the opportunities afforded in coal towns.[1] They became essential members of their communities, often being the economic powers of their towns. They were also avid boosters, making contributions to civic life

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[1] Weiner, "Lecture at East Tennessee State University" Sept. 23, 2010.

and town development.[2] This involvement made the Jewish community an integral part of the Appalachian communities they inhabited.

Communities played a large role both in the religious surveys and in CORA's Appalachian definition. They both spent time examining communities and the role that they played in Appalachia. However, their examination included only rural areas. Thomas Bender defines community as "a network of social relationships marked by mutuality and emotional bonds," and under this definition Appalachian Jews belonged to at least three communities: their own local Jewish group, their town, and their larger Jewish collectivity comprised of contacts and relationships beyond Appalachia.[3] Appalachian Jews wanted to go beyond being merely an economic and social factor in their communities; they wanted to become part of that larger Appalachian community while maintaining their Jewish community roots.

Appalachian Jews established their communities with the help of "chain migration." Chain migration is a method of relocation in which a person moves into a region, establishes a home, and then brings as many relatives as possible. It often works in stages, which creates links between the new and former communities. Chain migration allowed members to sustain their new communities by passing down their customs. However, they sometimes compromised to maintain community survival by using tactics such as partial assimilation, intermarriage, and interdenominational congregations.[4] Survival tactics helped ensure that the Jewish community could not only survive but would be welcomed by the majority population.

A great example of one such community is the B'nai Shalom Congregation of Bristol, Virginia. There had been a Jewish community of consequence in Bristol since at least 1907, and

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[2] Weiner, *Coalfield Jews:* 189.
[3] Weiner, *Coalfield Jews*: 188. Bender's definition of community.
[4] Weiner, "Lecture." Weiner offered her definition of chain migration and described the immigration and establishment of Jewish communities.

in 1927 this congregation built a synagogue which provided a community center.[5] A series of

letters, telegrams, and memorandums indicate that the funding for this synagogue came from

both internal and external sources. There were numerous letters summarizing donations,

requesting funds from outside sources, or simply detailing the progress of the synagogue to

update other members. The majority of correspondence came from Bristol-area businesses such

as Peters, Lavinder, and Peters (lawyers) and the St. Paul Fire and Machine Insurance Co., as

well as various congregation members. They received funding from the Bristol community,

Appalachian businesses that were outside of Bristol, and areas outside of Appalachia including

Cincinnati and Baltimore.[6] In a letter to Ike Levine, Oscar Levine from Cincinnati enclosed a

check "for the worthy cause." Oscar went on to say, "Permit me to congratulate everyone in your

congregation for undertaking to build a house of worship where there are few Jewish people."[7]

Levine's letter and others like it show how urban Jews fit into the Jewish, Appalachian,

and outside communities that Thomas Bender defined. Like most Jews in Appalachia's coal

towns Bristol's founding Jewish residents used chain migration and their own individual

networks to carve out their own place within their new home. As the community grew, they

relied on their larger Jewish community ties outside of the region. The B'nai Shalom community

also received support from members of their non-Jewish Appalachian community. For example,

the original house for their first synagogue was provided by Frank Defriece, a Bristol citizen who

wound up heading the non-Jewish support for B'nai Shalom. The B'nai Shalom community felt

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[5] "Bristol Jews Purchase House." n.d. Congregational B'nai Shalom Records (CBS), 83, 2, I, Folder 1. AA.

[6] "B'nai Shalom Congregation Donations." On this account there were 23 businesses and people listed coming from Britsol as well as Kingsport, Wytheville, Coborn, Marion, Elizabethton, and Appalachia. CBS, 83, 2, I, Folder 1. AA.

[7] "Letter from Oscar Levine to Ike Levine, 1/9/27." CBS, 83, 2, I, Folder 1, AA.

that there were many non-Jewish members of the community who wanted to help them and see them flourish.[8]

B'nai Shalom's community provides an example of interfaith cooperation before 1930 in urban Appalachian communities, yet members of the B'nai Shalom congregation would not be found in the 1931 surveys because they were administered in rural areas. As a result, they did not become part of the Appalachian religious identity as perceived by CORA. Instead the region was depicted as being in need of outside religious—in this case, Protestant—and economic salvation. However, this example of a small congregation that was allowed to flourish in an urban Appalachian setting before 1930 shows that Appalachia was capable of establishing internal and external links that benefited the region without the influence of outside mission groups.[9]

By the 1960s, the B'nai Shalom community had undergone changes and expansion. To try and maintain their community growth they began to look for contacts in areas of Tennessee and Virginia including Johnson City, Grundy, and Mountain Home.[10] Community growth continued into the 1960s, declined in the following two decades, then increased again on the heels of economic growth in the region primarily around Johnson City where the Veteran's Administration, East Tennessee State University, and the Johnson City Medical Center were growing and shaping the area's economy.[11]

Bristol provides a good illustration how an urban Jewish community evolved over the course of the twentieth century in Appalachia. However Knoxville, Tennessee, provides the

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[8]"Bristol Jews Purchase House." "The Jews feel that there are many people in Bristol who are not of their faith that will rejoice in seeing them establish a place of worship and will want to make contributions to the fund."

[9] Mosques also began to emerge in Appalachia in the twentieth century, particularly in the 1990s. References to Islam in Appalachia appear in Loyal Jones, "Mountain Religion: an Overview," *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism,* edited by Bill Leonard (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999): 94-95, and Charles Orser, Jr., *Southern Crossroads: Perspectives on Religion and Culture,* edited by Walter Conser, Jr. and Rodger Payne (University Press of Kentucky, 2008): 43-45.

[10] "Letter from M. Thorp to David Blumberg, 7/26/63." CBS, 83, 2, I, Folder 7. AA.

[11] "Congregation of B'nai Shalom Centennial." CBS, 83, 1, Folder 1. AA.

strongest example of Appalachia's urban Jewish population. Local historian Wendy Besmann traced the origin of Knoxville's Jewish community to German immigrant roots with the earliest informal meetings beginning in the late 1860s. Early members were mostly merchants and businessmen, and the community initially grew through familial contacts. However, by 1970 the Jewish community went beyond family ties and business openings to expand with increased opportunities such as the University of Tennessee and Oak Ridge, which is just outside of Knoxville.[12] The formation and evolution of the Jewish communities in Knoxville and Bristol were similar.

By the 1900s Knoxville's Jewish community was well established. Many of the Jewish families lived in the McKee neighborhood; a youth newspaper highlighted events for the neighborhood including information on community sales, dances, and lectures.[13] As the community continued to grow members began to form official organizations and congregations. The Arnstein Jewish Community Center (AJCC), formed in 1929, still plays a key role in coordinating and uniting the Knoxville area Jewish community. In its 85 year history the AJCC was a central figure with organized basketball teams, a preschool, and a community center.[14] Organizations and temples helped strengthen the ties of Jewish neighborhoods, and the opportunities afforded by Knoxville's urban setting helped solidify its Jewish community.

Knoxville's Jewish community had ties beyond the city including other areas of Appalachia. Morristown, Tennessee, had a small Jewish community in the 1960s. Many of its families came from larger metropolitan areas, including Knoxville. The Hadassettes, a mostly

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[12] Wendy Besmann, *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: UT Press, 2001).
[13] "Yiddish Bacherle." 1913. Held at the Knoxville Jewish Archives (KJA). Accessed online: http://www.jewishknoxville.org/page.aspx?id=264889.
[14] "Anniversary Gala, KJA Annual Meeting Celebrates Community, Camaraderie." *The Knoxville Jewish Community VOICE* (Dec. 2004). KJA. The KJA has several items on the AJCC and evidence of its impact in the community.

Jewish, female performance group, formed in Morristown during the 1960s and performed within the community at events such as weddings and bar mitzvahs; they also performed at events in Knoxville. The group members eventually moved out of Morristown and reside throughout the South, with two members living in Knoxville.[15]

The examples of Knoxville, B'nai at Bristol and the Beckley Jewish community discussed in the first chapter reflected the impact that urban areas were capable of having in Appalachia, including population influx, economic opportunities, and community ties beyond the region. Even though Appalachia's urban influences have often been overlooked, they could be seen before the Civil War. In John C. Inscoe's examination of cities in antebellum western North Carolina, he concluded that antebellum Appalachia resembled the rest of the South around it. The advent of railroads and the expansion of internal trade during the 1840s and 1850s may have exposed some of the topographical disadvantages of mountains, but it also led to economic expansion and population movement into more remote areas.[16]

Exploring population and population movement is one way to indicate the relationship between rural and urban Appalachia. By 1980, Appalachia's population was growing. The areas of eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northeastern Georgia were among the most populated in Appalachia; these regions also had the largest population increase from 1970 to 1980 in terms of both net and percent population change.[17] Migration from outside of the region was a strong influence on the population growth in these areas; it contributed the highest rates of

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[15] Mimi Pais, "Once There Were the Hadassettes." KJA. Accessed online: http://www.jewishknoxville.org/page.aspx?id=256682.

[16] John Inscoe, "Diversity in Antebellum Mountain Life: the Towns of Western North Carolina." *The Many Faces of Appalachia*: 153.

[17] "1980 Population," "Percent Population Change 1970-1980," and "Net Population Change 1970-1980." *1980 Census of Population and Housing*: 123-138. CORA, AA. All data maps used here were taken from an excerpt of the *1980 Census*, and include community statistics. Each section includes a map and the title will be used for citation, i.e. "1980 Population" refers to the map that indicates the statistics for that particular data.

population growth ranging from 7 percent to 12 percent, with some areas experiencing 21 percent growth.[18]

These areas were at the hub of southern Appalachia, and they included urban areas such as Asheville in North Carolina and Knoxville and Chattanooga in Tennessee. The numbers also indicate how important this urban hub was to the region. If the Commission would have examined urban areas more closely, then their impact and their interaction with rural areas could have been seen. These areas helped show that Appalachia shared similar traits with the rest of the country; they also contrasted the long-standing notion that Appalachia was a wholly rural, homogenous area that suffered with uniquely regional problems.

There was still a significant rural population in Appalachia, even in this southern Appalachian urban hub. While the rural population overall had a high percentage in the entire Appalachian region, it was not such a majority that it should have deemed the urban population irrelevant: the total percentage of rural population in Appalachian portions of states was only 52.3 percent. That statistic included Alabama (40.6 percent) and Mississippi (66.1 percent), which by the Appalachian Regional Commission definition are part of Appalachia. If you take those two states out of the equation, then the rural population for southern Appalachia was around 54.9 percent, which was slightly above the total for the region.[19] Compare that to central Appalachia (Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia) near 75.8 percent, and northern Appalachia (Ohio, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York) at roughly 50.1 percent.[20] There was certainly a majority of rural areas in Appalachia, and CORA emphasized those areas in its Appalachian characterizations and mission projects.

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[18] "Percent Who Moved from Out of State." *1980 Census:* 134. CORA AA.

[19] The other four Southern Appalachian states, rural population by percent: SC (40.5%), TN (49.3%), GA (64.3%) and NC (65.6%). *1980 Census:* 128. CORA AA.

[20] "Percent Persons Rural." *1980 Census:* 128. CORA AA.

Urban areas were often left out of Appalachian definitions, but the exclusion was not exclusively external. Elvin Hatch argues that many Appalachians make a distinction between "lowlander" and "highlander" or "mountaineer." Middle class lowlanders use geographical differences to distance themselves from "Appalachian" characteristics, viewing the lowlands as a more progressive region with the mountains marking class differences. Hatch also argues that lowlanders view highlanders the same way that color writers and missionaries did.[21] The creation of Appalachian "otherness" led to distinctions between mountaineers and lowlanders being more than geographical.

Knoxville is a good example of the potential trouble with Appalachian definitions. Knoxville's Jewish communities made significant contributions to Appalachia's religious identity. However Hatch would argue that the question of Knoxville's place in Appalachia could arise. It does not fit into the image of Appalachia that has persisted for so many years. However Knoxville is geographically Appalachian, and its contributions help broaden other definitions of the region.

Appalachia's religious definitions and patterns resembled the rest of the South. By the twentieth century, economic opportunities and urban areas throughout the South attracted an increasingly diverse mix including Spanish, Asian, and Jewish populations; Catholicism, Islam, and eventually Buddhism began to spread throughout the south.[22] Religious changes within Appalachia became increasingly evident as well, and in 1978 the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of Asheville, North Carolina, held its first annual Human Rights Award Banquet. The award was designed to "nurture the spirit of unity" and "foster quality of social, cultural, and

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[21] Elvin Hatch, "The Margins of Civilization: Progressives and Moonshiners in the late 19th Century Mountain South." *Appalachian Journal, 32* (Fall 2004-Summer2005): 68-99.

[22] George B. Tindall. *Natives and Newcomers: Ethnic Southerners and Southern Ethnics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

educational rights for all people." The Assembly worked to unify people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.[23] Asheville represented a highland urban area that resembled not only its lowland counterparts, but areas beyond Appalachia.

The changes made to U.S. immigration laws in 1965 are an example of national and international affairs that impacted the entire nation, including the south and Appalachia. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 amended previous immigration legislation and removed many of the restrictions that had limited immigrants from coming to America.[24] These changes virtually opened the door for an explosion in Asian immigration to the United States, and Asian communities quickly spread from the west coast to the rest of the nation.[25] After 1965, many Asian immigrants introduced their new communities to Buddhism. Increased contact between Buddhist and American cultures led to a solid movement within a decade.[26] By the 1970s, Asian communities and their influence were seen throughout the south, and from there they began to come into Appalachia.

This influx of immigrants coincided with a growing pattern of urban-to-rural migration. Rural Appalachia, like much of the South, was growing as a result of urban populations migrating to rural areas. These events were not only changing Appalachia, but communities across the United States.[27] In Appalachia it meant that there was increased contact between regional cities and rural areas in terms of economic exchange and transportation; populations were also shifting. All of these things undermined the guiding principles that CORA operated on

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[23] "Thelma Caldwell named Award Winner." *Asheville Citizen-Times* (Dec. 2 1979): 17.

[24] "Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965." Located online at http://library.uwb.edu/guides/usimmigration/1965_immigration_and_nationality_act.html.

[25] Mary Waters and Karl Eschbach, "Immigration and Racial Inequality in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology,* 21 (1995): 433-435.

[26] Kenneth Briggs, "Despite Rigors, Buddhism Continues to Win Adherents in the U.S." *New York Times* (Feb. 4, 1976).

[27] Robert Walters, "They're Migrating to Rural America." *Knoxville-News Sentinel* (Aug. 1, 1983).

and as a result undermined the changes that were taking place in Appalachia—similar to those in the rest of the country—were not being noticed in Appalachia—unlike in the rest of the country.

As Asian communities spread across the United States, they began to impact the South. They brought certain cultural influences, including Buddhism. Buddhist communities emerged in Greensboro, North Carolina by 1970. They initially consisted of Laotian and Cambodian refugees, but eventually locals also became members. Buddhist organizations kept a low profile while easing into their new environment; they eventually initiated contact with the larger community by selling timber and allowing anyone to come to their center to buy firewood, seek answers to questions about Buddhism, and ease any concerns that they had about Buddhism. This informal method of engaging the community in order to educate locals about Buddhist beliefs eased their integration into the city and, likewise, into the local religious community.[28] This is also an example of how Buddhist communities were contributing to the local economy. Although it was on a smaller scale than the Jewish coal town communities, Buddhist communities in the south mimicked Jewish communities of the early twentieth century.

The Buddhist community in Greensboro was significant because it was more than just a presence in the city; they were accepted into the larger community which led to discourse and a merging of ideas between two distinctly different cultures. This cultural interchange and acceptance is the real heart of a cohesive pluralism. Going beyond Greensboro, there are over seventy-five Buddhist communities throughout North Carolina, the earliest dating back to the 1970s. From these communities came contact with Appalachia.

The earliest Buddhist organization in Appalachia was the Southern Dharma Retreat Center, founded in Hot Springs, North Carolina, in the 1970s. Of all the groups in North Carolina, this was the only one founded by native Appalachians, even though the group's origins

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[28]Barbara Lau, "Meetings at the Buddhist Temple." *Southern Crossroads:* 96.

were in San Francisco. The center was founded by Elizabeth Kent and Melinda Guyol, and it grew out of their desire to come back to their home region. The center was not strictly Buddhist; it welcomed other religious groups including Christians, Hindus, and Jews.[29] The initial arrival of Buddhism in Appalachia was brought by native Appalachians who returned to the region, and it was brought to an area outside of Asheville, North Carolina. Thus this community exemplified the connection between rural and urban areas, economic opportunities and population changes.

By the early 1980s, a small Buddhist community was also having an impact in Knoxville, Tennessee. Members were forming organizations and trying to reach out to the larger community; like the Jewish communities, they were largely welcomed. For example, their presence in Knoxville influenced organizations such as the East Tennessee Vegetarian Society which held community-wide pot lucks and tried to spread the teaching of vegetarianism.[30] The initial presence of Buddhist organizations in Asheville and Knoxville within twenty years of the Immigration Act showed urban Appalachia's potential for growth and impact, but CORA's rural definition did not acknowledge such potential. Buddhist communities continued to grow and by the 1990s there were several in and around Asheville , Knoxville, and Chattanooga.

Non-Protestant groups in Appalachia added a new element to urban communities and can be examined against sociological examples of an outside or minority religion in an area. According to Robert Montgomery's theoretical perspective, there is an "in" group and an "out" group in social structures, and the most important factor for "outside" religions being accepted by the "in" group is a macrosocial understanding of how religions spread. He argues that an

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[29] Thomas Tweed, *Buddhism and Barbecue: a Guide to Buddhism in North Carolina* (University of North Carolina: 2001): 48.

[30] "East Tenn. Vegetarians Schedule First Meeting." *The Knoxville-News Sentinel* (Aug. 4, 1983): C2.

outside religion will not be accepted if it is still seen as foreign to the in-group.[31] Sociologist

John Grayson's conclusions supplement Montgomery's study. Grayson concludes that newer

religious components would be accepted if they exhibited signs of coexistence and cultural

adaptation with the native community. [32]

Grayson's and Montgomery's studies help understand non-Protestant communities in

Appalachia. The Jewish and Buddhist populations that came into the region coexisted with their

communities through economic exchange and cultural acceptance, exemplified in areas such as

Beckley, Bristol, Asheville, and Knoxville. The Commission examined communities and their

roles in the region when they were forming their definition of Appalachia. However, the way

CORA described Appalachian communities would have changed if they included urban areas in

their definition.

The idea that urban Appalachia could be discounted because of its similarities to the rest

of the nation ignores their importance: they *are* Appalachian. They are also the heart of

Appalachia's seldom-seen complexity. Without them, CORA perpetuated the image of a rural,

homogenous Appalachia. The Commission on Religion in Appalachia accomplished many goals

such as addressing the low education and high poverty rates of the more rural areas. However,

CORA's definition was ultimately limited and its approach made it difficult for Appalachians to

be perceived differently outside of the region. While it would be inaccurate to say that there was

not a poverty issue in Appalachia, the Commission's approach seemed to imply that there was no

other economic condition. That approach focused all of CORA's energies among rural areas and

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[31] Robert L. Montgomery, "The Spread of Religion and Macrosocial Relations, *"Sociological Analysis,* 52, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 37-53.

[32] James Huntley Grayson, "The Accommodation of Korean Folk Religion to the Religious Forms of Buddhism: An Example of Reverse Syncretism." *Asian Folklore Studies,* vol. 51, 2 (1992): 200-201. Both Islam and Judaism share the characteristics of blended influence with Buddhism.

left out a significant part of the population; urban centers in Appalachia were all but eliminated from CORA's considerations.

The Commission on Religion in Appalachia based its definition of the region on the results of the surveys, and CORA's definition of Appalachia directly shaped its mission. The Commission's definition focused on the rural areas and drew upon the Appalachian stereotypes of isolation and backwardness. Moreover they did not include Appalachia's urban areas in its definition. Appalachia's urban areas could have illuminated both the surveys and the Commission's definitions of Appalachia. Census data showed that urban population and movement impacted Appalachia more than CORA acknowledged. The small presence of Jewish communities at the turn of the century and the initial arrival of Buddhist communities after the Immigration Act supplemented ideas about Appalachia's religious and community identity. The Commission impacted the region with its projects, but Appalachians suffered because CORA perpetuated the traditional stereotypes of isolation, poverty, and necessary uplift that became popular in the 1800s.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Appalachia is not a singularly defined area. It is not a set geographic, social, or cultural entity. Appalachia resembles many other regions in the United States. It has rural areas with access to farming and mining. It has cities and urban areas that act as economic and social hubs that link beyond the region. It has impoverished areas where inhabitants struggle. Appalachia has evolved from the time of its earliest settlers through the twentieth century to become a complex mix of social and economic interactions. However, the Appalachian region still struggles to escape the decades of perception that portrayed it as a strange land with peculiar people inhabiting it.

Scholars have made strides in trying to overthrow some of the mythos that surrounds Appalachia. Loyal Jones has produced numerous works on Appalachia and its religious characteristics; he often described Appalachians' grasp of religious ideologies and theological intelligence. Howard Dorgan examined several facets of religious life in Appalachia including use of media and denominational studies. Deborah McCauley's in-depth and detailed descriptions about mountain religion in the Appalachian region described the influence of Scots-Irish heritages and Great Awakening ideals that permeated the region. She gave a serious, scholarly credence to religious traits in Appalachia and gave insight to some of the rural religious practices that became associated with Appalachia. Deborah Weiner examined the presence and impact of Jewish communities in Appalachia.

The tapestry of Appalachian religious life represented by those insightful works was far different than the imagery used by missionaries looking to bolster denominational interests in the region. Organizations such as the Home Mission Council and the Southern Mountain Workers

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Conference in the early 1900s relied on often-romanticized descriptions of life in the mountains to support their mission work. Writers including William Harney, Horace Kephart, and Emma Miles described a region that might have been left behind by its modern contemporaries. They accentuated the impoverished and rural conditions while romanticizing the nobility of its inhabitants. Their efforts created a popular conception of Appalachian "otherness" that centered on a mix of pity, reverence, and nostalgia.[1] There was a dual need in the American mainstream to honor the spirit of Appalachian mountaineers--their ruggedness, independence, and old-fashioned way of life--while also pushing for outside action in the region to bring these people up to speed with the rest of the nation. Appalachians were quaint; Appalachia was backward.

Missionaries focused on the quaint, backward imagery to promote the need for updated mission work in Appalachia. Missionary descriptions of Appalachia and its population resembled early color writers; their descriptions also did not vary considerably over time. Fifty years passed and Earl Brewer and Willis Weatherford's poor, rural Appalachians still resembled Edward Guerrant's characterizations of uneducated mountaineers from 1910. There were negative consequences to missionary characterizations of Appalachia, many that continued throughout the twentieth century and into the present. The biggest consequence was the overgeneralization of a region and the population that inhabited it. Missionaries in the early 1900s--who were no doubt influenced by their color writer predecessors--highlighted the remote rural areas of the region and provided a characterization for the entire Appalachia region based on those descriptions.

Later, as missionaries revisited the region in the 1950s and 1960s, the old generalizations returned. Appalachia again became the focus of mission work due largely to the handy

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[1] Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind:* 4. Shapiro first introduces the concept of Appalachian "otherness" and its implications.

Appalachian stereotype that had by that point become entrenched in America.[2] The overgeneralization of Appalachia resulted in the region being easily set up to become the focus of any number of outside interests, be it mission or otherwise. Throughout the twentieth century Appalachia became the interest of various big businesses in search for resources, government actions, church groups, and various social and progressive groups; often, these groups were either attracted to Appalachia or were allowed to come into the region because of the established characterizations by early mission and color writers.[3]

The Commission on Religion in Appalachia was an organization that relied on Appalachian stereotypes in its formation. Stereotypical descriptions and terminology gave the Commission credence with its mission work and validation to its formation. While the Commission succeeded with its projects and aided Appalachia's rural areas, it also succeeded in reinforcing century-old stereotypes about the Appalachian region and its population.[4]

My goal with this project was to examine the Commission on Religion in Appalachia's formation and their contributions to maintaining Appalachian stereotypes. Consequently, I examined the 1931 and 1958 religious surveys and the Appalachian image that emerged, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia's regional definition and operation based largely on the surveys' characterization of the region, and the traits of urban Appalachia that contrasted the perception that had been presented outside of the mountains. The surveys helped create and reinforce Appalachian stereotypes. The Commission was influenced by the survey results--

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[2] In *Appalachia on Our Mind* Shapiro argues that after entertainment literature after the Civil War and its ensuing popularity helped ensure that the stories depicting the strangeness and otherness of Appalachia would become the Appalachian identity that readily came to mind of most Americans.

[3] Whisnant discusses the interests and actions of several organizations at length in *Modernizing the Mountaineer,* focusing on groups such as missionaries and federal organizations including the TVA.

[4] This is not meant to be a diatribe against missionaries or their work. This is merely stating that CORA's founders expended a great amount of time firmly outlining their definition of the region, and it happened that their description resembled previous efforts that resulted in a certain Appalachian image that benefited the mission organization.

particularly the 1958 survey--and used them in its organizational definition of the region. The

Commission also excluded Appalachia's urban areas in its characterization of the region and

maintained the rural and isolated imagery of its definition for its mission work.

This project is a starting point and by no means exhaustive or complete. My focus was

mainly the Commission on Religion in Appalachia's formation, operational definition of

Appalachia, its influence, and its exclusion of Appalachia's urban areas. I chose to examine the

first two decades of its operation because it allowed me to focus more attention on its formation

and its original ideas. I consulted a few works that contained in-depth focus on the Commission,

but there was not an overwhelming literature on the organization.[5] For this project I relied on

primary sources relating to CORA and its members, including letters, news clippings, reports,

and mission projects.

I used the other two major components of this project to contextualize my study on the

Commission on Religion in Appalachia. I focused on the surveys to give a backdrop for the

Commission's formation. For the surveys I used source material from the Berea College

Archives, including notes on the results for both surveys and papers, notes, and publications by

Willis Weatherford and Earl Brewer. I used the survey results to frame the context of the

Commission's growth from its formation through its organization and early work.

Finally, I looked at twentieth century urban Appalachia to contrast the rural image of

Appalachia that CORA promoted. I used census data to highlight population trends, and I used

primary source material to provide examples of Jewish and Buddhist communities in the region.

Since Buddhism did not begin to arrive in Appalachia until the 1970s, there is not a lot of source

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[5] McCauley briefly discussed CORA in *Appalachian Mountain Religion*. She described it as a mission organization with national ties that acted exclusively in Appalachia. She did not discuss it at length but she seemed to indicate that it . Loyal Jones also mentioned it in his essay "Mountain Religion: an Overview." He mentioned it in passing as an interdenominational mission organization. James Sessions included an essay on the Commission in Bill Leonard's essay collection. Whisnant also briefly mentioned CORA in *Modernizing the Mountaineer.*

material available; on that section I relied on newspaper articles and Thomas Tweed's *Buddhism and Barbecue*, which was a compilation of research about Buddhist communities in North Carolina. I had a wealth of letters, news clippings, and Deborah Weiner's *Coalfield Jews* for the Jewish communities study.

This study is not a comprehensive endgame on any of the subjects explored. There are many avenues that can be more fully explored. This study can become a useful background to contextualize further investigation into Appalachia's religious identity. Buddhist organizations that increased in the 1990s and beyond can be examined. Islam's budding role in the region would also be an interesting endeavor to explore. Judaism's place in Appalachia at the turn of the twenty-first century can be looked at, possibly paralleling it to its original place in Appalachia at the turn of the twentieth century. The role of non-Christian religions in a largely Protestant region is another possibility. Appalachia has a strong religious history, and it is only becoming stronger and more complex in the twenty-first century.

The Commission and the surveys can both be explored in more detail as well. I centered on the Commission's formation and early years, but CORA's entire mission, its relation to other organizations, its growth and later mission projects, or the reasons for its disbandment in the 2000s are all stories that could help further contextualize its place in Appalachia's missionary history. There could easily be studies that centered on either survey as well.

Geographically, this study is largely centered around south-central Appalachia, and I did not examine other geographical regions of Appalachia in this study. The areas I examined were in close proximity to some of the counties in the original survey. This could be expanded to look at urban areas in other parts of Appalachia as well.

Mission organizations and Appalachian stereotypes are commonplace in Appalachian studies. However, I wanted to frame CORA's inception within the context of the religious surveys, prior mission work, and the implications of urban Appalachia's exclusion. There are elements of Shapiro's constructed Appalachia and Whisnant's motivations for Appalachian organizations within my argument; I applied those to the Commission on Religion in Appalachia. The Commission relied on a constructed Appalachian image and benefited from it as an organization. Urban areas were excluded because rural areas exemplified the common Appalachian construct which ensured that CORA would be more inclined to achieve its goals. In spite of the work of Appalachian scholars and of urban growth and complexity, old Appalachian stereotypes remain in the American consciousness as firmly as when they were first put there by color writers; as deeply as when Shapiro identified them in the 1970s; as much as when the Commission on Religion in Appalachia was formed in 1965. Even in the twenty-first century, the stigma of Appalachia's past is still present, and only time and continued understanding will help continue to remove it.

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VITA

JOSEPH SPIKER

Education: David Crockett High School, Jonesborough, TN. 2004.
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN. 2008.
- B.S. Degree with Social Science Concentration
- Major: History
- Minor: Psychology
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN. 2014.
- M.A. Degree
- Concentration: U.S. History
- Secondary: World History
- Thesis: "The Commission on Religion in Appalachia and the Twentieth Century Emphasis on Rural Identity."

Experience: East Tennessee State University, 2004-2008.
Office Worker, Management/Marketing Department
East Tennessee State University, 2009-2011.
Graduate Assistant, History Department.
Courses: U.S. History to 1877
U.S. History since 1877

Awards/Presentations:
Dean's List, East Tennessee State University
Fall 2004
Spring 2005
Spring 2008
"The Production Code Administration, 1920-1933."
Phi Alpha Theta Regional Conference, 2011.
Outstanding Presentation, 20th century America