



# The Invention of Appalachia (The Anthropology of Form and Meaning)

*Allen W. Batteau*

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**Appalachia has been characterized** by any number of stereotypes, from moonshiners to country music stars. Although many scholars have sought to debunk the images of Snuffy Smith and Li'l Abner, none have identified the archetypes and the poetic values from which Appalachia's political reality has been constructed. Allen Batteau here provides an appreciation of the invention that created and sustained Appalachia in the American imagination for more than a hundred years. Portrayals of Appalachia have united such images as hillbillies, homespun, and hungry children. The unity of these, Batteau maintains, is contained not in their semantic values, but in a common mood of mountain sublimity, wilderness innocence, and the gothic horror of rural industrialization. Like other vivid fictional works—*Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *The Grapes of Wrath*—the documentaries of Appalachia, by virtue of their poetic force, have altered America's political landscape. Today Appalachia is marketed as a commodity in the form of handcrafts, television shows, and the Foxfire books. Yet the symbolism of Appalachia also contains such positive images as Daniel Boone, Alvin York, and the heroic miners of Harlan County. In the periods of reform during which American interest in Appalachia increases—the 1930s, the 1960s, and, Batteau suggests, the 1990s—these positive images will return, enlisted once again in a struggle for America's soul.

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