

LIBRARY SERVICE TO URBAN APPALACHIANS: OPPORTUNITIES AND REWARDS

BY MARK SHORES

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/REGIONAL CAMPUS LIBRARIAN
MIAMI UNIVERSITY HAMILTON



Libraries should strive to serve members of their communities, including groups of people who may be underserved. Urban Appalachians have not garnered much attention in the library literature, but this group of people constitutes a sizable portion of the population in some U.S. cities. By briefly exploring the history of urban Appalachians, librarians can gain a better understanding of the opportunities for reaching out to this population. Historian James N. Gregory estimates that 28 million people—black and white—left the south during the twentieth century (4). The “Great Migration” of black Americans to the north accounts for over 3 million between 1910 and 1950 (Holt, par. 2). Another “great migration” that began in the early twentieth century was the movement of Appalachian mountaineers into some of the same cities as African Americans: Chicago, Detroit, Louisville, Baltimore, Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Dayton. This migration—over 3 million people migrated between 1940 and 1970 (McCoy and Brown 35)—is comparable in size to the migration of Irish and Italians to the United States from 1920 to 1970. While certainly people who migrated from Appalachia were of different races and national origins, this article focuses on white migrants who left the region.

“Travel anywhere today through the south, especially the Upland South, and knock on any door. You will be hard-pressed to find anyone whose family has not been touched by the great white migration, which began in earnest during World War I and continued through the 1970s” (Berry 5).

The following table gives the numbers of Appalachian migrants to selected cities for the years 1955-1960 and 1965-1970 alone (McCoy and Brown 61-62).

APPALACHIAN MIGRANTS (TO SELECTED CITIES)	
City	Number of Migrants
Cincinnati	27,756
Columbus	25,545
Cleveland	35,926
Dayton	23,046
Chicago	41,946
Detroit	50,068

WHY THEY LEFT

The migration of Appalachians to the urban north was hastened by both world wars because of the need to build up the country’s military might. Philliber cites other factors that led Appalachians to leave the mountains, including the loss of jobs due to automation in the coal fields and the subdivision of farms into smaller and smaller tracts of worn-out land (1). Few options remained but to find work elsewhere.

At the outset of their migration, urban Appalachians landed in blue collar neighborhoods in their new home cities and often struggled economically. Urban Appalachians also experienced problems typical to other low-income migrants: unemployment, discrimination, and stereotyping (Maloney and Obermiller 15). Many of them purposely moved to cities that were already home to other family members. Berry says that some companies made use of these kinship networks by hiring friends and family of their employees who had been migrants themselves (118).

According to Maloney and Obermiller, urban Appalachians have been dubbed “The

Invisible Minority” because they are not targeted by government programs geared towards helping the needy, and they are outnumbered by other minority groups (351). They suffer the same hardships as other minority groups, yet they blend in with other whites around them. Interestingly, African Americans who moved out of Appalachia to the industrialized north—many as part of the so-called second great migration—enjoyed a higher wage and better occupational status than other African Americans (18).

Even with some migration back to the mountain highlands, urban Appalachians still can make up a significant portion of the population in their adopted cities. Maloney and Obermiller estimate that Hamilton County, Ohio (which makes up part of the greater Cincinnati area), may be comprised of almost 40% Appalachians, when accounting for third and fourth generations (4). The numbers are even greater in other destination cities for the Appalachian migrants. Wagner estimates that in Hamilton, Ohio, a city approximately 25 miles north of Cincinnati in Butler County, over one-half of the residents are of Appalachian extraction (372). Even after factories closed in their adopted homes, and despite the strong urge to return to their beloved birthplaces, many who left Appalachia chose to stay in their adopted cities even after retirement (Obermiller and Howe 344).

WHERE LIBRARIES COME IN

Libraries located in areas populated by urban Appalachians and their descendants should consider building collections, programs and services not only to serve this population but also to educate the public about Appalachian culture. Many excellent bibliographies created by college and university libraries can help guide collection development decisions. (See the list of bibliographies included below.) Books covering social issues and the history of Appalachia are excellent places to start. University presses, such as those at the University of Tennessee and the University of Kentucky, are prominent publishers of scholarly monographs on Appalachian study topics. As many of the core titles on urban Appalachians were published several years ago in limited runs, it may be necessary to use online used booksellers such as ABE Books, Alibris or Powells.

One excellent example of print materials that positively reflect Appalachian values is the

series of anthologies of articles from *Foxfire* magazine. (*Foxfire* began in the 1960s to preserve the traditional lore of the mountains.) The *Foxfire* books cover a wide range of topics, including making handicrafts, beekeeping, building log cabins, fiddle making, midwifery, weaving and spinning, traditional foods of Appalachia, and animal husbandry.

Appalshop, a non-profit arts and education center based in eastern Kentucky, serves as a superior source for multimedia items to add to a library's collection. According to Appalshop's website, the organization produces “original films, video, theater, music, and spoken word recordings, radio photography, multimedia and books.” At the time of this writing, Appalshop's online store has approximately 100 films available for purchase, everything from interviews with Appalachians about their way of life, to hard-hitting documentaries, including *Justice in the Coalfields* and *Ready for Harvest: Clearcutting in the Southern Appalachians*.

The *All Music Guide* www.allmusic.com provides information to help make music purchasing decisions. Freely available online but also available in print, its strength lies in its histories and description of musical genres, as well as its comprehensive list of the most important artists in each genre. The site also includes suggested best albums of each artist reviewed. Amazon.com is also useful in that its expert reviewers designate some recordings as essential for a collection. Either allmusic.com or Amazon can help the librarian who wants to add Appalachian music titles to the library's holdings.

PROGRAMMING

Libraries that succeed in making meaningful connections to their local communities often do so by providing high-quality programs for the public. Focused programs targeted to urban Appalachians not only attract that population and their descendants to the library, but also help educate others in the community about the important contributions Appalachians have made. Prime examples of literary programs on Appalachia presented by public libraries include: community-wide reading events involving either authors from Appalachia or those that write about it (such as Sharyn McCrumb, Bobbie Ann Mason, Silas House, George Ella Lyon, Cynthia Rylant, Lee Smith, or Adriana Trigiani), and poetry readings of works by Jesse Stuart,

Wendell Berry, Jo Carson, Fred Chappell, and Frank X. Walker and other Affrilachian poets Performance-based programs include: story-telling festivals that highlight Appalachia's oral traditions; shape note singing concerts (a type of *cappella* singing common in rural southern churches); folk dancing; dulcimer playing; and, concerts by local Bluegrass and folk musicians. Other successful programs have featured talks by Appalachian photographer Shelby Lee Adams and award-winning writer Jeff Biggers, author of *The United States of Appalachia*. Demonstrations of hands-on craft activities—basketry, quilting, wood carving, soap and candle making—have been popular as well.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Unfortunately, negative stereotypes of Appalachians abound in popular culture. Appalachians have been portrayed as toothless, ignorant, shiftless, shabbily dressed, resistant to using modern conveniences, and unable to form a grammatically correct sentence (Bauer and Growick 21). In the 1960s, *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Hee Haw* brought this stereotype into the national consciousness. The news media were also involved in spreading the stereotype. Television cameras followed President Lyndon B. Johnson to Appalachia where, in 1964, he declared a War on Poverty. Footage of rural Appalachians at that time focused on the worst of the worst: "swayback porches, battered cars on cinder blocks, barefooted children, toothless men and polling places where dead people had been voting for years" (Jones par. 13).

Cultural sensitivity has been defined by Winston as "understanding and appreciation for cultural differences and a commitment to creating an environment that supports members of under-represented groups and that encourages and supports multiculturalism and continuous learning about ourselves and others" (7). While urban Appalachians are not a common minority in many American library communities, libraries should show the same level of cultural sensitivity to people from

Appalachia that they do to other cultural, ethnic or religious minorities.

Libraries should analyze programs and collections for potential offensiveness to people of Appalachian descent. In the workplace, library staff should avoid inappropriate humor that degrades Appalachian culture. Libraries can also take advantage of training sessions or workshops that address cultural sensitivity. For example, the Urban Appalachian Council in Cincinnati offers sensitivity training for organizations that serve urban Appalachians. Topics covered in these sessions include the history of Appalachia, issues facing today's urban Appalachians, Appalachians and substance abuse, and tips on how to work with urban Appalachian clients. Colleges and universities, social service agencies, arts organizations, businesses, and hospitals are among the many organizations that have participated in UAC sensitivity training (Urban Appalachian Council).

Becoming more culturally sensitive helps make the library a more welcoming environment to all people in the population served, while also improving the services provided by library staff. While library services may be as simple as helping someone apply for a library card, or as complex as making collection development or budgetary decisions, cultural sensitivity toward all, including urban Appalachians, is vital.

CONCLUSION

While not all libraries have urban Appalachians in their service population, those that do have a rich opportunity to reach out to this group. Libraries can also use the opportunity to educate the wider public about the positive contributions Appalachians have made to American culture. Programs, collections and services should reflect culturally sensitive practices and must avoid perpetuating still widespread negative stereotypes.

Mark Shores
shoresml@muohio.edu

INTERNET SOURCES ON URBAN APPALACHIANS

Urban Appalachian Council, Cincinnati, OH <<http://www.uacvoice.org>>

Social Areas of Cincinnati: An Analysis of Social Needs, Michael Maloney and Christopher Auffrey.

<<http://www.socialareasofcincinnati.org>>

Appalachian Migration Patterns 1975-1980, and 1985-1990 <<http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeID=1064>>

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Selected Readings on Appalachian Migration and Urban Appalachians

<<http://uacvoice.org/bibliography.html>>

AppLit – Annotated Bibliography of Appalachian Fiction for Children and Adults – Ferrum University

<<http://www.ferrum.edu/applit/bibs/fictionbibchild.htm>>

Berea College (KY) Hutchins Library Appalachian Bibliography

<<http://www.berea.edu/hutchinslibrary/appalachiaresources/appbib.asp>>

Appalachian Studies Research Guide: Marshall University (Huntington, WV)

<<http://www.marshall.edu/library/guides/appalachian.asp>>

Ohio University Zanesville <<http://www.zanesville.ohiou.edu/zcl/atg/index.htm>>

Appalachian Studies Links – Shepherd University, Shepherdstown, WV

<<http://www.shepherd.edu/passweb/links.htm>>

Resources from Appalachian Studies Association <<http://www.appalachianstudies.org/resources>>

OTHER USEFUL LINKS

Affrilachian Poets – <<http://www.affrilachianpoets.com>>

Appalshop – Whitesburg, KY – <<http://www.appalshop.org>>

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