

CHAPTER I.—INTRODUCTION

POVERTY AND APPALACHIA

"Beauty can be a mask for ugliness. That is what is happening in Appalachia."¹

The Appalachian Mountain Range stretches northeastward from Alabama to New England. This study was conducted in several counties in the Eastern Kentucky portion of the Appalachian Range, in the western section of the Cumberland Plateau. The colorful historical development of the Southern Appalachian Region—with its famous labor disputes, family feuds, and moonshine whiskey—has been well documented by others and will not be a concern of this study.² Recently, however, Appalachia has become well known for a less colorful attribute, poverty. This has been part of an increased national interest in poverty, greatly influenced by Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, and perhaps reaching its apotheosis with the enactment into law of the Economic Opportunity Act in the summer of 1964. Harrington opened the eyes of the United States, or at least of some influential people, to the plight of the poor whose existence persists amidst the affluence of contemporary America. Appalachia naturally became a focus of concern, for it had a great concentration of poverty—the only regional commission established to combat poverty was for the Appalachian region.

Harrington quoted an unidentified journalist's description of contemporary Appalachia:

"Whole counties are precariously held together by a flour-and-dried milk paste of surplus foods. The school lunch program provides many children with their only decent meals. Relief has become a way of life for a once proud and aggressively independent mountain people. The men who are no longer needed in the mines and the farmers who cannot compete with the mechanized agriculture of the Midwest have themselves become surplus commodities in the mountains."³

Table 1.1 presents the percentage distribution of personal income by various sources for the three counties where this study was conducted, approximately 30 per cent of the personal income in these counties comes from transfer payments, including various forms of government anti-poverty measures.

Conditions have been so extremely bad in the Appalachian Region that hundreds of thousands of men have voted with their feet, and migrated to other, hopefully more promising, places.

Total net migration from Eastern Kentucky from 1950 to 1960 was 269,000 people.⁴ The total population in 1950 was 745,000; net migration from the area equalled 36 per cent of the total population.⁵

TABLE 1.1.—Percentage distribution of personal income by type for 3 counties in Kentucky, 1963

	Wages and salaries	Proprietor's income		Property income	Transfer payments
		Farm	Nonfarm		
Clay.....	51.4	6.9	9.2	4.3	28.2
Magoffin.....	41.1	17.7	9.6	3.4	28.2
Owsley.....	25.2	30.3	10.6	3.3	30.6
Entire State.....	64.7	7.9	7.7	10.6	9.2

Source: John Fulmer, "Development Potential for Kentucky Counties with Related Statistics" (Lexington: Bureau of Business Research, University of Kentucky, 1966), pp. 192-195.

¹ Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1962), p. 44.

² See especially: Harry Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), and Virgil Parrington Jones, *The Hatfields and The McCoy's* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1954).

³ Harrington, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁴ James S. Brown and George Hillery, Jr., "The Great Migration, 1940-1960," *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey*, ed. Thomas R. Ford (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962), p. 60.

⁵ Gordon F. DeJong, *The Population of Kentucky: Changes in the Number of Inhabitants, 1950-1960*, Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 675, December 1961, p. 25.