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Urban Appalachian and Appalachian Migrant Research in Greater Cincinnati: A Status Report

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Introduction

Appalachians are as hard to count as Florida voters. The definition of Appalachia established by the federal Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) includes cotton planters in Alabama, tobacco growers in Kentucky, Christmas tree farmers in North Carolina, and vintners in the grape-growing counties of New York. The ARC also counts Orthodox Jews in downtown Pittsburgh as Appalachian, as well as the entire African-American population of Knoxville and the growing Hispanic community in the metropolitan area north of Atlanta.

The ARC defines the Appalachian region as 406 counties spanning parts of New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and all of West Virginia. Because Appalachians are not specifically identified in the federal census data, their numbers are simply inferred from ARC county totals, meaning that the census enumerates many people living in the region who were not born there. The same is true for the use of census tract data to profile Appalachian neighborhoods in metropolitan areas both inside and outside of the region.

Geographic designations of social groups like Appalachians are difficult, and are made only more complex when people move. Migration from the Appalachian mountains has been a demographic reality and social concern in Greater Cincinnati for nearly two centuries. Writing in the *Journal of Negro History*, Carter G. Woodson notes that "during the period between 1826 and 1840...Cincinnati had to grapple with the problem of the immigrating Negroes and the poor whites from the uplands of Virginia and Kentucky." The passage of time makes urban Appalachians particularly hard to count. Multi-generational Appalachian families now live in Greater Cincinnati, and the possibility of assimilation increases with each succeeding generation. Information gained from county-wide surveys is more reliable in identifying Appalachians than census data, but surveys are usually not able to identify Appalachian respondents beyond the third generation after migration. Focus groups, ethnographies, and geographically targeted surveys also provide useful information, but they cannot reliably be used to characterize the larger Appalachian

population. These are serious methodological problems for researchers, but just because Appalachian people are hard to count doesn't mean they shouldn't be counted.

Members of the Urban Appalachian Council's (UAC) Research Committee have studied the Appalachian community in the Cincinnati area since the 1970s. Their primary information sources have been census and survey data accompanied by smaller-scale studies. Even with the drawbacks mentioned above, census and survey data can produce useful and reliable indices of the Appalachian presence in Greater Cincinnati. The strength of census data is its representativeness, its geographic specificity, and its longitudinal nature. Criticisms of census undercounts notwithstanding, the United States census is among the most accurate in the world. Its geographic specificity allows census tract or block level data to be overlaid with voting precincts, agency service areas, ethnic neighborhoods, and school districts. Census data also allow for comparisons among groups; UAC researchers have used comparisons among Appalachian whites, non-Appalachian blacks, and non-Appalachian whites to gain better understanding of all three groups.

The strength of survey research is that it is able to focus precisely on several generations of migrants from the Appalachian region to Greater Cincinnati. In addition to demographics, Appalachian responses to other questions placed on the survey instrument can provide information on health concerns, environmental issues, political behavior, and other subjects of concern within the Appalachian community. Depending on survey design, survey results may also be representative of a large population spread over a fairly extensive geographic area.

Small-scale studies focus on specific issues in particular places like neighborhoods or school buildings. While not necessarily representative of the wider Appalachian experience, they add insight and important information which is often indicative of conditions among similar groups of Appalachians. In the following pages we present a brief outline of the research conducted by members of the Urban Appalachian Council's Research Committee.

The Social Areas Report

One of the most important published analyses that includes Appalachians is *The Social Areas of Cincinnati*. This report is a longitudinal study begun in 1970 by Michael E. Maloney and continued through the 1980 and 1990 censuses. The key findings for Appalachians from the most recent edition of this report include:

- Among blue-collar Appalachian areas Camp Washington, East End, Carthage, and Linwood saw improvements in socioeconomic status in the 1980s. This may be explained, at least in part, by displacement of low-income people by gentrification.
- Three of the ten Cincinnati neighborhoods with the lowest socioeconomic rankings were predominantly Appalachian. The heavily Appalachian neighborhoods of East Price Hill, South Fairmount, and Lower Price Hill continued a pattern of decline.
- The highest concentrations of poor, white families in 1990 were in East Price Hill (931 families), West Price Hill (434 families), Westwood (434 families), Northside

(403 families), Over-The-Rhine (227 families), and Lower Price Hill (215 families).

- Poverty rates increased in all Appalachian neighborhoods between 1980 and 1990, doubled in several of them, and tripled in East Price Hill. Only one Appalachian neighborhood, Carthage, does not have a higher poverty rate than the county as a whole.
- In many respects white Appalachians and African Americans in Cincinnati are in comparable positions regarding socioeconomic status.
- High school dropout rates declined in Appalachian neighborhoods between 1970 and 1990, but the aggregate data hide large localized discrepancies. When Appalachian areas were examined at the level of census block groups, the dropout rate in some approached 100%.

The Social Areas of Cincinnati author Michael E. Maloney cautions that the positive trends in Appalachian educational attainment prior to 1990 may have substantially changed in the following decade. He notes that: "White Appalachians were virtually absent from all the city's high schools by 1999."

The Greater Cincinnati Survey

The Urban Appalachian Council has also sponsored questions that identify first-and second-generation migrants on the Greater Cincinnati Survey. This randomized telephone survey conducted by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati was used by UAC to gather demographic information in 1980 and again in late 1989. Because both surveys asked the same questions, change in the urban Appalachian population over time can be observed. The following findings are coherent with those from a county-wide survey of Appalachians conducted by William Philliber in the late 1970s and published in 1981 in book form by Praeger. The key findings from the two surveys conducted by the IPR are:

- By 1989 one in five residents of Hamilton County was a first-or second-generation Appalachian migrant.
- The median age of Appalachians in the county increased, meaning they are aging in place rather than returning to the region and that the influx of younger migrants has slowed.
- Appalachians were long-term residents of the county with tenures equivalent to those of non-migrant groups.
- The proportions of Appalachians and African Americans living in the Cincinnati part of the county increased.
- Educational attainment for Appalachians improved somewhat, but did not achieve parity with non-Appalachian whites.
- As blue-collar job availability decreased, the occupational status of Appalachians

declined.

- Appalachian household income rose to parity with non-Appalachian whites primarily due to multiple-worker households.
- Appalachians are more likely to report a religious affiliation than non-Appalachian groups.
- The Appalachian family appears intact. Appalachians in Hamilton County:
 - are more likely to be married or widowed and much less likely to be single than non-Appalachian groups
 - have divorce rates that are one-third of those for non-Appalachian blacks and on a par with non-Appalachian whites
 - have a household whose size is, on average, larger than that for non-Appalachian groups
 - have a household size that is remaining constant over time; and
 - have fewer children under 18 in the household than non-Appalachian groups.

The positive family data from these general surveys must be tempered with the geographically targeted census data in *The Social Areas of Cincinnati*. Some Appalachian inner-city neighborhoods have experienced a steep decline in the percentage of children under 18 who are living in two-parent families. Clearly Appalachians are located in all parts of Hamilton County, but Appalachian families in poverty tend to be concentrated in central city neighborhoods.

Recent Patterns of Appalachian Migration to Greater Cincinnati

In 1995 the U.S. Census Bureau made available summary data on county to county migration for the entire nation. The authors of this working paper have been analyzing these data to determine recent Appalachian migration trends. For the purpose of this study "Greater Cincinnati" includes Kenton, Campbell, and Boone counties in Kentucky and Hamilton County in Ohio. The data represent migrants from Appalachian counties to Greater Cincinnati in the period 1985-1990. As such, these are the most recent and comprehensive statistics currently available. The key findings from this analysis provide a demographic picture of recent Appalachian migration trends affecting Greater Cincinnati:

- Number of Appalachian in-migrants = 20,894
 - 79% migrated to Hamilton County
 - 52% were female
 - .05% were black
- Age
 - 40% were 5-24 years old
 - 52% were 25-54 years old
 - 8% were 55 and older
- Educational attainment (of persons 25 years of age or older)

- 20% did not have a high school diploma
- 25% had a high school diploma
- 26% had some college including an A.A. degree
- 19% had a bachelor's degree
- 10% had a graduate or professional degree

- Occupational status (of persons in labor force)
 - 21% were laborers
 - 12% were service workers
 - 34% were in technical or sales work
 - 33% were executives or administrators

- Annual income (of persons 15 years of age or older) in 1989
 - 29% earned less than \$10,000
 - 27% earned between \$10,000 and \$19,999
 - 20% earned between \$20,000 and \$34,999
 - 24% earned more than \$35,000

- Housing tenure (by household) in 1989
 - 54% were renters
 - 46% were homeowners

- Poverty (by family unit)
 - 12% were below the 1989 federal poverty standard
 - 88% were above the 1989 federal poverty standard

With 20,894 people coming from Appalachian counties during the study period, Appalachians continue to constitute the largest social group migrating into Greater Cincinnati. By contrast, African-American newcomers to the area totaled 14,167 while Hispanic migrants numbered 2,187. Nonetheless, because of their small base population, Hispanics experienced a proportionate net gain of 15.5%, making them the fastest-growing group in the four-county area.

Nearly three-fifths of recent Appalachian migrants to Greater Cincinnati came primarily from the Appalachian portions of Ohio and Kentucky. Forty-two percent of these came from Clermont County, which is part of the Cincinnati metropolitan area. Many of the other migrants came from highly urbanized counties in West Virginia and the Appalachian sections of Pennsylvania, Alabama, and Tennessee.

Small-Scale Studies

Major institutions such as the Cincinnati Health Department and the Cincinnati Public Schools remain obdurate in their refusal to collect information on Appalachian patients and students. While the Urban Appalachian Council continues its advocacy with these and similar public service organizations with occasional successes, it is constantly collecting important information through small-scale studies. For example, UAC Research Committee members are monitoring in-school studies being conducted in the heavily Appalachian Oyler School and the East End Heritage School. Another Research Committee member,

Rhoda Halperin, has conducted an ethnographic study of the city's East End that has been published in book form by the University of Texas Press.

An independent task force formed in 1990 by UAC reported that Lower Price Hill children were suffering disproportionately from the neighborhood's heavy burden of industrial pollution. As a consequence UAC, using a federal Environmental Justice Grant, has formed a local environmental leadership group which recently completed an evaluation of the health status of children in Lower Price Hill. The same group is currently mounting a women's health study in the neighborhood.

Conclusion

Despite the difficulty of enumerating Appalachians both inside and outside of the region, the rigorous application of standard methodologies can produce useful and broadly reliable results. Census tract information indicates that, with some exceptions (e.g., East End, Linwood), Appalachian neighborhoods in Cincinnati are clustered along the Mill Creek Valley and spread westward from there. These communities are home to large numbers families living in poverty, and many of these are headed by single parents.

Survey data indicate that, as well-paying industrial work becomes scarcer, Appalachian workers in Hamilton County are being forced into lower-status jobs, and are maintaining their household incomes primarily by putting extra workers into the labor force. Appalachian educational attainment progressed during the 1980s, but Appalachian students in the county were still less likely to graduate from college than African Americans. Evidence indicates that families within the *overall* Appalachian community were remaining relatively intact.

Census data on county-to-county migration between 1985 and 1990 indicate that, in the main, migrants from Appalachia were relatively young, came from urbanized areas of the region, and were reasonably well educated - 80% of those over age 25 had a high school diploma or higher educational attainment. About two-thirds of the working migrants were employed in sales, technical, administrative, or professional work. While 56% of the migrants over age 15 had annual incomes of less than \$20,000, only 12% of the migrant families were in poverty. This contrast may be explained by the relative youth of the wage-earning migrants; it is likely that many have not yet established families or are in the early, lower-paying, stages of their work careers.

Although Appalachian migration to the area has slowed, it nonetheless constitutes the largest flow of migrants into Greater Cincinnati. However, the demographic data indicate a dichotomy between Appalachians who arrived in the Cincinnati area during the Great Migration of 1940 to 1960 and more recent migrants. A portion of the older, more established Appalachian cohort is concentrated in low-income neighborhoods, and appears to be more vulnerable in terms of social well-being than more contemporary migrants. Recent migrants are more likely to come from other urban areas, and appear to be better equipped in terms of education and job experience for succeeding in their new location. The older cohort is large, composing one-fifth of the county's population in 1989, and is aging in place. Although some Appalachian families live in economically secure suburban enclaves, many others live and work at the precarious margins of a changing economy, and not a few live in pockets of poverty located primarily in the city.

Due to the difficulties inherent in Appalachian research and because of the reluctance of public institutions to obtain information about their Appalachian clientele, it remains the role of the Urban Appalachian Council to gather and disseminate data on behalf of their Appalachian constituency. Maintaining UAC's valuable large-scale, longitudinal studies will require analysis of data from the 2000 census and participation in another Greater Cincinnati Survey. Monitoring studies currently in the field and sponsoring smaller-scale research such as focus groups, will allow the Council to add nuance to these larger studies. These will be the tasks of the UAC Research Committee in the opening years of the 21st century.

Selected Resources on Appalachian Migration and Urban Appalachians

(For a more complete listing see the bibliography in *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration* listed below)

Books & Summary Articles (in order of publication)

The South Goes North. Robert Coles. 1967. Little, Brown and Company.

White Southerners. Lewis Killian. 1970. University of Massachusetts Press.

Mountain Families in Transition. Harry K. Schwarzweller, James S. Brown, and J. J. Mangalam. 1971. Pennsylvania State University Press.

Hard Living on Clay Street. Joseph Howell. 1973. Anchor Books.

Appalachian Migrants in Urban America. William Philliber. 1981. Praeger.

The Invisible Minority. William Philliber & Clyde McCoy, eds. 1981. University Press of Kentucky.

Too Few Tomorrows. Phillip Obermiller and William Philliber, eds. 1987. Appalachian Consortium Press.

"Health, Education, and Pollution in Lower Price Hill." Pauletta Hansel, Katie Brown, et.al. 1990. A Report by the Lower Price Hill Task Force. Cincinnati: Urban Appalachian Council.

"Country Comes to Town: A Survey of Appalachian Literature," Danny Miller. 1990. Pages 35-38 in *Now and Then: The Appalachian Magazine*. Volume 8, Number 2.

From Mountain to Metropolis. Kathryn Borman and Phillip Obermiller, eds. 1994. Bergin and Garvey.

Down Home, Downtown: Urban Appalachians Today. Phillip Obermiller, ed. 1996. Kendall/Hunt.

Perceptions of Home: The Urban Appalachian Spirit. Malcom J. Wilson and Don Corathers. 1996. Urban Appalachian Council.

The Social Areas of Cincinnati: An Analysis of Social Needs. Third Edition - Patterns for Three Census Decades 1970-1990. Michael E. Maloney and Janet R. Buelow. 1997. University of Cincinnati, School of Planning.

Mountain People in a Flat Land: A Popular History of Appalachian Migration to Northeast Ohio, 1940-1965. Carl Feather, 1998. Ohio University Press.

Practicing Community: Class Culture, and Power in an Urban Neighborhood. Rhoda Halperin. 1998. University of Texas Press.

Valuing Our Past, Creating Our Future: The Founding of the Urban Appalachian Council. Thomas Wagner and Phillip Obermiller. 1999. Berea College Press.

"Paving the Way: Urban Organizations and the Image of Appalachians," Phillip Obermiller. Pages 251-266 in Billings, Norman, and Ledford, eds., *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region.* 1999. University Press of Kentucky.

Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit. John Hartigan, Jr. 1999. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration. Phillip Obermiller, Thomas Wagner & Bruce Tucker, eds. 2000. Praeger.

Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles. Chad Berry. 2000. University of Illinois Press.

Serials

The Appalachian Connection, a monthly newspaper published in Cincinnati by Media Associates in cooperation with the Urban Appalachian Council.

People's Appalachia published a special issue on urban migrants, n.2, July, 1972.

Working Papers, occasional publications of the Urban Appalachian Council beginning with issue #1 in 1974.

Mountain Life and Work published three special issues on Appalachian migrants: v.44, n. 8, September, 1968; v.52, n. 8, August, 1976.; v.64, n. 4, October-December, 1988.

Now and Then published a special issue on Urban Appalachia, v.8, n.2, Summer, 1990.

Films and Videos

The Newcomers. 1963. George C. Stoney. Board of Missions of the Methodist Church.

Long Journey Home. 1987. Elizabeth Barret. Appalshop.

Although Our Fields Were Streets. 1991. Peter Allison. P. Allison Productions.

Appalachians: The Silent Majority. 1996. Roy Flynn. Greater Dayton Public Television, Inc.

Mountain Shadow: Four Appalachian Artists. 1997. Jane Goetzman and Dorothy Weil. TV Image, Inc.

Keeping Community: East End Voices. 2000. Jane Goetzman and Dorothy Weil. TV Image, Inc.

The Will to Read: Estill Sizemore's Story. 2000. Thomas Law. Voyager Media Group, Inc.



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