
An Exploration of Poverty in Central Appalachia: Questions of Culture, Industry, and Technology

KOME – An International Journal of Pure
Communication Inquiry
Volume 3 Issue 2, p. 75-89.
© The Author(s) 2015
Reprints and Permission:
kome@komejournal.com
Published by the Hungarian Communication
Studies Association
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.2015.26

Cara Robinson

Tennessee State University, Department of Social Work and Urban Studies, U.S.A.

Abstract: By most government statistical definitions, Central Appalachia is one of the most impoverished regions in the United States. Many of the region's residents are low-income, dependent on government benefits, have high rates of obesity and diabetes, and low rates of college educational obtainment. Central Appalachia is historically tied to the coal mining and railroad industries. Many scholars believe this historical bond created an internal colony of company-dependent residents who have been unable to transition successfully from those industry's boom eras or escape the lingering effects of industry environmental, health and economic degradation. While coal mining stripped the land of Central Appalachia and often cheated its residents from access to economic well-being and opportunity by traditional American definitions, Central Appalachians have created a rich culture based on kinship, religion, fatalism and community pride. Today, significant questions arise regarding the impact of advanced communication technologies and the associated infiltration of a monolithic standard for American success; success defined by material gain idealized by middle-class suburban living. While advanced communication technologies are often praised for their capacity to advance education, employment and cross-cultural understanding, in regions such as Central Appalachia, they may undermine the foundation of culture the residents have built in order to survive decades of isolation and exploitation.

Keywords: poverty, Appalachian Studies, internal colonialism theory, digital inequality, ICT