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Making a Case for Multi-Disciplinary Analysis

Matthew J. Richard
Valdosta State University, mjrichar@valdosta.edu

Michael G. Noll
Valdosta State University, mgnoll@valdosta.edu

Catherine Oglesby
Valdosta State University, coglesby@valdosta.edu

Mark Patrick George
Valdosta State University, mpgeorge@valdosta.edu

Tracy Woodard
Valdosta State University, tmeyers@valdosta.edu

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Introduction

"There continues to be a reductive tendency in the social sciences to seek and accept singular effects to explain social and cognitive phenomena" (Gutierrez and Rogoff 2003:20).

"The specialized social sciences, having abandoned a holistic perspective, thus come to resemble the Danae sisters of classical Greek legend, ever condemned to pour water into their separate bottomless containers." (Wolf 1982:11).

"We need to abandon the practice of science as usual. Anthropology cannot be carved off into permanent parts—legal, political, gender, historical, biological, cognitive" (Nader 2001:617).

Throughout the academy there is unease over disciplinary boundaries and disciplinary overspecialization—what Wallerstein cleverly calls "the division of knowledge" (2004:21). The concern, rooted in the eighteenth century split of science and philosophy and subsequent post-World War II expansion of the university system and concomitant rise of "area studies" (2004:20), is that scholars have narrowed their gaze so much that they have become myopic and incapable of providing anything but partial—hence, flawed—analyses of critical social issues (Wolf 1980; 1982; Wallerstein 2004; Nader 2001).[1] Worrisome words like fragmentation, monism, atomism, and reductionism are commonly read and heard as advocates of a multi-disciplined analytical approach lament the demise of academic holism. Anthropologist, Richard Thompson, is typical. He rues what he sees as a tendency in science "to break up the totality of human behaviors into various kinds, each kind being defined by some attribute the scientist chooses to emphasize," while adding that "it is important to grasp the degree to which this naming or labeling is both difficult and somewhat arbitrary" (Thompson 1989:9).

Likewise, historian Thomas Bender glumly recounts the post-World War II rise of the so-called 'new histories' (1986:120) that distinguish the profession—

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[1] Anthropology, my own discipline, provides additional evidence of the division of academic knowledge. Its flagship organization, the American Anthropological Association, lists thirty-eight subsections on its homepage (www.aaanet.org), a sampling of which includes the Society for the Anthropology of Work, the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, the Council on Anthropology and Education, the Association of Latina and Latino Anthropologists, the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness, the Society for the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition, the Culture and Agriculture Section, the Evolutionary Anthropology Society, and so on. We are hardly unique; specialization also characterizes other disciplines as well: the American Sociology Association lists 51 sections of its own (see http://www.asanet.org/sections/Final2011Counts.cfm), and the American Historical Association lists more than seventy historical associations dedicated to various subfields.

the new economic history, the new labor history, the new social history, the new political history, to name a few—and he ponders the continued feasibility of narrative synthesis—and even the relevance of American history itself—in the wake of what he describes as a "proliferation of intensely parochial, nearly hermetic discourses around a series of social units far smaller than either societies or nations" (1986:126). Anthropologist Eric Wolf expresses the same concern when he admonishes readers that "the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes, and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and pieces and then fail to reassemble it, falsify reality" (1982:3). Wolf further inveighs against "concepts like 'nation,' 'society,' and 'culture,' that name bits and threaten to turn names into things (1982:3). Only by understanding these names as bundles of relationships, and placing them back into the field from which they were abstracted, can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase our share of understanding."   Sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein sounds a similar note, lamenting that "amid the reality of an ever increasing degree of complex specialization of knowledge . . . all but a very small number of persons are bereft of a capacity for individual rational judgment either about the quality of evidence proffered or about the tightness of the theoretical reasoning applied to the analysis of the data" (2004:8).   Even the much "harder" scientist, renowned biologist, E.O. Wilson, contends that "the greatest enterprise of the mind has always been and always will be the attempted linkage of the sciences and humanities" (2000:8).

A Welter of Theoretical Possibilities: A Personal Recollection
    As a beginning graduate student struggling to come to terms with a variety of theoretical approaches in the undertaking of social science, I (the lead author) was often dismayed by the lack of theoretical consensus among the many brilliant academics I knew of and admired. Having gone to graduate school in search of "the truth," I, instead, experienced an evermore contentious polemic resulting in ever greater confusion and self-doubt at the very time I was attempting to forge an adult identity. Indeed, every apparently convincing article was inevitably rebutted by any number of critics of varying theoretical persuasions, whose arguments sounded equally valid to me. Were they not looking at the same thing? Why then the disagreement? This was a source of fascination, but even more so of anxiety, and I often felt overwhelmed by ignorance: less the intellectual than the imposter. Not only that, but my own academic department was a veritable battlefield where one was all but forced to choose sides along many possible dividing lines: between the theoretical and the applied anthropologists, for example; or between the biologically oriented and the culturally oriented; or between the Marxians and the Postmodernists. The stakes here, namely, one's intellectual credibility and departmental funding in the form of GA's and TA's, could not have been higher, fueling competition and escalating tensions in the department. As one of my

colleagues observed at the time, "although graduate school is recognized as a formative experience, it is tainted by several myths that hold it to be a wholly apolitical, merit-based, and edifying experience" (Davis 1992:335). The whole welter of theoretical possibilities was at once exhilarating and unsettling, and a significant proportion of my M.A. cohort became disillusioned and dropped out. The rest of us continued to grapple with multiple paradigms until we gradually came around to the party line, namely, that a variety of explanations and lack of consensus is, in fact, propitious, for it is only through rigorous debate that science is even possible.

Staying with my graduate school memories for the moment, my peers and I often fantasized about sending a crew of researchers of varying theoretical persuasions to a single field site with the assignment of assessing the place, its people, and the society's internal and external dynamics. We fantasized about replicating the classic team research expeditions, like some of those we'd read about, including the celebrated Torres Straights expeditions of A.C. Haddon and W.H.R. Rivers, [2] and Julian Steward's People of Puerto Rico Project,[3] both of which were lauded as exemplary field studies because of their diverse research teams and their holistic research design. We'd been amply forewarned, alas, that such grand social science projects were passé; that the realities of research funding rendered them all but impossible, and that the best social science could provide was a well-executed, solitary analysis, leaving the world with a slew of mere impressions, more properly referred to as case studies and monographs.[4] For me and my fellow imposters, it was sobering to learn that finances and the politics behind funding decisions—as opposed to a genuine concern for scientific truth—actually determined the search for knowledge. Still, we clung wistfully— if only in our daydreams—to our tantalizing question: what would happen if you sent a diverse research team to a small village in the jungle—or, barring that, to a town or village adjacent to one's own campus? What might a Marxist, a Freudian, a Feminist, and a Postmodernist come up with? How many versions of the truth would there be—and how much overlap or disparity would there be between them? Wouldn't such an experiment consisting of varying methods and differing disciplinary and theoretical approaches be useful for both students and instructors alike—wouldn't it be a boon for pedagogy? Wouldn't scientific redundancy validate one approach or another, and wouldn't disagreement cast real doubt?

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[2] Rivers and Haddon see McGee and Warms 2008:159

[3] Julian Steward's People of Puerto Rico Project

[4] Davis (1992:342) lists several anthropological traditions that make up what he calls the canon, one of which is that team work—other than that between married researchers—"is a waste of valuable resources; in the interests of knowledge, two anthropologists are better deployed in two different places, rather than in one."

And other weighty questions: Was science condemned to be no more than a series of impressions? And if so, shouldn't we be more honest and call what we do impressionism—maybe even "abstract impressionism?" My curiosity (read: skepticism) never abated; more quixotic than most of my peers, I have continued to fret over the problem of academic overspecialization and whether scholars could somehow verify or refute the charge of epistemological impotence. Alas, my musing has led me to propose the practical experiment that is the subject of this paper: what if one were to invite colleagues from various disciplines on one's own campus to participate in a project designed to examine the extent and the effect of academic overspecialization? The idea is simple and straightforward. My colleagues—a sociologist, a feminist scholar, a cultural geographer, an historian—and I, a cultural anthropologist, will all view and then analyze a documentary film about an extended family living in Appalachia. Briefly, the film, "The Burks of Georgia," is a 58-minute ethnographic film about the Burk family, a working class, multi-generational family living in the mountainous surroundings of Dalton, Georgia. Seemingly lacking both cultural and economic capital—illiteracy plagues several family members; many, in fact, haven't finished high school, and many of the adults are employed in low-skill positions in nearby carpet mills where they earn minimal or near-minimal wages—family members pool resources, like cooking and childcare, and engage in a host of subsistence activities, like gardening, raising small livestock, and cutting firewood to help make ends meet. Their compound is strewn with worn out appliances, old cars and worn-out tires, and cages for the various small livestock. The challenges for the Burk family are made worse by the ever present threat of collecting agencies, the memories of siblings lost to violence, and the daunting attempts to escape a cycle of poverty, where alcohol and daydreams may provide temporary respite from the harshness of their lives, and where family and marriages can become both a refuge and a prison. But lest the viewer think that the film portrays just another stereotypical rural Southern family (read: rednecks), it would be a mistake to label the entire Burk family "traditional" and "conservative." It is true that many—but not all—of them are church-goers and bible-abiding, and some—but not all—family members uphold the value of self-reliance in pursuit of the American Dream, while others—but again, not all—openly question traditional gender roles and conventions. What are scholars to make of such cultural complexity, of such similarity amid difference (Hannerz 1993)? Like other proponents of multi-disciplinary analysis, I believe that whatever approach we take ultimately discredits—or redeems—our efforts as social scientists. So, one question this paper asks is, how effective are the specialized academic disciplines at handling such heterogeneous social actors?

The film was made in 1974 by David and Albert Maysles, Ellen Hovde, and Muffie Meyer as part of a six-part PBS series called Six American Families. A short trailer of the film can be seen here: http://maysles.site.aplus.net/companypages/films/movies/burks.mp4. The authors

believe that the results of this decidedly low-tech, low budget exercise are replicable and enlightening, and that the implications for social science and social science pedagogy are quite provocative and important. It is hoped that instructors and students alike can benefit from watching the film and reading our varying interpretations. Before proceeding, I would like to elaborate, if only briefly, on the history of the structuring of the academy. Then, in the following section, I will describe my method, which will be followed by my results and conclusions.

From Holism to Monism: The Historical Construction of the Division of Knowledge

As already mentioned, concerns over academic specialization are not new. Eric Wolf's view is particularly astute. Wolf recounts that scholars and academicians "took a wrong turn" in the middle of the past century, when, he says, "inquiry into the nature and varieties of humankind split into separate (and unequal) specialties and disciplines" (1982:7). This says Wolf, was fateful, for it subverted our way of thinking about the world as an aggregate of separate nations. Ever since, he says, we've had a tendency to view societies "as fixed entities opposed to one another by stable internal architecture and external boundaries [which] interferes with our ability to understand their mutual encounters and confrontations" (1982:7). Wolf asserts that the analytical shortcomings of specialized study are nowhere more apparent than in the case of sociology. Before sociology, Wolf says, there was political economy, a field of inquiry concerned with the relationship between mode of production and social and cultural processes; or, in Wolf's words, "with 'the wealth of nations,' the production and distribution of wealth within and between political entities and the classes composing them" (1982:7). But with the expansion of capitalist enterprise in the eighteenth century, he continues,

> the structure of state and classes came under increasing pressure from new and 'rising` social groups and categories, [clamoring] for the enactment of their rights against those groups defended and represented by the state. . . . [A] "rising tide of discontent [pit] 'society' against the political and ideological order, erupting in disorder, rebellion, and revolution (Wolf 1982:8).

Proto-sociologists—Wolf names Saint Simon, August Comte and Lorenz Stein—pondered how social order might be restored and maintained. In their quest for a remedy to social disintegration, they adopted a new metaphor; they likened society to a biological organism—autonomous, self-regulating, and self-justifying; in short, a closed system. Consequently, focus shifted to the inner workings of society; to the intensive study of interaction among individuals—in primary and secondary groups, in the market, in the processes of government.

More specifically, they looked at the quantity and quality of social ties binding people to people as individuals, as groups and associations, or as members of institutions, believing that "the greater the density of such ties and the wider their scope, the greater orderliness of society" (Wolf 1982:8). Formation and maintenance of ties of kinship and neighborhood, or group and association, was believed to correlate with common beliefs and customs and lead to moral consensus, hence, to harmony, stability, equilibrium, and the status quo. In Wolf's words, "they asserted the validity of new social, economic, political, and ideological ties, now conceptualized as 'society,' against the state . . . and they and their successors expanded this concern into a number of theoretical postulates, using these to mark off sociology from political science and economics" (1982:8). But in doing so, he says, they severed the field of social relations from political economy; they turned away from concern with crucial questions about the nature of production, class, and power, prompting an exasperated Wolf to ask (1982:18), "has there ever been a time when human populations have existed in independence of larger encompassing relationships, unaffected by larger fields of force?"

In a similar vein, Immanuel Wallerstein recently recounted that the split between science and philosophy taking place between 1750-1850 created an everlasting impact on the social sciences. The medieval European university, he explains, had had four faculties: theology, medicine, law, and philosophy (Wallerstein 2004:17). From 1500 on, however, theology became less important, medicine and law became more narrowly technical, and the faculty of philosophy commenced what he terms an epistemological divide into "two cultures," namely, philosophy and science. Prior to this split, Wallerstein says, there was almost no sense that philosophy and science were distinct—indeed, virtually antagonistic—arenas of knowledge, or that scholars should confine their activities to one field of knowledge or another. Subsequently, in the nineteenth century, social science was invented, "inserting itself somewhere and somehow in between" science and philosophy (2004:73). With a focus on human social relations, there were numerous subdivisions of social science at the outset, but from 1850-1945, the number contracted and generally included history, economics, political science, sociology, anthropology (for "primitive" peoples), and Oriental studies (for non-Western "high civilizations") (2004:20). Beginning in 1945, the number began to rise again with the proliferation of area studies, academia's response to the demand for scholarly inclusion of previously ignored groups, such as women, minorities, and other non-mainstream social groups (2004:20).

Method and Results: Specialists Specializing

So, a priest, a preacher and a Rabbi walked into their favorite bar where they would get together two or three times a week for drinks and to talk shop. On this particular afternoon, someone made the comment that preaching to people isn't really all that hard. A real challenge would be to preach to a bear. One thing led

to another and they decided to do an experiment. They would all go out into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and attempt to convert it. Seven days later, they're all together to discuss the experience. . .(see Appendix 1 for entire joke).

After recruiting my team of scholars—a sociologist, a feminist scholar, a cultural geographer, and an historian—each was loaned a copy of "The Burks of Georgia" and instructed to report to me in detail what they found interesting and important as well as how they would use the film in the classes they taught. In short, I wanted to know what so-called "teachable moments" each identified in the film and how they planned to exploit them. My expectation was that each of us would recognize both similar and, more importantly, different sociological variables, the latter of course indicating a division of knowledge and therefore of much interest to researchers and pedagogues alike. This hypothesis proved correct and the findings are highly illuminating. In the following sections, I summarize each participant's impressions, concluding with my own.

The Feminist

Co-author1, my feminist colleague, is a Family Sociologist and the director of my school's Women and Gender Studies Program. She reports that she would instruct her students to be aware of gender categories; specifically, how they are constructed and reproduced, as well as how they are experienced by the various members of the Burk family. She believes that the film illustrates particularly well two important contexts in which gender is propagated and perpetuated, namely, via the institution of the family and also by way of interpersonal relations. With regard to the former, she observes that like any other institution, family comprises a set of rules and relationships that govern the social activities in which members participate to meet their basic needs. In other words, they come to constitute a form of social control, which by way of value-laden institutional policies and practices, results in the creation of categories of difference. One example she provides is the gendered division of labor as practiced by the Burks. The women are the caretakers of the children. They're the ones who cook the meals, wash the clothes, and clean the house. Although the men interact with the children (mostly through rough play and inquiries as to how "mean" they'd been on this particular day), it is clear that they are not the primary caretakers of the children. Rather, they repair the cars, and work outside the home for money, apparently in return for being taken care of by their wives.

A second example, involves sexuality. Among the Burks, co-author1 observes, sexuality is stereotypical and traditional, for the most part. Nice girls and women, according to convention, are sexually committed to their husbands. They are sexually passive and in control of their sexual urges (if, indeed, they have any). In one scene, older sister Mary admonishes younger sister Peggy to comply with her husband Lewis and to overlook his shortcomings, while reminding her of her wedding vow to honor and obey her husband. In another, Grace avers that "it doesn't matter what comes up, you need to stay with your

husband because the children need a mother and father." The men of the family, on the other hand, are understood to be sexual beings, which, "by nature," are less able to control their sexual urges and not expected to do so. Masculinity was stereotypical in other ways, too; the Burk males engaged in more risky behavior—like drinking alcohol and skipping school—and were seen as less responsible than the women when, for example, Tommy, second to the youngest male, was depicted as habitually borrowing money from his mother. These family interactions lead to stereotypical gendering.

In both examples, says co-author1, men hold power at women's expense. To be more precise, men wield power where it counts—in the public sphere—while women wield it where it confers little status: in the domestic sphere. That is, women get to make decisions about what to cook, when to clean, how to rear the children. Co-author1 finds additional evidence of masculine power—what she calls "conferred dominance"—in patterns of interaction within the Burk household; specifically, in family conversations. She would ask her students to note who starts and controls the conversations? Who decides on the topic, and who interrupts others? All of this "micro-sociology" amounts to what co-author1 refers to as "unearned entitlements."

With regard to interpersonal relationships, co-author1 states that she would ask students to pay close attention to the daily interactions of each member of this family—to look at the "process" of what "being family" looks like. She observes that people's daily interactions with others, and the norms they rely on to define situations, create categories of difference. She mentions patriarchy as an obvious organizing principle of social relations in the Burk family, and she identifies Arlon Burk as the family patriarch. Among other things, he is uncomfortable with public displays of affection, and he doesn't approve of his daughters wearing halter tops or eye shadow. Of greater significance, perhaps, is the use of violence in the Burk home, which co-author1 sees as prima facie evidence of patriarchy. Both women and men, she reports, were not only seen routinely slapping and hitting one another, but the children as well, provoking co-author1 to state that "the use of fear and violence to dominate and control others is evidence of patriarchal masculinity."

The Historian

Co-author2, the historian of the group, begins her analysis with the declaration that time and place are everything for the historian, and she quickly adds that in its depiction of social neglect in Southern Appalachia, "The Burks of Georgia" reveals as much about popular and scholarly awareness of social issues in the 1970s as it does about the Burk family itself. She supports this by identifying several themes running through the film: (1) family as a core value; (2) the violent deaths of two male family members; (3) alcoholism; (4) the role of poverty in forging identity and in shaping relationships within the community;

and (5) marital and generational conflicts. Co-author2 attributes at least some of this collective ignorance and concomitant indifference to negative stereotypes of Southern Appalachia, and says that she would use the film as a period piece; that is, as an example of mid-1970s sociological perspective on Appalachia. She would thereby challenge her students to identify ways it either confirms or refutes those stereotypes. Among the familiar Southern Appalachian or "mountain people" stereotypes, she enumerates the following: (1) sense of pride; (2) fierce independence; (3) a mixture of nostalgia and impatience; (4) bitterness at their fate, and yet (5) resignation to it;[5] (6) a belief in Appalachia as a monolith; (7) a place of backwardness; (8) illiteracy; (9) degeneracy; (10) crippling fatalism; (11) isolation; (12) pathological psychology; (13) hyper-moralism associated with Pentecostal religion; (15) absence of a work ethic; and (16) clannish kinship ties. Importantly for those utilizing gender as an integral and essential analytical method, there is also (17) the myth of silenced, witless women, driven so by the enormity of their workload and the presence of overbearing and often violent men.[6]

In focusing on stereotypes, co-author2 argues that history is made and remade through the actions of people who are themselves constrained or driven to act by stereotypes—in particular, those of race, class, and gender—and she would have students read and ponder historical essays that address the variety of stereotypes associated with Appalachia and the ways in which they inform their interpretation of the film. Co-author2 rejects some commonly held beliefs about Appalachia, specifically, that it was anti-secessionist, antislavery, anti-Confederate and exclusively "White," and she also advises that an understanding of industrialization and the Civil War as the two pivotal events responsible for Appalachian poverty, has been exposed as a myth.

This historical debunking complicates the story of Appalachian poverty by proving that exceptions existed far more often than thought. It also illustrates how mistaken and misleading generalizations can be to any people's cause.[7] As a

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[5] Wayne Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979) 127.

[6] Attention to Appalachian women by historians informed by gender theory is fairly recent. In 1986 Jacquelyn Dowd Hall wrote about women strikers in the mountains of East Tennessee on the Eve of the Great Depression and provided a good model for studying Appalachian women with strong voices. See "Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South," *Journal of American History* 73 (1986): 354-82. Another good treatment on the status of Appalachian women in southern women's history is Barbara Ellen Smith, "'Beyond the Mountains': The Paradox of Women's Place in Appalachian History," *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 11 #3 (Fall 1999).

[7] See the following: John Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Phillip S. Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981); Edward J. Cabbell and William H. Turner, eds., *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985)

means of seeing the film both as a period piece as well as instructive of ways one extended family coped with poverty and tragedy in the Georgian foothills of Appalachia, co-author2 would ask students to ponder and reflect upon the significance of several issues and incidents that arise in the film. Each issue could be researched to discover what has been published by scholars studying and publishing on Appalachia since the documentary was released forty years ago. The film might thereby provide future research projects. It might motivate an inquiry into the ways myths and stereotypes in general survive and thrive over time. More specifically, it might provoke further examination of the ways reality, as revealed by one particular Appalachian family, defies or confirms stereotype and myth.

According to co-author2, several issues covered in the documentary seem to promote stereotypes. Three of note are alcohol, violence, and poverty. Students might question why the number of repeated references to the three brothers who died, and the family's refusal to explore further the issue surrounding the two who died as adults and violently. They might ask whether the repeated references to the incidents come more spontaneously from the Burks, or whether the filmmakers ask questions that lead to repeated recall of the incidents. Students might ask what role alcohol actually played in shaping Appalachian identity and experience, especially that of violence. And they might juxtapose the different ways men and women interpret the effects of alcohol. Is it significant that men in the Burk family discussed alcohol as a source of entertainment, while the women saw it as destructive of family harmony and the chief cause of the violence that disrupted the family's continuity? With regard to the stereotype of economic deprivation and the fated meaning Appalachians assign to it, students might reflect on Arlon's attitude toward finding mail from a collection agency addressed to several members of the extended family. Issues of alcohol, violence, and poverty certainly shape the Burk family, and seem to confirm myths about the region.

Significantly, the Burk family challenges the myths about mindlessly submissive women. Indeed, the film reveals a family dependent in nearly every way more on the women than the men. Among other examples, students might ponder what is significant about the prominence of Grace rather than Arlon as the one responsible for the family's material possessions? Grace is clearly more a matriarch than Arlon is a patriarch. They might note and question what it means that husbands come to live in Grace's house, or in a home she provides for her daughters, rather than her daughters moving away with husbands. Another domestic stereotype the film challenges is the role of children. Peggy's baby, Thomas, became a focal point in the film. A persistent sentimentality about the baby defies stereotypes of the poor, for whom children often fit the model of being seen and not heard.

Finally, considering that Appalachia is known for its attachment to Pentecostal religion, and filmmaker, Paul Wilkes, for his religious documentaries,

co-author2 would ask why religion plays such a minor role in the film. There are occasional references to church, she notes. And tellingly, Bud, Peggy's husband, holds a book and talks about wanting to read the Bible, lamenting that he has neither the literacy nor analytical skills to do so (which provides a teachable moment regarding stereotype vs. reality of both religion and education). But the fact that a religious filmmaker makes a film about a family in a region regarded as zealously religious and covers the subject so little in the film begs to be questioned.

The Geographer

Co-author3, is a cultural geographer who, in viewing the film, sees a cycle of poverty, characterized by meager resources (including a lack of both technology and cultural capital), sub-standard education, and limited employment possibilities. Among the Burks, as with other poor people, this cycle is reinforced by higher than normal morbidity and mortality rates. Indeed, one can't help but notice the respiratory and dental problems among several family members, nor can one overlook the fact that the family has experienced what seems to be an inordinate amount of suffering at the hands of both infant mortality and adult violence. Other significant demographic variables noted by co-author3 include early age of marriage and high fertility. Daughter Charlotte, for example, married at eighteen years of age; daughter Jean at sixteen, and daughter Peggy at fifteen.

Co-author3 is quick to point out that such poverty is not simply regional but rather a nation-wide phenomenon in the United States. A German citizen, co-author3 brings added perspective to his craft and to this project. Like many northern Europeans[8], he doesn't prejudge government; he doesn't see it as necessarily inefficient and menacing. To the contrary, he sees government as a viable means of achieving a greater good in society, a theme that was recently explored in Time Magazine (July 2, 2012). Time writer, Jon Meacham notes (2012:35) that "Americans have never liked acknowledging that what we now call the public sector has always been integral to making the private sector successful," and he goes on to cite as examples the Pacific Railroad Act, which gave federal support to the creation of a transcontinental railroad making the United States an economic and cultural whole, the Homestead Act, which enabled settlers to claim parcels of land west of the Mississippi, the Morrill Act, which created land grant universities and made higher education available to many Americans for the first time, and various provisions of the New Deal—Social Security, the G.I. Bill, Home Mortgages, interstate rail and highway programs— that "set off an economic boom unrivaled in the history of the world" (2012:35).

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[8] The public sector in Germany . . . compared to US ALSO: I cite data that compare the size of the middle class in the US (estimated at approximately 40%) with those of various European countries (e.g., Sweden, Belgium, Norway, and Germany, all of which have approximately 70% of their populations in a middle class).

Co-author3 is clearly struck by this disconnect and by the indifference and prejudice to which the poor are subjected in America. He is miffed by the low value placed on the lives of the poor, citing the lack of criminal investigation into the suspicious death of one of the Burk boys, Douglas, prompted, he suspects, by police indifference. He is miffed, too, at the shame heaped upon America's welfare recipients, which often prompts preemptive denials or apologies from the poor, as at the beginning of the film when daughter Jean announces emphatically that "Mama's never been on welfare." The statement made by Grace Burk near the end of the film to the effect "I was born poor, I am living poor, and I will die poor," leads co-author3 to question the American Dream, suggesting that it is oversold and increasingly out of the reach of more and more Americans, even though American workers are known to work longer hours and to achieve a higher productivity than of their counterparts in the industrialized West.

The Sociologist

If the preceding scholars all remark on the structuring and restructuring of poverty in America, sociologist co-author4 takes a more dialectical view of rural poverty. He begins his analysis with an emphasis on the film's materialist backdrop of weathered vehicles and scattered debris, the family's lack of modern conveniences, and the assortment of dogs, cats, rabbits, chickens, and ducks that comprise the Burk estate. "Teeming with images of dilapidated housing, crowded rooms, dirty hands, the splitting of firewood, the making of the most rudimentary meal, and people struggling to read, the Burks of Georgia puts a human face on chronic, rural poverty." Of the many social ills faced by the Burks, co-author4 mentions "the death of three of the Burk males (caused by post-natal health, accident, and violence), alcoholism and alcohol abuse, functional illiteracy, stigmatization by many of the better off people in the community, in addition to the substandard housing most of the Burks call home."

But rather than dwell solely on what Auguste Comte might have called the "social statics" of multi-generational, rural poverty, co-author4 focuses on what he calls the resiliency of several of the Burk family members, much as James Scott (1987) did in his classic work "Weapons of the Weak." In short, marginalized social actors aren't simply passive in the face of exploitation; rather they find ways to resist dominance. By introducing human agency into the discussion, co-author4 provides a more effective model of historical change—what Comte referred to as social dynamics: "As for the power and resiliency of family, the Burks of Georgia also illustrates how poor people both cope with and construct meaning out of their reality in order to negotiate their station in life and continue on. The ability to employ such "resistance strategies" is long documented in sociology. Ranging from what is seen as "laziness" or "foot-dragging" in the workplace and on jobs that lack incentives or advancement to overt acts of rebellion, humans are rarely passive when faced with adversity and

inhuman circumstances. The Burks are no different. That humanity and resilience pervades the actions and voices of the Burk women and men. It is also evident in the humor that viewers witness between Burk siblings and Burk couples as they joke and poke fun at one another throughout the film. In the face of limited avenues of escape and the pressures of persistent poverty there is little doubt they cope and clearly love one another. Additional coping strategies range from the raising of animals for subsistence to the use of alcohol to alleviate frustration and weariness. As one Burk male explains, "I'll tell you the truth, I think if I didn't get drunk once an a while I'd just go crazier than the devil cause I just have so much on me."

Moreover, co-author4 continues, the Burks move beyond merely "getting by" to "constructing a reality that soothes the sting of economic struggle." According to co-author4, "that reality is most strongly heard and felt in the presence and voice of the matriarch Grace Burk as she defends her life and ability to 'make it' even in the worst of times. It is also heard in her daughter's declaration at the onset of the film that her mother always managed to have at least 'gravy and bread' on the table in the toughest of times and had too much pride to ever accept 'welfare.' Moreover, in Grace Burk's mind real wealth does not simply involve being rich and saturated with material possessions. Her reality is different and her family is her wealth. As she succinctly states near the end of the film, 'I was born poor, I live poor and I guess I'll die poor, and I don't want none of those big riches, big finery. . . . Yeah I'm glad with what I got, I got all the kids around me, that's enough to live for'. . ."

Co-author4 concludes that the film provides an ideal opportunity to teach about class, class formation, and social stratification. He repeatedly refers to the South's wider political economy and socio-economic system that keeps financial and cultural capital in the hands of an already privileged elite, which perpetuates itself and a disproportionately large underclass: "As an area once targeted by northern textile industrialists because of the availability of cheap and poor uneducated labor, along with the pervasive southern hostility toward organized labor unions, there is a bigger context behind the Burks situation, one the film fails to touch on. With that in mind, it may be easy for viewers/students to "blame the victim" if they reduce the Burk's situation solely to the "choices" of Burk family members without any reflection on the region and what other choices are/were available to them."

The Anthropologist

Early in my teaching career, I discovered that basic concepts like culture, society, nation, state, self, institution, and mind, are viewed as discrete entities by many undergraduates. Unconnected, they remain abstract and nonproductive concepts to the would-be critical thinker. This constitutes a major failure to this educator, for not only does their inability to connect these important abstractions

undermine students' ability to participate effectively in the democratic process, it also restricts how they experience themselves as persons. Not knowing how social systems work, they often don't know where they stand on important issues. This ambivalence makes for an identity crisis, for it breeds anxiety, frustration, and indifference. I feel strongly that anthropology, with its emphases on meanings and "making sense" provides a vital corrective to the psychological confusion and political apathy wrought by the western academy's extensive division of knowledge. In my classes, therefore, I strive to make students aware of the links between culture—defined as ideas, beliefs, and values—and social structure. I want them to grasp that when beliefs are enacted—when they are put into practice—a corresponding and distinct social pattern or structure is created; that, in other words, "French-ness" and France are two sides of the same coin, as are "Masai-ness" and Masai-land, or even "Disney-ness" and Disneyland. Put yet another way, culture is instantiated in society, and society, in turn, substantiates culture. Here it's vital to point out to students that decision-making consists of conforming to or defying cultural assumptions and expectations, and that either choice is historically significant, for conformity reproduces society, while defiance has the potential to alter it. Accordingly, each of us is a social actor playing a role in the making or remaking of history.

Like my co-authors, when I view The Burks of Georgia I see a depiction of what it means to be poor in America—exactly what I would expect from an ethnographic film: the dire material conditions, the squalor, the working class aesthetic, the lack of opportunity, the illiteracy, the ignorance, the poor diet, the missing teeth and sickly gums, the wheezing and coughing, the indebtedness, the demeaning ridicule by some of the more fortunate, the political powerlessness. Beyond all of this, I see the national disgrace of a deficient social safety net, notwithstanding the many shibboleths attesting to America's greatness. And I see evidence of a dismaying false consciousness, manifest in the ways the Burks have internalized the familiar neoliberal (or Tea Party) economic discourse that espouses self-reliance and small government, while stigmatizing poverty as a character flaw. Like co-author3, I caution skepticism of the American Dream. According to bourgeois orthodoxy, it's ethical to work and to hold a steady job. Indeed, employment symbolizes not only success but also morality, and it is more honorable to hold a low-paying job on whose salary one cannot make ends meet than to be unemployed. The poor Burk family, like others living at or below the poverty line, strives to uphold the ideal of the American Dream: work hard and you can succeed and be upwardly mobile. Grace, the matriarch, has been working in the bedspread factory for sixteen years, and all of her children are industrious. Some, in fact, hold down multiple jobs. So, I ask students to consider American discourses of work and personal responsibility, noting that the latter idea derives from the Christian model of selfhood, whereby each person is held personally responsible for the salvation of his/her soul (Pandian 1985). More importantly, I ask them to contemplate alternative ethos, reminding them that every society has

a distinct style that defines for its citizens what is most important in life—art for the Dogon; drama and music for the Balinese; ritual exchange of necklaces and bracelets for the Trobrianders; and human sacrifice for the Aztecs (Robbins 2011). Transposed from the religious realm to the economic realm, the notion of personal responsibility equates work with morality and salvation, while conveniently exempting the wealthy members of society from having to do anything about extreme poverty. Thus, we see a lack of resentment and/or compassion among the Burks, which is ironic in this family of bible-abiding church-goers. Another irony that raises questions about the role of religion in society is that several family members are unable to read the bible. In one memorable scene, Bud expresses his regret over only being able to read the "itty-bitty words" of any text.

I move on to ask students to consider or deconstruct the meanings of five keywords with regard to the American socioeconomic system: unions, entitlements, taxes, regulation, and government. In comparison to other societies, like those in northern Europe, where the middle class is considerably more vigorous[9], these words have pejorative connotations in the United States. Instead of pro-union discourse, we have "right to work" states that disavow unions as impediments to economic growth. Entitlements are not earned benefits; rather, they are handouts to social parasites. Taxation is not for building a better society; rather, it is wasteful and illegitimate. Regulation is meddlesome and kills jobs. And government is bloated, inefficient, and a threat to individual freedom. Here again, I want students to see that cultural meanings and beliefs elicit interpretations, which provoke emotions and intentions that underlie the everyday practices that perpetuate the very social systems in which they originate. That is, social actors with cultural or subcultural ideas and beliefs interpret the world and act upon it in ways that reconstitute or change their world. Thus by connecting meaning and affect to motivation, I am able to give students a deeper understanding of poverty in the United States.

On an altogether different topic—stereotypes—I want my students to be able to recognize individuality even in the face of ostensible cultural homogeneity. On this topic, I'm taking advantage, again, of anthropology's recent rapprochement with psychology. Membership in a class—or any other group, for that matter—should not be taken to mean that all members are exactly the same, an analytical flaw that Rogers Brubaker derisively labels "groupism" (2006). Groupism, says Brubaker, leads to the conclusion that a group's members are interchangeable; that their beliefs are uniform or evenly shared. Groupism, in other words, makes it impossible to recognize that knowledge is unevenly distributed in society, an

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[9] I cite data that compare the size of the middle class in the US (estimated at approximately 40%) with those of various European countries (e.g., Sweden, Belgium, Norway, and Germany, all of which have approximately 70% of their populations in a middle class).

idea that Ulf Hannerz refers to as cultural complexity (1993). Groupist assumptions are belied by The Burks of Georgia, as will be discussed below. Still, at first glance, the Burks seemingly fit stereotypical notions of rednecks and hillbillies. The men are hard drinkers and in one scene we overhear two of the Burk women's husbands talk about "huntin' and fishin' and gettin' drunk." That the men are masculine and raised to be tough and manly comes through in their clothing, their gestures, their postures, and their speech acts—both in what they say and don't say. Indeed, the film depicts a steady stream of violence in and around the household: in one scene, Arlon is discussing guns; he owns many of them. We learn that one of his sons, Harold, died of a gunshot at 23 years of age. Another son, Douglas, 16, was run over by a train after escaping from a youth detention center in Macon (though there is a great deal of dispute as to whether he and his two companions might actually have been shot by authorities; no autopsy was ever performed). There are lots of "threats" in the house: James says to little Thomas: "I'll bust that nose." "Grandpa's gonna whup you." The adults coach two-year old Thomas to "hit him," constantly. You hear one of the daughters say of her husband, "Kill him. Kill him if he does" (if he flirts with another woman). The word "mean" is used over and over by various family members. Also heard: "I'll poke your eyeball out." "I'll smack you." "I'll tear you up." "Cram it." "Crack your head." "You're going to the hospital." There are lots of threats. Peggy says to Thomas, "Take this (tube) and throw it at Daddy."

At the same time, there is a great deal of intra-cultural variation or cultural complexity which, psychologists tell us, is rooted in differences in enculturation, either due to differential socialization or to people's different life experiences. Personality, in effect, is simply the product of non-uniform understandings of objects and events. In other words, there's a lack of congruence in the belief systems of one person and the next despite their common roots. It's easy to recognize differences in The Burks of Georgia—if one knows what to look for. For instance, Johnny dreams of moving to Canada, which puzzles Lewis, who declares himself "a Georgia boy," and who says he can't imagine why anyone would want to live in Canada. In-law, Bud, appears quiet and unassuming—perhaps this has something to do with illiteracy?—while in-law, Lewis is confident and outgoing. And older brother, Junior, appears introspective in comparison to his twenty-year-old brother, Tommy, who appears rambunctious at various times in the film. And in contrast to the tough guy mentality described above, at one point in the film we see Lewis being very tender with his young son, Thomas. We also see several of the Burk women instructing young Thomas to love and to be gentle with his baby brother, Robert Blake. Such data enable us to reject the stereotypic notion that all the Burks are interchangeable, not to mention all Appalachian people. And as with male stereotypes, likewise with female stereotypes. Ostensibly obedient, dutiful adherents to rigid gender constructions, we see Peggy defying her older sister, Mary, who is reproaching her for quarreling with her husband and for threatening to leave him. Subsequently, we

hear Peggy again, complaining that her parents try to influence what clothing she wears and what makeup she puts on. "They want us to act old," she complains, "but I won't do it." And later, we hear young Ruby—clearly, a tomboy—insisting she'll never get married because marriage holds so little promise. Thus, there's ample variation among the individual Burk women as well.

Conclusions

Throughout the academy one hears complaints about over-specialization and calls for greater holism. Historian Thomas Bender, for example, decries the emergence of what he calls the "gemeinschaftlich worlds of trades, occupations and professions, locality, sisterhood, race and ethnicity, and family" (1986:127). "What we have gotten," he says, "are the parts, all richly described. But since they are somehow assumed to be autonomous, we get no image of the whole, and no suggestions about how the parts might go together or even whether they are intended to go together" (1986:126). "Monographic work," he concludes, "no matter how prolific, will not fall by itself into an interpretive synthesis" (1986:126). As we've seen here, Eric Wolf advised a return to political economy as an alternative to the detailed accounts of particular social groups and analyses of problems within a single society. In much the same way, Immanuel Wallerstein advocates an approach he calls "Historical Social Science," which reunites the economic, political, and sociocultural arenas, thus avoiding linear analyses of complex historical processes. Surprisingly, even biologist E.O. Wilson envisions consilience among the natural sciences and the social sciences by way of linking facts and fact-based theory so as to create a common groundwork of explanation.

The results of the authors' own experiment on holism, though more modest, is in line with the critiques and the ongoing push to lower academic boundaries. Our findings are variable and intriguing, and we believe that the project's implications for pedagogy are significant. All of the contributors to this paper believe that we have benefited from reading one another's varying interpretations, and none of us will ever look at the Burks of Georgia in quite the same way again. And thanks to our involvement in this project, neither will our students. In fact, many of us are already employing interdisciplinary hybrids in our analyses/in our quest for greater holism.[10] As instructors of primarily undergraduates, we believe that interdisciplinary efforts such as ours offer a convenient and effective means of enhancing critical thinking and improving undergraduate education.

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[10] The lead author, for example, frequently draws upon socio-historical psychology, cognitive and psychoanalytic anthropology, neurobiology, cognitive neuroscience, and neurophilosophy in his quest for more satisfying understandings of human action.

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Appendix 1.

The rest of the joke: *Father Flannery, who has his arm in a sling, is on crutches, and has various bandages, goes first. "Well," he says, "I went into the woods to find me a bear. And when I found him I began to read to him from the Catechism. Well, that bear wanted nothing to do with me and began to slap me around. So I quickly grabbed my holy water, sprinkled him and, Holy Mary Mother of God, he became as gentle a lamb. The bishop is coming out next week to give him first communion and confirmation."*

Reverend Billy Bob spoke next. He was in a wheelchair, with an arm and both legs in casts, and an IV drip. In his best fire and brimstone oratory he claimed, " WELL brothers, you KNOW that we don't sprinkle! I went out and I FOUND me a bear. And then I began to read to my bear from God's HOLY WORD! But that bear wanted nothing to do with me. So I took HOLD of him and we began to wrestle. We wrestled down one hill, UP another and DOWN another until we came to a creek. So I quick DUNKED him and BAPTIZED his hairy soul. And just like you said, he became as gentle as a lamb. We spent the rest of the day praising Jesus."

They both looked down at the rabbi, who was lying in a hospital bed. He was in a body cast and traction with IV's and monitors running in and out of him. He was in bad shape. The rabbi looks up and says, "Looking back on it, circumcision may not have been the best way to start."