

John F. Day. *Bloody Ground*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981) 328 pp., \$19.50, \$8.00 paper.

Bloody Ground, in 1941, was the book-length result of a reporter's coverage for the Lexington *Herald-Leader*. Day's work appeared well ahead of any national concern over Appalachia and was received with admiration by some, outrage by others. It was then eclipsed by the events of the Second World War.

The 1981 reprint, with photographs from the University of Kentucky Libraries Archives, is an excellent addition to the literature of Appalachia, in particular concerning the Coalfields of Eastern Kentucky during the great depression of the 1930s. The "bloody ground" was that of violent feuds among the mountain people, of clashes between coal miners and mine owners and their henchmen, of the corrupt and often deadly politics of the times, and of the death by disease or in childbirth of an isolated, poverty-stricken people.

Day traced the history of the region from the 18th and 19th centuries when there was enough land for the numbers to rely on subsistence farming augmented by hunting and fishing. The fiercely independent people were then overwhelmed in the 20th century by the forces of industrialization. Day's exposure of the region's exploitation by the coal industry undoubtedly was one reason his work was met by outrage. Another reason was probably his debunking of the notion that the inhabitants were quaint. By contrast, he respected and felt compassion for the once proud descendants of Scots-Irish immigrants who became (and are) an oppressed minority living in "Hell in the Hills."

Admiration for the work is still an appropriate response. The book is in the American muckraking tradition. Its strengths are in the author's knowledge of his region and his intense concern with it. A well-written social history, it has devastating descriptions, for example, of the educational and legal systems (a chapter on the latter is entitled "Parade Before Justice") and still valid material on language patterns and cadences, and on country music.

The book's chief shortcoming was clearly stated by the author forty years ago. To his own question of what solutions existed to remedy the results of an economy that fostered the social and economic failure of the people he replied, "I don't know." In the "Afterword" to the present volume, Harry M. Caudill (*Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, 1963, et al) has called Day, who became a newsman with a national reputation, a "philosophic reporter."

Caudill himself asks in conclusion what another perceptive reporter will find forty years hence in the same region. It is not a question that elicits an optimistic answer. There is now a federal welfare system that feeds the people, and schools and roads have reduced illiteracy and isolation. Miners today are better paid. Hookworm-ravaged mothers no longer die in childbirth in remote mountain cabins. But there is renewed dependence on coal as a fuel. Hardly a week passes without reports of mine disasters and quick deaths or of black lung disease and slow deaths. Thus, the exploitation of our natural resources and our people continues.

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