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### Moonshine Video Script

Moonshine and Appalachia have long been synonymous with one another. The image of the woodsy mountaineer with his jug of moonshine is not uncommon in American culture. What would surprise many, however, is that the production and distribution of illegal liquor dates back far longer than the idea of Appalachia as a region, which was popularized by missionaries and William Goodell Frost in the years following Reconstruction. So how did moonshine begin and how has its cultural standing evolved through the years?

According to scholars Emelie K. Peine and Kai A. Schafft illegal liquor was a response by the Irish to Parliament's excise tax on liquor to quell tensions between King James and Northern Ireland. Eventually, the Scotch-Irish moved to the New World because of economic strife and brought their liquor-making traditions with them. Once in America, many Scotch-Irish settlers moved into the Appalachian region to avoid government laws similar to what they left behind in Europe. In 1791, the US Government "imposed a federal excise tax on stills and distilled spirits" (McDaniel 198). Even so, illegal liquor still found a fertile market in America prior to the Prohibition of the 1920s as many states began "outlawing the sale of liquor" and moonshine made its way as far North as Chicago and New York (Peine, Schafft 98).

Literary critic Matthew Kelly argues that the Volstead Act had a loophole for homemade liquors: Section Twenty-Nine permitted the home production of “non-intoxicating cider and fruit juice,” which meant that homemade wine below “0.5 percent alcohol by volume” was allowed (79). This technicality likely contributed to the trend of hiding moonshine in fruit drinks or ciders. Moonshine was often stored “in [a] cider jug” and “the juice-colored camouflage quelled suspicion” and made the liquor easier to drink; later, this iteration of moonshine became known as “apple pie moonshine” or “applejack” (Howard 493). This seems like a lot of trouble to go to for a little liquor, but the process of making moonshine is actually highly involved and demanding. According to journalist Ed Grabianowski, the process of making moonshine is as follows:

First, cornmeal is soaked in hot water and mixed with yeast to start the fermentation process. The mixture, which is called mash, is heated in a copper still, because of copper’s ability to conduct heat but not leach into the alcohol. As the mash heats up, pressure builds and the alcohol steam is guided through the “cap arm.” Sometimes, to make a stronger moonshine, shiners will re-evaporate the alcohol before continuing the process. The steam then travels into “the worm, a coiled pipe that winds down inside of the worm box.” There, the moonshine is cooled and subsequently condensed into a liquid. The liquid is fed through a spout that typically filters it one last time and then it is ready to be bottled and sold. According to food writer Ronni Lundy, sorghum was another option for making moonshine as it “grew more quickly and was less trouble than corn” (Lundy 16).

But for many families in Appalachia, corn was the staple ingredient. Such was the case for Sarah and Charles, who both grew up in Grundy, Virginia in families that made moonshine.

Charles even helped his grandfather in the process and recalls his first experience with moonshine. *Interview #1 with Charles.*

Interestingly, moonshine is responsible for the development of racing culture in America. Moonshiners “took Ford cars from the 1920s to the late 1930s, they modified them greatly, and then they ran them much faster than anything else on the road” in order to distribute the liquor they carried (Mitchelson and Alderman 34). *Insert interview #2 with Charles.*

Representations of moonshine in popular culture tend to be far more one-dimensional than the reality of moonshine. In 1899, William Goodell Frost published “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains,” an essay which popularized the negative stereotypes that are still associated with Appalachia today. Frost painted Appalachians as backwards, illiterate, and violent to the point of being homicidal-- and lumped moonshining in with these stereotypes. Thus, the idea of the poor, violent mountaineer who made moonshine rather than an honest living was widely distributed to readers of the *Atlantic Monthly*. John Fox Jr, in his 1908 local color novel, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, applied this stereotype to characters within the Tolliver family; Dave spends much of his time in liquor houses and June frets that any stranger in town is an authority figure coming to disrupt her family’s still. Additionally, June’s father, “Devil Judd” Tolliver is portrayed as the quintessential mountaineer-- bushy beard and feuding included-- and he makes moonshine. Later literature treats moonshiners somewhat more favorably; Julia Franks’s 2016 novel, *Over the Plain Houses*, is set in the 1930s and features a sympathetic moonshiner. Lesley is one of the main people to show sympathy and care for his cousin Irenie in the book, though he is still criticized for his craft by those around him.

Some consider moonshiners to be “gentlemen criminal[s]” due to beliefs that excise taxes on alcohol are unfair (Peine, Schafft 97). Others still find economic sympathy with moonshiners

seeking to supplement their income through liquor. Sidney Saylor Farr, in her Appalachian cookbook *More Than Moonshine*, recalls that her “father, her brothers, and grandfathers all made moonshine whiskey, primarily to sell for cash” and that they “could make more money selling moonshine whiskey than any other way” (Farr 21). It is important to note, however, that moonshine was not universally favorable to those making it. *Insert interview with Sarah #1.*

Television offers a new lense through which to view moonshiners. A 2009 episode of the popular cartoon sitcom *The Simpsons* featured moonshining in its plot. Entitled “Rednecks and Broomsticks,” the episode features a character named Cletus, who is essentially an amalgamation of stereotypes. He owns a lot of guns, lives in a cabin, has a lot of children, is unintelligent, and--of course-- makes moonshine. The recurring main character, Homer Simpson, drinks some of the moonshine and claims to taste “elderberry, tobacco, poison oak, and hints of game” in the moonshine (Curran). This is an obvious jab at the poorer moonshiners’ lifestyle and diet.

Some television shows take a documentary-style approach to moonshine, such as the wildly popular Discovery Channel program, *Moonshiners*. The description of the show on its webpage reads: “Every Spring, a fearless group of men and women venture deep into the woods of Appalachia, defying the law, rivals and nature itself to keep the centuries-old tradition of craft whiskey alive” (“Moonshiners”). The show stages moonshining as a way of preserving customs and traditions but also features moonshiners evading authorities and distributing their product. Although shiners in the show often have a family history of moonshining, most also rely on its production for their income. There is a certain degree of irony to this program as it essentially commodifies an illegal product and turns the lives of moonshiners into a spectacle for viewers to ogle. In this case, the producers control the narrative of the moonshiners.

Furthermore, specialty shops such as Ole Smoky in Gatlinburg, Tennessee sell a variety of flavored moonshines, turning moonshine into a commercial product for the general public (“Ole Smoky”). The rise of “craft moonshine,” breweries such as Howling Moon Distillery, and brands of moonshine like Troy and Sons speaks to the transition of moonshine from a home-brewed practice to an upscale, quirky beverage, but at the cost of authenticity and understanding of the practice’s roots.

Moonshine does crop up in local cookbooks, but even though recipes list ingredients, they often neglect to mention distillation steps or still set-up instructions. This speaks to perhaps an assumption by contributors to community cookbooks that people in their community are already aware of how to make or acquire moonshine. *The Deep South Cookbook* by Southern Living Progressive Farmer includes a recipe for moonshine whisky cake that doesn’t actually use any moonshine but instead calls for bourbon, which may be an acknowledgement of the difficulty of obtaining moonshine if the cook doesn’t already know someone who makes it or cannot purchase it. *Recipes, Remedies & Rumors* by the Cades Cove Preservation Association has a moonshine recipe by Dave Staley that has no mention of a still or even specific directions of what to do with the ingredients listed; thus this recipe would only make sense to someone who is already familiar with moonshine. *Old Timey Recipes*, collected by Phyllis Connor, gives a detailed explanation of how to make moonshine but again lacks instructions on making a still. Some recipes and references include jokes, such as: “There are many ways of making moonshine. This is just one way. For other ways, check with your nearest revenuer” (Connor 64). Humorous recipes seem to indicate that moonshiners don’t always take themselves too seriously. Jokes can also help them skirt around the illegality of what they’re doing. After all, as one cookbook says, “This occupation is agin’ the law but there is no law that prohibits know how

- so here's how" (Dwyer 39). Overall, the representation of moonshine in cookbooks seems to support the insular nature of the craft; unless a reader already knows most of the process or a moonshiner, these recipes provide little help for getting started.

The internal and external cultures of moonshine are wildly different and representations of moonshine in literature and cookbooks support this assumption. Media produced by people outside of moonshine culture tend to be negative or fail to encapsulate the variety of opinions on moonshine held by moonshiners themselves. Comparatively, when moonshine is discussed by those familiar with the craft, it becomes clear that not all moonshiners loved moonshine but also that authors assumed an innate knowledge about the craft in their reader when writing about it. One thing is clear, however, and that's that moonshine isn't going anywhere anytime soon. Whether moonshiners base their production in heritage, economics, or just-because, the legacy of moonshine is proof that Appalachia and its food are subjected to external forces that can preserve or demean its unique culture, sometimes doing both at once. Thus, there is no singular moonshine narrative, but continued interest in the craft opens the possibility for a more nuanced understanding of its history and future.

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