FONTANA DAM AND THE ROAD TO NOWHERE: PUBLIC MEMORY, RHETORICAL REMEMBERING, AND APPALACHIAN IDENTITY IN THE FONTANA REGION

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ABSTRACT

FONTANA DAM AND THE ROAD TO NOWHERE: PLACES OF PUBLIC MEMORY, RHETORICAL REMEMBERING, AND APPALACHIAN IDENTITY IN THE FONTANA REGION

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In 1942, the United States Congress approved the construction of Fontana Dam in Swain County, NC. To carry out this project, Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) entered the region to construct the dam and its reservoir. In the process of construction, over 20 communities around the dam's immediate area were condemned, leaving approximately 1,300 residents displaced from their homes. Additionally, the reservoir's flooding led to the destruction of a highway which connected the cemeteries in these communities to the rest of the region. Ultimately, the road project was abandoned, leading to the creation of The Road to Nowhere. Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere serve as examples of contested sites of public memory, which stand as reminders of the legacy of stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement in Appalachia. Residents of Swain County and public officials have retold the history of the Fontana region over the years, and the official and vernacular retellings of the area's history showcase how rhetorical rememberings of the Fontana region shape the values in and around Swain County today. I argue that the Fontana region serves as a case study for how a history of exploitation in Appalachian communities contributes not only to the way the Fontana region's history is remembered through

official and vernacular memories, but also to the broader issues of stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement in Appalachia as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Growing up, I always had a fascination with abandoned buildings, from single-family residences to sprawling factories. As a teenager I drove around my hometown, Greensboro, NC, searching for decrepit locations to explore. Often, I would attempt to find any sort of historical information about the places I found; more often than not, discovering that information proved to be nearly impossible (for my high school self, that is). I lived in Greensboro from the time I was born until I left home to attend college at Western Carolina University (WCU) in 2018. Spending 18 years in the same place allowed me to become well acquainted with my surroundings, so the prospect of moving to an entirely new region of North Carolina was intimidating. Perhaps more prevalent than feeling intimidated, though, was a new level of excitement as I began researching the area I would soon call my home. Whenever I travel anywhere, I immediately refer to the popular website "Atlas Obscura" to find offbeat places to visit and/or explore. This is what I did when I moved to Cullowhee for school, just to get an idea of the places I was surrounded by. This is how I came across a specific hiking destination known colloquially as "The Road to Nowhere" (officially, it is called Lakeview Drive and North Shore Road).

The Road to Nowhere in Swain County is a popular hiking trail in the western North Carolina region. The trail itself consists of a six-mile long stretch of paved road which abruptly ends before branching off into multiple trailheads; while beautiful on its own, the trail system would be unremarkable if not for the quarter-mile-long covered tunnel situated just before the paved road's end. The tunnel is dark, damp, and riddled with graffiti. It has an eeriness to it which has not gone unnoticed by the general public, including its portrayal in media appearances. The tunnel, for instance, was used as a filming location in a sci-fi/horror film titled

“Alien Abduction” as the place where one of the main characters falls victim to the alien antagonists. Admittedly, when I first saw images of the road I was more fascinated with the “creepy” elements of the place than interested in the history of the location. I made the decision to drive to the road soon after moving into my freshman dorm to see it in person and take some photos of it.

The route to reach the Road to Nowhere winds through Bryson City and up the side of a mountain, passing farmland and homes and thick patches of rhododendron. I remember myself wondering if I was going to the right place, because it truly felt like the way to the Road to Nowhere was too well-traveled to be leading to that abandoned tunnel. My worries were soon quashed, though, when I neared a specific road, Lakeview Drive East. In large red, white, and blue typeface on the side of the road stood a billboard reading: “WELCOME TO THE ROAD TO NO-WHERE [:] A BROKEN PROMISE! 1943 - ? NO MORE WILDERNESS[.]” I would see the Road to Nowhere that day, but it wasn’t the tunnel itself that left the strongest impression on me. It was that billboard and the questions it made me ask myself. For instance, what makes a road a “broken promise?” Who was angry enough about this “broken promise” to pay to make and set up a billboard informing the public of this perspective?

I progressed through my undergraduate years and entered graduate school at WCU in 2022, and these questions still lingered in my mind. Additionally, I found myself asking more questions: Why was the year 1943 mentioned specifically on the billboard, and why was no end date included on it? What does the phrase “No More Wilderness” mean, especially given the context that the trail is within the boundaries of Great Smoky Mountains National Park? As a student in the rhetoric and professional writing concentration within the English Studies department, I found myself reflecting upon these questions frequently through rhetorical

frameworks covered in my courses. The Road to Nowhere's history and presence in Swain County situates it as a rhetorical place of public memory, which is what I cover in this case study.

Rhetoric as a discipline and framework can be distinguished from other critical protocols because "it organizes itself around the relationship of discourses, events, objects, and practices to ideas about what it means to be public*"* (Dickinson, Blair, and Ott 2-3). The Road to Nowhere is a specific place, but the events surrounding its construction and abandonment span across decades. It is a site of historical and emotional importance for people from the Fontana region and residents of Swain County; as such, examining the Road to Nowhere in a rhetorical framework serves to acknowledge both the history of the road – especially the events leading to its creation – *and* the memories and feelings associated with it.

In rhetorical memory studies, scholars agree that memory is historically situated. In other words, the history of a particular place or event is directly tied to the ways in which people remember them privately and publicly. Memory is, as Kendall R. Phillips argues, "largely one of the rhetoric of memories" because "the ways memories attain meaning, compel others to accept them, and are themselves contested, subverted, and supplanted by other memories are essentially rhetorical" (2). Behind all memories lie rhetorical assumptions, interpretations, and actions which contribute to how these memories persist through time.

Scholarly Positioning and Historical Context

Memories and present-day rememberings of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere are powerful for multiple reasons, all of which relate to three patterns of mistreatment experienced by people in the Appalachian region. Although this case study focuses specifically on the communities formerly located in the Fontana region and on modern-day Swain County, these patterns connect the specific locations I outline here to the region as a whole.

The first pattern, and perhaps the most discussed in public settings, is the application of negative stereotypes to Appalachians. Appalachia has been defined as "a region, an ethnicity, or a shared set of cultural practices and representations" (Rountree 4). For centuries, popular characterizations of the region have ultimately led to a "separating [of] the region from the rest of the country as exceptional" (5). For decades, stereotypes have emphasized Appalachian peoples as a peculiar other, living a way of life many consider strange. The image of the "lawless mountaineer" emerged from popular portrayals of Appalachians violently resisting attempts by people in power to change their strange way of life. Along with the stereotypes of being lawless and uncivilized, Appalachians fell victim to narratives positioning the region as a target for modernization and industrial development, solely because of the relative isolation and ruggedness of the landscape. Ultimately, the stereotypes portraying Appalachia and its people as being peculiar, backwards, and violent set a precedent for exploitation in the region, namely through land and resource extraction.

The second pattern lies within the history of resource extraction's impact on land ownership in Appalachia. In the essay collection *Promised Land: The South Since 1945,* southern sociologist Howard Odum is quoted as saying "the greater cultural tradition of the south" as being "one of exploitation of the land and its resources" (197). In the Appalachian region, communities have frequently been displaced and overrun to make room for industries which exploit the land and the rich resources found within it. Extractive industries have flocked to Appalachia for centuries, which has ultimately resulted in issues of land tenure and ownership in the region. A common stereotype associated with Appalachia is that of poverty, or of communities unable to sustain themselves despite being in a region rich in resources. The reality is that extractive industries have directly led to land loss and the decimation of economic

opportunities for people in the area. The Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force describes a constant struggle Appalachians experience "against the concentrated, usually absentee control of the region's land and mineral resources" (136). On a large scale, people in Appalachia experience a lack of control of their land and resources because corporations and government entities purchase large tracts of land for these resources; thus, the potential for individuals to make a life for themselves through land ownership and access to the land's resources is slim. The Fontana region, like most of Appalachia, has a long history of corporations purchasing land to harvest its resources. Prior to Fontana Dam's construction, the mining and timber industries dominated the area and decimated local mining and timber operations which had previously been profitable for communities there. The presence of abundant natural resources in the area drew national attention to Appalachia, and government agencies began entering the region in droves to capitalize on these resources. This trend has continued through the years, leaving a troubling pattern in its wake: the forced removal of people and communities from land acquired by state and federal governments.

The third pattern is the forced removal, or displacement, of communities in Appalachia. Displacement directly relates to resource extraction industries focusing on coal, timber, minerals, and recreation/tourism because many of the forced relocations of communities have happened as these industries have purchased land for private use. It is important to recognize the presence of Native Americans in Appalachia before discussing displacement in the Fontana region, especially because the pattern of displacement began when Europeans arrived in the area in the 1500s. This case study focuses specifically on western North Carolina, which was predominantly inhabited by the Cherokee. In the late seventeenth century, approximately 30,000 Cherokee living in 60 towns covered the landscape of the western North Carolina mountains; within 100 years

following colonization, smallpox, warfare, and other epidemics reduced their population to only 7,500 (Dennis, Hirschfelder, and Flynn). Decimating the population was not enough for the Europeans in power, though. They had something else in mind: land.

When Europeans first arrived in Appalachia, "the Cherokee nation had claimed lands from near present-day Orangeburg, South Carolina to Cincinnati, Ohio and from Wytheville, Virginia to Tuscumbia, Alabama" (Holland 13). At the end of the American Revolution, land belonging to the Cherokee in South Carolina and Kentucky was given to "throngs of land hungry Americans," and over the next 50 years treaties enacted by the new American government continued to dwindle the land Cherokee people had settled on for centuries. By about 1830, "Cherokee lands were confined to extreme southwestern North Carolina, southeastern Tennessee, northwestern Georgia, and northeastern Alabama" (Holland 13). The Treaty of New Echota, signed in 1835, forced the remaining Cherokee to migrate to present-day Oklahoma in what would become known as the Trail of Tears (Dennis, Hirschfelder, and Flynn)[1].

In Cherokee history, white settlers searching for land to colonize decided the Cherokee were displaceable because they deemed their way of life uncivilized; in fact, the American government spent a good deal of time and resources "encourag[ing] Native people to become 'civilized,' transforming their economies and cultures in emulation of white America" (Denson 20). To be clear, the forced removal of the Cherokee from western North Carolina and the removal of Appalachian people *after* the Cherokee population was decimated are very different. What is important to note, though, is the history of people in power coming to the region, determining that the local populations are uncivilized and in need of development (specifically in

[1] The scope of this study does not allow me to cover the history of the Cherokee in-depth, but it is a topic of great importance in several fields. For further reading, please see the following: Dennis, Hirschfelder, and Flynn; Ehle; and Perdue and Green.

an emulation of white, industrial America), and using that rationalization to push people off of their land to make room for said development. In Appalachia, the negative stereotypes positing the region as an exceptional other serve as a foundation for the ease with which state governments and the federal government seize and use land, as well as how they determine who is displaceable.

Understanding the rhetorics of the displaced is crucial in retellings of the Fontana region's history, especially as we examine the discrepancies between official and vernacular narratives of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere. From the time European settlers entered the region to the present, people and groups in power have decided who is/are displaceable. As Katrina Powell writes, "the process of rendering individuals 'displaceable' has a history in this country." (148). For memories to persist through time, public communication must take place among groups of people and retellings of the memories must be circulated across time and space. This rhetorical movement ensures that the memories associated with the history of any event will not be forgotten. History is not just made up of the voices of people in power, despite the tendency for those in positions of authority to prioritize these voices; the dispossessed, too, deserve a voice in history. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge the need to include the voices of the dispossessed in rhetorical memory studies.

Malea Powell's work on Native American rhetorics has been key to understanding the rhetorical significance of displacement rhetorics. In her essay "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing," Malea Powell examines the rhetoric used by Native American writers Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Charles Alexander Eastman to address the displacement they experienced, writing that "the space of absent presence, the space where the rhetorical tactics of folks… can be put into conversation with Euroamerican 'oratorial culture' as a way to

complicate its so-called transformations" (398). In other words, Malea Powell argues that the rhetoric employed by the targets of displacement is central to understanding processes of displacement as they happen in the world. Vernacular retellings of the Fontana project's impact on Swain County serve as an outlet for the dispossessed to forge their own place in the rhetorical conversations surrounding the area's history. Given the trend of resource extraction and government-led removal of communities, it is undeniable that these vernacular retellings are crucial to understanding why Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere are contested sites of public memory.

Much of Swain County has been acquired by the federal government and TVA, which acts as a government entity. The land purchased by TVA to become Fontana Lake was home to 600 families, 99 of whom owned farmland (Tennessee Valley Authority 484). Initially, TVA estimates identified 275 families who would have to be relocated; ultimately, though, 1,311 families were displaced from the land TVA purchased (Tennessee Valley Authority 483). Aside from family farms and dwellings, "74 institutions, including churches, stores, schools, mills, and mines" were removed (Tennessee Valley Authority 484). Swain County had already "lost approximately 58 percent of its land area to federal and state acquisitions," between 1930-1940 (prior to the Fontana project). TVA's land purchases for the Fontana project increased this federal land ownership to almost 75 percent of the total county's area (Tennessee Valley Authority 482). Even before the Fontana project began, residents of Swain County were the target of governmental interference in land ownership. Countless residents between 1930 and the mid-1940s experienced the effects of displacement, including the loss of economic opportunities and the ability to live on ancestral homelands. Through the acquisition of land, the federal

government essentially set a precedent for Swain County: displacement of its residents was not only justified for the public good, but something to be considered normal in the county's history.

Timber industries entered the Fontana region in the 1800s; the first large commercial timber operations to enter the region were Taylor and Crate, Loomis and Wheeler, and W.C. Heyser and Co. (Holland 59). Mineral companies flocked to the region in the 1930s-40s after residents began their own small-scale mining operations to harvest high quantities of copper in the area (Holland 45). The mining industries prior to industry intervention were run by families and individuals, many of whom were local to the area. TVA's appearance in the area marked the end of a way of life for the people who worked in the mines and for their families. When TVA purchased land tracts for the Fontana project, communities which had been built surrounding the operations were forced to vacate. This was all so TVA could use the natural resources the land held. In some cases, land containing abundant mineral resources was purchased and never used; for instance, one of the most lucrative copper mines in the Fontana area is beneath Fontana Lake, simply because the mine was located on a land tract TVA purchased to flood (Holland 49).

Displacement is not only destructive to local ways of life, but has also been shown to impact people psychologically through "alienation, socioeconomic dislocation, and feelings of loss and hopelessness" (Holtzman and Nezam 92). Collective trauma is defined by Gilad Hirschberger as "the psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect an entire society" and is "represented in the collective memory of the group" the trauma involves (1). Rememberings of the Road to Nowhere and Fontana Dam are directly linked to the trauma of displacement, and this history has served as a foundation for current attitudes towards the federal government.

The Road to Nowhere and Fontana Dam are contested places of public memory which represent the legacy of stereotyping, exploitation, and displacement so many in Appalachia have experienced, as well as the disregard entities in power have as they retell their own histories. Over the years, official and vernacular retellings of the history of the Fontana region have been circulated publicly through the process of rhetorical remembering. Travis Rountree defines rhetorical remembering as the ways in which "individuals create public or private artifacts or memories that construct meaning about a public event" (9). The official retellings (history controlled by those with power and/or authority) of the history focus primarily on the benefits of resource extraction in the region and the significance of the dam as a wartime project, all while disregarding the voices of those who were displaced from the area. The vernacular histories (or histories of the people), by contrast, help citizens to heal and to memorialize the communities lost to the Fontana project.

The Road to Nowhere is, as previously stated, a specific, fixed place. What makes it a place of public memory is not simply its presence in the public sphere. The volume of emotion surrounding the road's halted construction represents decades of injustices and displacement experienced by people in Appalachia. Although the road's construction began in the 1940s and halted soon thereafter, public anger and sadness about the ill-fated construction project persist. Strong opinions surrounding the road's incompletion and the federal and state governments' response to pleas from people in the region to finish it – or to find any other solution to the incomplete road – have persisted for just over 80 years, passed from generation to generation like a haunted heirloom.

Methodology: Memory is Historically Situated, Lived, and Rhetorical

There is no rhetorical scholarship done on the Road to Nowhere and Fontana Dam, but movies, news articles, and novels have focused on both locations for scenery, reporting, and inspiration. Pop culture puts real-world locations on the map; Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere are popular destinations for film tourism, with both locations having been used in popular films and television shows. The Road to Nowhere, as I mentioned previously, was used in the 2014 sci-fi/horror film "Alien Abduction." This movie, inspired by the popular North Carolina folk legend of the Brown Mountain Lights, follows Riley, a 12-year-old boy who witnesses several people – including his father, brother, mother, sister, and a policeman – being abducted by aliens before being abducted himself. By being based on a popular Appalachian folktale, the storyline generates feelings of unease and spookiness about the remoteness of the region. The Road to Nowhere is not located in Brown Mountain, but its appearance in the movie means the tunnel is linked with a scary story of alien abductions; in fact, there are several pieces of graffiti in the tunnel related to "Alien Abduction," including a floor-to-ceiling humanoid figure similar to the one seen abducting Riley's father early in the film.

Fontana Dam was also used in segments of the 2015 adventure film "A Walk in the Woods," based off of author Bill Bryson's popular novel of the same name. The film tells the story of Bryson; his wife, Catherine; and one of Bryson's old friends, Stephen, who decide on a whim to hike the entire Appalachian Trail (AT). Along the trail, the three make several acquaintances and have pleasant experiences on the trek. One night a rainstorm hits, so the two enter a hut and find a map of the trail which marks their current location; it is there that the two realize they have hiked less than half of the trail after being on it for three months. Fontana Dam is included as one of the many places Bryson, Catherine, and Stephen see while hiking the trail. Bryson and his two companions did, indeed, pass by the dam as they hiked; many hikers on the

trail stop at the Fontana Dam Visitor Center to restock on provisions and make use of the "Fontana Hilton," which is "one of the most accessible AT overnight shelters along the AT, with a view of Fontana Lake. It is legendary among long-distance hikers for its 24-person capacity, unique design, scenic setting and the relative luxury of nearby flush toilets and showers" ("Fontana Dam, N.C."). In this movie, Fontana Dam is included as a scenic, high-traffic, desirable stop after journeying along the AT, juxtaposing the woods with the polished facilities the dam houses.

Lastly, Fontana Dam appeared in a 2013 episode of the TV show "Only in America with Larry the Cable Guy." Larry the Cable Guy is the stage name of actor and comedian Daniel Lawrence Whitney. His Larry character has an appearance consistent with the Southern "redneck" stereotype as well as a thick Southern accent. In the episode, titled "Larry Caves In," Larry hikes a portion of the AT to get to Fontana Dam. The episode itself is classified as a documentary, with Larry meeting and interviewing experts in geography (especially caving), history, and dams; he even goes on an official tour at Fontana Dam to learn how it works. In a comedic history segment, Larry gives an overview of TVA and the purpose of Fontana Dam in WWII. In between these informational segments, Larry works alongside TVA employees to clean parts of the dam, making jokes about the unpleasant smells in the machinery and his own ability (or lack thereof) to do what the employees do every day. He describes TVA as the organization that "lifted the whole area out of poverty," but fails to mention the cost of the project on local communities ("Larry Caves In" 33:43). The main purpose of this episode is to feature how "the people here have used the natural power and resources of this land to prosper," which Larry does by focusing on the marvel of the dam itself rather than the history of the area ("Larry Caves In" 41:42).

Fontana Dam has also been the subject and/or inspiration of several literary works. Appalachian author and poet Ron Rash's 2002 novel *One Foot in Eden*, for instance, is set in a community to be flooded to create a lake that will generate hydroelectric energy. A murder takes place in the community, and the sheriff of the town struggles to find both evidence of the murder and the victim's body, leading to a race against time as the government continues to force residents to leave their homes. The novel explores themes of Appalachian culture and resource extraction in the region, and the situation those in the community find themselves in as they are displaced mirrors the experiences of those in impacted communities in the Fontana region. Lance Holland's 2001 novel *Fontana* is a detailed history of the Fontana region. The history begins in the 1700s and ends in the 2000s, covering everything from the Cherokee settlements once situated in the region to recent tourism developments at and around Fontana Dam.

Coverage of Fontana Dam's history is not restricted to fictional portrayals and novels, however. A number of news articles covering the history of the area, the displacement of communities, and the unresolved issues surrounding the Road to Nowhere have been written and published on well-known news websites and online magazines. Several articles focusing on the towns lost to Fontana Dam's reservoir, and different modern-day attempts to memorialize these towns, have been written (see Campbell; Igelman; Luckadoo; and Perrotti). In a detailed article for *Our State* magazine, historian, author, and creative writing professor Philip Gerard writes about the town of Fontana, Fontana Dam's construction, and the experience of families who were displaced from their homelands to make room for Fontana Dam's reservoir. Additionally, Gerard interviews former residents of Fontana Village about life on the construction site. From Gerard's work, we see vernacular histories of the Fontana region in action, giving readers a sense of what made the area special and memorable to so many. His research also details the context of

Fontana Dam in WWII-era America, which is important in understanding part of the significance of the dam as a landmark in the region.

Fontana Dam as a wartime landmark has also been explored in an article by Michael Hennessey and Brent Patterson. Hennessey and Patterson's piece, told through writing and a four-part video series, focuses primarily on the top-secret war project behind Fontana Dam. The dam was constructed to provide hydropower to a nuclear facility at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, which was directly involved in research which ultimately led to the use of the atomic bomb Little Boy on Hiroshima, Japan (and, as a result, the end of WWII). Hennessey and Patterson discuss the work ethic practiced by the men and women hired to build the dam, which led to the project being completed very quickly despite the dam's massive size and the arduous construction procedures of the era.

Academic scholarship specifically surrounding Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere is sparse. Fontana Dam has been examined in engineering case studies (see "Bricks and Mortar" and Zee, Zee, and Zee), and the Road to Nowhere has been covered in business and economics journals (see Business NC and Jacobson). A rhetorical case study of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere would contribute to a larger understanding of the way Appalachian stereotypes contribute to the continued resource extraction and displacement in the region, as well as an understanding of how these patterns have impacted Appalachian identity for centuries. The Road to Nowhere would not exist without Fontana Dam, and the histories – some official, some vernacular – of these places are tied together.

In the Road to Nowhere and Fontana Dam, there is a rich history. There are patterns of negative stereotypes, resource extraction, and displacement, discussed in Appalachian studies scholarship; there are historical examples of patriotic visual rhetoric during WWII, as well as

men and women who worked incredibly hard to serve their country by building Fontana Dam; there are modern-day examples of people engaging in rhetorical rememberings of the history of the region; and, above all else, this history is being rhetorically meaningful. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott describe "meaningful" rhetoric in two ways: the first states that "discourses, events, objects, or practices" are "significant, in an emotionally inflected sense," and the second outlines that these "discourses, events, objects, and practices are composed of signs that may take on a range of signification" (3). The history of stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement in Swain County was meaningful as it happened in the moment, and the continued circulation of remembrances of this history demonstrates a continued emotional, meaningful connection people feel now, over 75 years after the Fontana project began.

Appalachian Studies

The official and vernacular histories surrounding Fontana Dam are tied both to the public tendency to dismiss Appalachians *and* the efforts of Appalachians to be respected, recognized, and, ultimately, appreciated. The stereotypes which so often surround Appalachia mean that contextualized history is necessary in order to fully understand the rhetorical rememberings of the Fontana region. Additionally, these stereotypes require awareness of how Appalachians are represented in any and all forms of writing. Appalachians have long been the target of stereotypes and oversimplifications (see Harkins and McCarroll; Andreescu and Shutt; Batteau; Catte; Obermiller and Scott; and Whisnant), and these negative perceptions have ultimately led to a "common refrain among [Appalachians] that the region has rarely been allowed to speak for itself" (Harkins and McCarroll 21). I am not from Appalachia, but I am aware that stereotypes and stigma surrounding the region and its people exist. As someone who is not Appalachian but is writing about Appalachians, I have taken care not to rely on caricatures of the region as I

examine the rhetorical rememberings of the Fontana region. While I am writing about stereotypes to provide readers with the context necessary to understand official and vernacular retellings, I would also like to be clear that the Appalachian region and its people are far more diverse and complex than these stereotypes portray. Through the writings of Appalachian scholars, I have been able to include the voices of Appalachian people rather than trying to change their words for my own study. It is also important to acknowledge that stereotypes have impacted the power dynamics at play between governmental entities and Appalachia, and that these power dynamics heavily shaped – and continue to shape – how Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere were planned and constructed.

Appalachia has previously been defined "as a region, an ethnicity, or a shared set of cultural practices and representations" (Rountree 4). It was first described as a region in the early 1920s when writers came to the region to vacation and write. Later, writers and historians such as Harry Caudill, Jack Weller, Horace Kephart, and John C. Campbell focused on the cultural practices in the geographical confines of Appalachia, "separating the region from the rest of the country as exceptional" (Rountree 5). Even though these writers were not explicitly malicious towards the Appalachian region, stereotypes emphasizing Appalachian peoples as a peculiar "other" stemmed from these writings. This peculiar "other" positions Appalachians as people who live a strange way of life *and* as people who violently resist attempts by people in power to change their lifestyles. Appalachian scholars have critiqued these stereotypes consistently over the years, discussing how these stereotypes neglect accurate portrayals of the scope of pressing issues in the region, such as exploitation, displacement, and unequal power dynamics between the region and the government (see Batteau; Whisnant; Moffett; Berry, Obermiller and Scott; Snyder; Billings, Norman, and Ledford; and Harkins).

Although Appalachian scholars have worked for years to dispel the negative outcomes of regional stereotypes, media portrayals continue to perpetuate these stereotypes. A wave of modern-day scholarship in response to these negative portrayals has led to more scholarly works in the field. *Appalachian Reckoning*: *A Region Responds to 'Hillbilly Elegy'* edited by Anthony Harkins and Meredith McCarroll, as the title suggests, responds directly to inaccuracies and harmful stereotypes in J.D. Vance's novel *Hillbilly Elegy* through the works of many modern Appalachian writers and scholars. Elizabeth Catte's *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* also responds to inaccuracies and overgeneralizations – such as the popularization of calling Appalachia "Trump Country" – in Vance's work. Works such as Amanda E. Hayes' *The Politics of Appalachian Rhetoric* hope to "see *more* acknowledgement of the complexities inherent in Appalachian identity" (3). Publications such as The Foxfire Fund, Inc. release volumes of works focusing on Appalachian culture. In Kami Ahrens' work *The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Women,* for instance, the stories of women in the Appalachian region from different time periods, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and beyond are compiled in one volume. The commonality between these women, as Ahrens writes in the book's afterword, is that they all "express such a powerful connection with place that it forms the foundation of their shared identity" (255). These works paint a picture of an Appalachian identity that is comprised of different identities which are connected through place.

Appalachia is a region of various cultures and lifestyles, but negative stereotypes associated with Appalachia have prevailed through time and heavily influenced the power relations within the region. Appalachians are very much aware of these stereotypes and their consequences, as several writings by Appalachian scholars and writers demonstrate. Todd

Snyder's book *The Rhetoric of Appalachian Identity*, for instance, references the common trope of the "Hillbilly" when he writes:

> The unique set of identity constructs imposed upon the Hillbilly has been done by his social betters. He has been caricatured… We allow these disparaging characterizations to continue without questioning their sociopolitical consequences because we, as a nation, have yet to fully come to the conclusion that the rhetorical tradition that has given birth to the Hillbilly is of deceptive or malicious origins. (2)

Snyder is a self-identified Appalachian, which gives him the right to reclaim the "Hillbilly" term. He also uses "Hillbilly" to represent Appalachian people because the hillbilly caricature has been used historically to represent all Appalachian people. Because of this negative stereotype, the power relations within Appalachia have been impacted time and time again, with those in places of power and influence coming to the area for their own gain under the assumption that Appalachians are better off with their intervention. This notion also makes these powerful entities and the people complicit in their actions feel as though they are doing the area a service or, more often, that the exploitation of the region is for the greater good.

The popular portrayal of Appalachian people as being more expendable than those in other demographics has often been recycled over the years to justify the exploitation of Appalachian peoples and communities. People who call Appalachia home have fought back against this notion consistently through time. Resistance against exploitation and mistreatment, according to Stephen L. Fisher, has long been a theme of Appalachian identity. He writes of a "long history of media bias and neglect" that has ultimately led to two common images of those who live in Appalachia:

> Appalachians are generally viewed as backward, unintelligent, fatalistic, and quiescent people who are complicit in their own oppression. But at the same time, these 'submissive' mountaineers are seen as among the most vicious and violent people in the United States… The media are not alone in developing and perpetuating this portrayal of Appalachians. Novelists, missionaries, social workers, industrialists, folklorists, politicians, and academicians have in their own ways… portrayed Appalachia as an isolated, underdeveloped area of inferior and dependent people (1).

According to Fisher, resistance is an important part of Appalachia's history *and* is a central point in Appalachian identity. People in the region have historically resisted mistreatment from the government and/or threats to their way of life. The repeated instances of resisting this exploitation have become a part of Appalachian history and identity, but not in the violent way stereotypes seem to suggest. In all reality, Appalachian people "have been made to feel that they must defend their positions, either physically or metaphorically," with "resistance and strife" continuing in modern-day Appalachia "as people are placed in positions where they must defend their identities and their ways of life, taking activist stances against various power structures" (K. Powell 25). Katrina Powell's book *The Anguish of Displacement,* for instance, analyzes letters to the government written by families and residents who were displaced during the construction of Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. In these letters, the writers utilize their literacy to negotiate the terms with which they will leave their land, despite the fact that popular portrayals of Appalachian people at this time declared them "individualistic, self-reliant, traditional, fatalistic, religiously fundamental, illiterate, hostile, and peculiar" (K. Powell 24). People in the Fontana region did attempt to stop their land from being seized by TVA, but these attempts were all unsuccessful. Instead, the vernacular retellings of those negatively impacted by the Fontana

project serve as a kind of activist stance against the official narratives of the region's history, which disregard the voices of those who were ignored by the federal government and TVA.

Communities in Appalachia have often been displaced to "make room" for larger governmental projects, and those impacted by this displacement are left without reward and are often brushed off by public officials when calling for compensation. Katrina Powell's case study surrounds the politics of literacy within the letters of families displaced from their homes in the construction of Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. When examining histories of Appalachian communities, what tends to be omitted from the histories of "developments are the voices of the people affected… even if their voices are included, they often make no difference to policy and law" (K. Powell 159). She additionally argues that the very use of the word "displacement" in relation to the forced removal of people from their homes is a conscious, political choice which reflects broader, societal perceptions of those being removed (K. Powell 161). Through displacement, land ownership has become a major topic of discussion for Appalachian scholars.

Land ownership in Appalachia is a major topic of discussion in the Appalachian studies field because federal entities and resource extraction industries have purchased land in the region to benefit from the natural resources the landscape provides. In doing this, people within the region are unable to use the land for their own purposes, whether it be for homes, farming, or their own small-scale resource extraction operations. In research by John Gaventa, the complicated history of land ownership in the region suggests that both politics and power play a major role in the acquisition of Appalachian land by companies and other entities, such as state and federal governments. He writes:

> The political economy of the South is deeply rooted in the land… In the Appalachian region, [local economies were shaped] by coal and mineral exploitation. Timber

> extraction for wood and paper, tourist development… tobacco and other agriculture – all have shaped the history, culture, and most essentially, the power and politics of the region. (3)

Appalachia has historically been the target of resource extraction industries because of the rich resources in the area *and* because the people who occupy the region have been considered displaceable in the eyes of industrial America. As a result, land has become a major indicator of who holds power in Appalachia and who doesn't. Land ownership in Appalachia is a major issue, with "the rate of land ownership among the poor and minorities" in Appalachia being "disproportionate" and contributing "greatly to the region's lack of economic development" even today (K. Powell 156). When the natural resources of the land are used up or corporations discover that their operations are no longer as lucrative as they once were, these industries pick up and leave. This leaves people in the region without jobs and without resources, both of which are key contributors to economic development.

Ultimately, the tendency to view Appalachian communities as displaceable is directly related to negative Appalachian stereotypes; these stereotypes are perpetuated not by Appalachian people, but by official and powerful narratives which are given more credence than those coming from Appalachia. As a result of this power dynamic, the people in the Appalachian region have been virtually unable to separate themselves from images of poverty and peculiarity. Additionally, the ability to improve local economies has been impacted because of the toll resource extraction industries have taken on the land and its people. In fact, when the Road to Nowhere's construction halted, what many residents of Swain County wanted was a cash settlement from the government equal to the cost it would have taken to finish the road.

When TVA finished the Fontana project, it was understood by people in Swain County that Lakeview Drive would be constructed to connect their old communities to Bryson City. Instead, construction of the road halted and the site of the Road to Nowhere was absorbed into Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP). Construction for what ultimately became the Road to Nowhere began in 1963 (20 years after the agreement to build a road was expressed), but it halted in 1971 when construction conducted by the National Park Service uncovered an environmental issue: exposed rock containing pyrite crystals. When exposed to air and water, these crystals produce a sulfuric acid runoff, which destroys ecosystems. This effect is able to be combated with modern engineering techniques (Holland 192), but considerable expense would need to be added to the construction process. Given the history of disregard those in power have for Appalachian communities, the choice to halt construction entirely rather than invest money in the engineering techniques necessary to combat this environmental issue seems to many like the federal and state governments have deemed the area unworthy of investment. Official retellings of the Fontana area champion the land as a mecca for natural resource potential, but they fail to acknowledge the continued pattern of those in positions of authority to dismiss the communities in the region as displaceable.

Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere became a resource pool for both electric power for TVA and tourism for the state of North Carolina. Both of these are extractive industries with a history of exploiting Appalachian communities. Residents of Swain County responded to the abandonment of the Lakeview Drive project with resistance, but this resistance was not violent as Appalachian stereotypes frequently suggest. Through lobbying efforts and petitions to Congress, the people of Swain County fought back against power structures continued stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement have established in the region. Despite

efforts that spanned over 70 years, though, the federal government continued to dismiss the urgency of finding a solution to the Lakeview Drive problem. Multiple solutions to the road problem were suggested, but for 75 years no resolution was reached. Instead, residents in Swain County and descendants of people buried in the communities rendered inaccessible by Fontana Lake found themselves waiting to see when the promise would be fulfilled.

A settlement between the federal government and Swain County was not reached until 2018. When the settlement was reached, a check for $35.2 million dollars, representing "the final value for the unfinished road along the north shore of Fontana Lake," was given to Swain County Officials (Knoepp "Road to Nowhere Debt Repaid"). Despite plans county officials made to withdraw money from this sum as needed to improve the town budget, the federal government placed the full settlement into "an investment account at the state treasury," from which Swain County would "receive a check for the interest each year" (Knoepp "'Road to Nowhere Debt Repaid'"). Although the federal government has not directly stated that they don't trust Swain County with the money, the fact that Swain County is unable to access the money from this cash settlement as needed demonstrates the issue of land ownership in Appalachia. The land which belongs to Swain County has finally been assigned a cash value, and that cash value was finally given to officials in the county; however, rather than being able to use the money given to them to make up for the loss of land and revenue in the county, they have had to report to the federal government to receive what is essentially an allowance. Swain County leaders have been going back and forth with the government since 2018 trying to rectify this issue, but as of now the county has not been granted the right to withdraw more than $300,000 dollars per year from the total settlement (Stone).

For people from the communities flooded to build Fontana Dam and current residents of Swain County, the amount of time it took for the federal government to fulfill its end of an agreement from the 1940s – partially, many would argue, given the current issues surrounding the handling of the treasury account – has not been forgotten. According to District 119 Representative Mike Clampitt, "The animosity for the federal government has been tremendous. This is a healing process… It won't bind all wounds. We will still have the scars on our heart" (Knoepp "'Road to Nowhere' Debt Repaid"). Ultimately, the Road to Nowhere and Fontana Dam are places of public memory because of this unresolved promise, reflecting themes of generational trauma experienced by the people who have called the Fontana region home for centuries.

Circulation Studies

The "public" element of public memory lies, of course, in the interactions of groups in a public in the remembering of a specific event. As I have discussed, a major factor in Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere being sites of public memory relates to the official and vernacular retellings of the history of the Fontana region. Public communication is crucial to these retellings, as are the ways public communication changes through time and space to reflect the needs of the groups involved in the retellings. The processes through which public communication occurs have been outlined and debated by numerous rhetoric scholars (see Bitzer; Warner; Smith and Lybarger; Vatz; and Biesecker). Jenny Edbauer describes rhetorical situations as operating within a network of lived consciousness and emotions. According to Edbauer, rhetorical publicness exists "as a context of interaction" (9). In her framework of rhetorical ecologies, rhetorics are contextualized in "their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes" (Edbauer 9). Public communication is a rhetorical act which moves through time, historical

events, and lived experiences. The way this communication circulates through time relates to the publicness of rhetoric because it posits that rhetoric is a public creation. In the case of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere, retellings and discussions related to the region's history are heavily informed by the circulation of the events across time and space.

The term 'circulation' refers to the way texts, objects, events, and so on flow through space and time. The history and perceptions surrounding Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere have circulated in the public's minds and actions since the 1940s, and the emotions people have surrounding both locations have remained strong despite this passage of time. Laurie E. Gries understands the temporal element of circulation as "futurity," which she defines as "the strands of time beyond the initial moment of production and delivery" (*Still Life with Rhetoric* 14). Although Fontana Dam was built in in the early 1940s and the Road to Nowhere's construction halted in the 1970s, rememberings about both locations have persisted long past these initial moments of production and delivery. An interesting element of the remembrances of the Fontana region lies within the amount of time that passed between the Road to Nowhere's abandonment and the solution reached for the road in 2018 (it is important to note, though, that many people are still dissatisfied with this solution). For 75 years, people in Swain County kept the history of the Fontana region at the forefront of public rememberings, creating monuments, memorials, and museums dedicated to preserving the area's history. As time passed and the federal government's inaction continued, the history evolved to not only focus on the initial mistreatment of those in the area, but also to remind the public that the people of Swain County were not being heard by those in positions of authority. The legacy of stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement fueled responses from Swain County residents from the 1940s to now, with many still expressing

anger and sadness over the government's role in destroying dozens of communities and taking so long to acknowledge the pressing issue of Lakeview Drive.

The futurity of the events behind these sites of public memory can be seen in the ritual performances associated with both locations, from resident-led groups dedicated to preserving the area's history to official and vernacular retellings of both locations' importance to the Fontana region. Edward S. Casey points out that "public memory is both attached to a past (typically an originating event of some sort) *and* acts to ensure a future of further remembering of that same event" (17). The circulation of memories and public remembrances through time and space are crucial to the analysis of present-day rememberings of Fontana-related history. The way memories evolve and change through time is also crucial to rhetorical memory studies, which serves as a framework through which we can understand Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere as contested sites of public memory.

Public Memory and Memory Studies

For a location to be a place of public memory, it is not only important for the history of the place to remain in the public sphere through time, but also for public communication about the location to persist. This public communication not only includes general discussion about the location's history, but it also requires public engagement with these histories and memories. For the memories of a collective group to persist, action must be taken to ensure that the history behind those memories is not forgotten.

Analyzing places of public memory requires cultural awareness to understand the context of the locations in history, as well as an awareness of related parties' concerns about how the history of the location is told and circulated. As I examined official and vernacular retellings of the Fontana story for this research, I found that the memories of the history were highly

contested, mainly between two groups of people: those who benefitted from Fontana Dam (i.e., TVA, the federal government, and the North Carolina state government) and those who felt forgotten throughout the entire project, from its start to ongoing efforts for compensation from people in power. Official and vernacular retellings of the Fontana project and its impact on the region differ in how much care and attention is given to the voices of the dispossessed, and the tendency for authority figures to control historical narratives means vernacular histories of the region are not given as much priority as those official narratives.

The memories any individual or group holds regarding a specific place are rhetorically significant, whether these memories are based on the material world of the place or the symbols associated with and/or located at the place. Although official and vernacular rememberings of the Fontana region differ, the creation of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere as places of public memory are reliant upon the same circumstances. In the collection of essays *Places of Public Memory,* Dickinson, Blair, and Ott describe memory as rhetorical, making "memory places… especially powerful rhetorically (2). The contested nature of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere is one factor of the power these locations hold solely because of the rhetorical nature of memory. Public memory can be understood as the product of a group of people with some type of connection to an event which ultimately leads to the persistent circulation – the way the discourse about the event moves through time and space – of the memories, histories, and meanings of the event itself. A connection alone, though, isn't all that constitutes a location as a place of public memory. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott outline six points to describe what a place of public memory is:

1) Memory is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties;

2) Memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging;

3) Memory is animated by affect;

4) Memory is partial, partisan, and thus often contested;

5) Memory relies on material and/or symbolic supports;

6) Memory has a history. (6)

Several of the assumptions about public memory as outlined by Dickinson, Blair, and Ott can be applied to Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere. Each of these characteristics tie into the locations themselves and to official and vernacular retellings of the events leading to both locations' conceptions. Keeping these intersections at the forefront of my research allowed me to analyze the rhetorical attachments of different groups to Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere. Official and vernacular retellings of both locations are heavily reliant upon their statuses as contested places of public memory.

Retellings of a historical event through time persist particularly strongly when the history is tied to the present. As I have stated, the Road to Nowhere continues to be an emotional topic for people in Swain County over 75 years after the project began. The first point outlined by Dickinson, Blair, and Ott is that "public memory is… activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties of the present" (6); this intersection between public memory and rhetoric is relevant to both Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere because the history of power dynamics caused by negative stereotypes, resource extraction, and displacement in Appalachia directly ties into the perceived "broken promise" residents of Swain County waited decades to see resolved. From 1943 to 2018, the federal government went back and forth with Swain County as local politicians and lobbyists attempted to receive some sort of closure on the construction of Lakeview Drive.

The second intersection between public memory and rhetoric is that "memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging." This certainly applies to people

from the Fontana region (including those from communities displaced by the dam and those who lived in Fontana Village as the dam was being constructed) and residents of Swain County. Although it is not ideal, the legacy of displacement and exploitation in Appalachia has become a part of Appalachian identity. Many people in the region throughout several generations have fallen victim to displacement; in the areas TVA operates within (Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia), thousands of families over a considerable span of time have lost their homes to accommodate TVA projects. The Fontana region is one example of this, but there are many more. Since 1933, TVA dam construction projects have been responsible for the displacement of over 125,480 residents (Branscome 285). Collective trauma has led to modern-day attitudes towards TVA and the federal government, as well as a key point outlined in the history of Swain County.

Public memory is animated by affect. This means, according to Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, that public memory "embraces events, people, objects, and places that it deems worthy of preservation, based on some kind of emotional attachment" (7). The particular responses to the unresolved promise of the Road to Nowhere include attempts to preserve the history of the Fontana region as well as governmental inaction over 75 years. People in Swain County continue to be angry over how long it took to reach any sort of resolution surrounding the Road to Nowhere, and the descendants of people from the communities which lie beneath Fontana Lake continue to reflect upon the histories of their families. Many people feel that the history of the communities lost to the Fontana project have not been memorialized enough, with these communities being neglected in TVA's official retellings of the history of the Fontana region.

Related to the emotions generated by this perceived neglect of the area's history, the fourth characteristic of public memory outlined by Dickinson, Blair, and Ott is that "memory is

partial, partisan, and thus often contested… that is, public memories may be challenged by different versions of the past, by introduction of different information or valuations" (9). The Road to Nowhere and Fontana Dam are areas in western North Carolina which are frequently visited by tourists from all over the country. The Fontana Dam Visitor Center located at Fontana Dam displays the history of the area in a way that champions TVA as an innovative, beneficial presence in the region. This perspective is evident in the Visitors Center located at Fontana Dam, which is owned and operated by TVA. To many people in Appalachia, though, TVA has been more bad than good. The amount of displacement TVA has caused is one part of this; another part relates to the economic toll of TVA's presence in the region. According to research by James Branscome, TVA "has raised the income in the TVA region to around 75% of the national average, *about the same figure as for all of Appalachia"* (293). TVA has a legacy of both industrialization and harm in Appalachia, which adds an extra dimension to Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere as places of public memory. On the one hand, Fontana Dam is a marvel. It is the largest dam east of the Rockies, and the men and women hired to build the dam worked tirelessly to complete the dam as a wartime project. On the other hand, the dam also represents the loss of dozens of communities which were home to families for generations. These differing perceptions of TVA and Fontana Dam are evident in official and vernacular retellings of the region's history, as well as in present attitudes towards the federal government in Swain County.

The fifth characteristic of public memory states that public memory relies upon "material and/or symbolic supporters – language, ritual performances… objects, and places – that work in various ways to consummate individuals' attachment to the group" (Dickinson, Blair, and Ott 10). In the decades residents spent waiting to see Lakeview Drive's construction continue/waiting to see if the government would give the county a cash settlement in place of the

road, archives, memorials, and books about the entire situation were created. One example of this characteristic is the North Shore Cemetery Association. When the 1970s were nearing an end and still no resolution to Lakeview Drive was made, former residents of the area organized the North Shore Cemetery Association. The two women who headed this effort were Helen Cable Vance – valedictorian of the final graduating class at Proctor High School on Hazel Creek in 1943 – and her sister Mildred Cable Johnson (Holland 193). The immediate aim of the organization was to gain access to the cemeteries along the North Shore of the reservoir in conformity of the 1943 Agreement's provisions, as well as to plan decorations and maintenance for the cemeteries in the area. The organization was, and is, made up of former residents of communities lost to the Fontana Dam reservoir and their descendants (Swain County Heritage Museum). To this day, descendants of the dead gather on boat ramps on the south shore of the reservoir to take boats contracted from Fontana Village by the Park Service for the first part of the journey across the reservoir. When they reach the North Shore, they board Park Service trucks and jeeps before hiking up ridges to each of the cemeteries. The visits take place in July, August, September, and October, and the association works to preserve Fontana's history and to maintain the cemeteries cut off from the rest of the state. The ritual of going to the cemeteries each year is a supporter which continues to tie people in Swain County to the lost communities in the Fontana region. Another example of the ritual performances and places tied to the Road to Nowhere and Fontana Dam are the museums dedicated to chronicling the history of the Fontana region. In Swain County, there are several museums which memorialize the communities drowned in Fontana Lake and the unresolved promises made by the federal government and TVA. Both the cemetery decorations and the way these museums retell the history of the county demonstrate the commemoration of the attachment to this history many people feel today.

Lastly, and very importantly, public memory "is historically situated… both its cultural practice and intellectual status have changed over time and in different societies" (Dickinson, Blair, and Ott 10). In the case of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere, the history of the Fontana Project has become a key point in Swain County's history. During WWII, TVA purchased tracts of land owned by the aluminum company Alcoa for the purpose of building a dam to supply hydropower in aluminum production and for the top-secret nuclear facility in Oak Ridge, TN. Workers from all over the country were hired by TVA to construct the dam.

In WWII America, workers involved in wartime industries – industries which produced products (such as weapons and tanks) and structures (such as dams) – were considered patriotic and highly important in the war effort. Labor shortages were common nationwide since so many working-age men were overseas fighting, so the federal government pushed programs and visuals (such as billboards and films) to encourage civilians to contribute to the war effort by working in these industries. Fontana Dam was widely recognized as an important war project. Workers were told the dam would provide hydropower to facilities producing aluminum for use in military weapons and equipment. This was true, but what workers did not know at the time was that the dam would eventually provide hydropower to the facilities at Oak Ridge, where nuclear research was taking place. The legacy of the dam's purpose has persisted throughout history, with many official retellings of history in the Fontana region focusing on the importance of the dam in the war effort rather than the consequences of displacement for communities in the region. It is important to remember the efforts of the men and women involved in Fontana Dam's construction, but it is also important to remember the communities lost to the project. The importance of Fontana Dam as a wartime project heavily influenced the willingness of residents in the area to leave their homes. Many of the families displaced from the Fontana region believed

their removal was necessary for the good of the country, so the continued inaction on the government's part to fulfill their end of the Lakeview Drive bargain felt like they were being taken advantage of all along. The history behind Fontana Dam is tied directly to current attitudes surrounding the Road to Nowhere, as is clear in modern retellings of the region's history.

Rhetorical Remembering, Epideictic Rhetoric, and Public Memories

Public memory and history are intertwined, and so are the ways people choose to remember the history of a particular place or event publicly or privately. In Travis Rountree's book *Hillsville Remembered: Public Memory, Historical Silence, and Appalachia's Most Notorious Shoot-Out,* he addresses the importance of these artifacts of memory through the concept rhetorical remembering. Rountree defines rhetorical remembering "as how individuals create public or private artifacts or memories that construct meaning about a particular event" (9). According to Rountree, the way the creators of these artifacts choose to "construct the history of the event" essentially "depict the creators' own rhetorical approach to the event" (9). In his research of a 1912 shoot-out in Hillsville, Virginia, Rountree examines several instances of rhetorical remembering surrounding the history of the shoot-out. Through his research, he determines that a large role in retellings of the shoot-out's history relies on official and vernacular histories of the event. John Bodnar writes that "public memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions," identifying official histories as "the concerns of cultural leaders or authorities" in society, and vernacular histories as representative of "an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole" (13-14). In Swain County, I have identified three locations which serve to tell the history of Fontana Dam. The first location, TVA's Fontana Dam Visitor's Center, is a site of official history, where TVA has exhibits focusing on the positive developments TVA brought to the region. The second location

is the Appalachian History Center (AHC) in Bryson City, owned and operated by Lance Holland. AHC is an archive Holland has spent decades cultivating, showcasing primary source documents from TVA, the Fontana Dam project site, interviews, photographs, and more. The third location is the Swain County Wall of History, located right outside of the new Swain County Courthouse in Bryson City. Members of the Swain County Heritage Board and the Swain County Genealogical Society raised $100,000 dollars for the monument, casting the history of Swain County (including the communities lost to the Fontana region) on large marble slabs (Bowling).

In this case study, the frame of rhetorical remembering serves to show the Road to Nowhere's continued significance to people in Swain County, as well as to the background of the dam as a patriotic landmark. Many people in Swain County feel that TVA's official retellings of the Fontana project do not do justice to the communities drowned by the lake or the current opinions of people in Swain County. Vernacular histories about the region, as a result, seek to address these missing elements of the history; this aim demonstrates the current values of those dispossessed in the Fontana project. Examining vernacular histories is not only a way to provide the dispossessed with a voice in the rhetorical sphere, but a way to challenge official retellings which perpetuate the norm of ignoring the voices of those with less power. Malea Powell describes the space in which the voices of the dispossessed are prioritized as "the space of absent presence, the space where the rhetorical tactics of folks… can be put into conversation with Euroamerican 'oratorial culture' as a way to complicate its so-called transformations" (398). Much like the communities Powell is talking about, the Fontana region was populated with people the voices in power saw as being displaceable; because of this, the voices of the people within the Fontana region were not heard at the time, and they often continue to be ignored today. By acknowledging how the rhetoric of the dispossessed contributes to larger conversations

about the Road to Nowhere, we are able to give these elements of the conversation a voice as well as examine how the history of displacement in the Fontana region contributes to present-day conversations. Vernacular histories in Swain County, along with ritualistic performances, demonstrate the value these histories continue to have in Swain County.

Epideictic rhetoric plays a role in the way vernacular histories in Swain County are shaped, thus contributing to the sites of rhetorical remembering I examined for this case study. Epideictic rhetoric "develops from the conduct and values of the society that constructs the piece of rhetoric (Rountree 92). According to Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard, epideictic rhetoric rhetoric today "operates in contexts civic, professional, or occupational… that invite individuals to evaluate the communities or institutions to which they belong, their own roles within them, and the roles and responsibilities of their fellow constituents, including their leaders" (771). Public memory serves the needs of the present as well as memorializing the history of the past, and the needs being served and memorialized are apparent in the three locations of rhetorical remembering I examined for this case study.

Archival Research

For much of the research I did for this case study, I relied upon archival materials. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) outlines three usages of the word archives. The first definition posits archives as "the permanently valuable records… of people, businesses, and government." The second definition is "an organization dedicated to preserving the documentary heritage of a particular group: a city, a province or state, a business, a university, or a community." The final definition refers to the physical location of archives, where 'archive' is "used to refer to the building or part of a building in which archival materials are kept."

Regardless of how these archives are organized, SAA states that archives are "any collection of documents that are old or of historical interest" ("What Are Archives?").

A major issue surrounding archives in the past has been the exclusion of vulnerable groups, including "women, indigenous people, people of color, people who identify as LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and people of lower economic status," as well as the tendency of archives to insert these vulnerable groups "in archives not as subjects but as objects: people about whom others voice opinions but whose own voices are muted, overwritten, and nearly… erased" (McKee and Porter 60). Throughout history, certain groups have been granted the ability to control the narratives circulated as fact. The voices of the dispossessed have ultimately been disregarded because of this, which heavily impacts the materials deemed worthy of documentation and preservation. The Appalachian region, as I have examined throughout this chapter, has frequently been overlooked and exploited through stereotypes, resource extraction, and displacement. Heidi A. McKee and James E. Porter address the problems with dispossessed voices being left out as they describe efforts of scholars to challenge "researchers to look beyond canonized public figures to include the public writings… [and] rhetoric of any and all persons who may be overlooked" (61). These considerations played a part in the way I conducted my archival research.

The archival materials I used were available through online public archives, such as the electronic records of the TVA, the National Archives, the North Carolina Digital Collections, and the Tennessee Virtual Archive. I also acquired several materials from Lance Holland's archives at the Appalachian Heritage Center, which he graciously showed me. When I conducted my archival research, I gave special attention to the words of people from the communities drowned by Fontana Lake and people who have ties to the Fontana region. Thanks to Lance Holland,

many of these voices have been chronicled in interviews. Although records from the time Fontana Dam was built do not typically focus on the thoughts of people directly impacted by displacement, several interviews from Holland's archive gather the voices of people who remember the feelings from the time. Working in the archives was an incredible experience for me. I reached out to several archivists to get information about photographs I analyzed in this thesis, and their help was invaluable. I was especially honored to be given a tour of Lance Holland's archive in the AHC.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter one analyzes the historical context of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere, specifically as it relates to the patterns of stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement in the Appalachian region. Each of these patterns contributes heavily to current retellings of Fontana-related history, which makes an examination of the history crucial to the rhetorical memories in this study. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott assert that memory is "operationalized by forgetting," (9), and a major element of the rhetorical rememberings of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere is both the tendency for official histories to forget the dispossessed *and* the feeling of being forgotten experienced by the dispossessed. In order to understand the impact the three patterns of mistreatment in Appalachia had – and continue to have – on residents of Swain County, it is crucial to examine the relation of these patterns to the history of both Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere. It is through this framework that we see the emergence of both locations as contested places of public memory.

Chapter two is an examination of visual rhetorics used on the construction site of Fontana Dam to encourage workers to work efficiently. Official retellings of Fontana Dam's history focus primarily on the importance of the dam to the natural resource industry in the area and its status

as an important wartime project during WWII. Vernacular retellings of the history also give credit to the people who built Fontana Dam, but they also include history about the displaced communities after the project ended. The people employed at the dam weren't aware of it at the time, but the hydropower Fontana Dam would provide was to be used for nuclear bomb-related research at the Oak Ridge facility in Tennessee, which was a crucial part of the Manhattan Project. Since the wartime history of Fontana plays a major role in modern rhetorical rememberings of the region's history, the rhetoric present on the dam's construction site is important to analyze. One of the ways official retellings justify the displacement of communities in the region is through patriotic rhetorics, which praise those who contribute to the war effort and shame anyone who doesn't. Many people in the communities surrounding Fontana Dam vacated their land to help the war effort, expecting that the promises made by TVA and the federal government would be fulfilled. Through the framework of circulation studies (see Gries; Gries and Brooke; and Edbauer), I examine how the futurity of pieces of visual rhetorics posted around the Fontana Dam construction site contribute to modern rememberings of the Fontana region.

Chapter three examines language used in TVA's report on the Fontana Project to describe the people and communities who were displaced to make room for Fontana Lake. The language used in the report is thorough, albeit dismissive of the situation people in the region found themselves in. Examining this document also provides insight into the struggles people in Swain County still experience today, since the official agreements outlined in TVA documents continue to be debated and unresolved to this day. The three patterns of mistreatment experienced by Appalachians – stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement – are all present in this document, and an examination of the rhetoric used by TVA to justify the displacement of over 20

communities in the Fontana region is crucial in examinations of modern retellings of the area's history.

Chapter four focuses on three sites of rhetorical remembering in Swain County. The first location is TVA's Fontana Dam Visitor Center; the second is the Swain County Wall of History; and the third is Lance Holland's Appalachian Heritage Center, which serves as an archive for Fontana-related information. Each of these tellings of the Fontana history focus in varying degrees on the displacement-related history of the region, showcasing how official and vernacular histories differ in the retelling of the region. A major element to both official and vernacular histories in the area is the history of Fontana Dam as a WWII landmark. Official retellings focus heavily on this portion of the history, all while neglecting the history of the communities in the area prior to the project's beginning. Vernacular retellings also tell the story of the people who built the dam, but they don't shy away from the rhetorics of displacement that are so important in historical remembrances.

The conclusion of this thesis discusses the potential for future research in areas near the Fontana region. There are several areas surrounding Bryson City, NC that have been the target of forced removal since the Fontana project; rather than TVA, though, these communities have been targeted by Duke Energy. In one case, a tract of land which was part of the path taken by the Cherokee during the Trail of Tears was nearly flooded to become a hydropower reservoir for Duke Energy. Additionally, resource extraction industries continue to flock to Appalachia to take advantage of the resources held by the land. As long as these practices continue, the legacy of exploitation in the region will not cease and the dispossessed will be forced to continue fighting for their voices to be heard.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FONTANA DAM AND THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

Unequal Power Dynamics in Historical Rememberings of Fontana

Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere are locations which are inextricably linked in the history they share and in official and vernacular retellings of this history. From the time of Congress' approval of the Fontana project to the present-day negotiations between Swain County officials and the federal government, two groups have been directly involved in the Fontana region's history. The first group is those who came to the region in search of natural resources to pursue the "public good," and the second group is made up of those who called – and call – the area home. John Bodnar writes that "public memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions," identifying official histories as "the concerns of cultural leaders or authorities" in society, and vernacular histories as representative of "an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole" (13-14). When examining the history of the Fontana region, Fontana Dam, and the events related to the Road to Nowhere, what becomes clear is that official retellings of the history differ from vernacular retellings in one major point: the remembering, or forgetting, of communities in the area prior to the dam's construction.

History is often viewed as being straightforward and concrete, but the reality is that the way history is told is heavily reliant upon memory, meaning the official narratives of people in power tend to persist more strongly through time. In Appalachia, the voices of people in the region have frequently been dismissed by people with the influence to control historical narratives, resulting in the continued portrayal of the region as "an isolated, underdeveloped area of inferior and dependent people" (Fisher 1). The continued circulation of this stereotype means that Appalachia is trapped in a vicious cycle of misrepresentation leading to exploitation of land.

It is much easier for powerful entities to enter an area seen as underdeveloped and inferior in the public eye, and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes in Appalachia are certainly convenient for exploitative industries hoping to establish themselves in the region. In the context of the Fontana region, the omission of the history of economic development in the region prior to TVA's establishing challenges the notion that Appalachian communities are more expendable than other communities. Official retellings of the area's history make rhetorical choices to influence how people reflect upon and remember the history of the Fontana project in the region by perpetuating the idea that pre-TVA Fontana *needed* development for their own good. Vernacular histories, by contrast, seek to show the public that the Fontana region was well established before TVA displaced the communities there.

Power dynamics heavily influence the way history is told, specifically through which events are remembered and which events are forgotten in official retellings. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott's fourth characteristic of places of public memory states that public memory is "partial, partisan, and thus frequently contested," and, as a result of "a collective's memories [being] selective, they are seen as also deflecting other memories" (9). Since memories are selective, Dickinson, Blair, and Ott argue, we can understand memory as being "operationalized by forgetting" (9). With two conflicting histories of the Fontana region being circulated in the public sphere, Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere have become contested sites of public memory.

In TVA's official retellings of Fontana Dam's history, the negative impact the project had on dozens of communities and the voices of the dispossessed are omitted; instead, TVA retellings focus on the benefits Fontana Dam's hydropower brought to the region, as well as how important the dam was in achieving victory during WWII. Vernacular retellings of the Fontana region, by contrast, tell stories of all that the people in the area lost because of the dam. They lost

communities, homelands, and economic opportunities as a result of their displacement from the area; after the dam was built and the reservoir was filled, families lost the ability to return to cemeteries they were told would be accessible, all because Lakeview Drive was never finished; and, to add insult to injury, the residents of Swain County were forced to wait 75 years before any sort of resolution surrounding Lakeview Drive's construction was reached. Most importantly, vernacular histories serve as a means for the voices of the dispossessed to be included in the rhetorical circulation of the Fontana region's history.

The struggles people from the Fontana region have experienced as a direct result of the stereotypes, resource extraction, and displacement from their communities have influenced not only vernacular retellings of the history, but also acted – and act – as the foundation through which the history occurred at all. These three patterns acted not only as precedents for TVA's swift entry into the region, but also continue to influence how the history of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere are circulated today.

In the introduction I examined how stereotypes against Appalachian people have separated Appalachia from the rest of the United States, emphasizing the perceived peculiarity of the way of life in the region. The stereotypes which separate Appalachia as exceptional are influential factors in how and why entities in power enter the region; since the people in the area are viewed as being outside what is "normal," people with the power to make decisions about the land's use find it easier to exploit and displace Appalachian communities. The otherization of communities in Appalachia made the Fontana region particularly vulnerable to exploitation by TVA and the federal government. Stereotypes play a heavy role in determining which communities are determined to be dispensable – exploited and displaced by those in power – and which are exempt from interference.

The Rhetoric of Land Ownership in the Fontana Region

Negative Appalachian stereotypes served as the catalyst for the federal government to enter the region, and the unequal power dynamics between federal entities and the people of Swain County are made clearer through an examination of the land ownership in the county. Before the Fontana project was approved by Congress, 58 percent of Swain County had already been seized for federal and state projects (particularly for National Park, Forest Reserve, and Indian Reservation purposes); once Fontana Dam was complete, 75 percent of Swain County's total area was owned by federal entities (Tennesee Valley Authority 482). Over half of Swain County was already owned by the federal government before TVA was established by Congress, which made further acquisition of land in the county much easier; the precedent for resource extraction had already been set for a decade prior to the Fontana project's conception.

The physical and economic resources provided by the land in Appalachia had the capability to support communities before TVA entered the region, but the ability for people in the Fontana region to maintain communities using the resources around them was taken away when land began to be seized for federal and state projects. When entities like the government or large-scale businesses purchase land for their own use, the opportunity for people in local communities to build their own economies becomes nonexistent. This is the case even when the landowners aren't actually living on the land they purchase; in other words, absentee landowners have the ability to purchase land and profit off of its resources without being present on the land. This results in fewer homes and opportunities for people local to the area, as well as the displacement of communities (if any communities happen to be contained in the bounds of the land purchased). Absentee land ownership accounts for much of the Appalachian region's lack of

economic development, with “the rate of land ownership” among groups in the region being notably disproportionate when compared to these absentee owners (K. Powell 156).

One of the major differences between official and vernacular retellings of the Fontana region lies in how much attention is given to the dispossessed. Before TVA entered the region, communities had been built and sustained through their own small-scale resource extraction industries (particularly mining). When TVA entered the area, though, these land tracts were purchased out from under these communities and the citizens there were dispossessed. Official histories of the region state that the presence of TVA in the region was crucial to the economic development of the area, but this frame disregards the economic developments of the communities in the area for years before TVA arrived there. By ignoring this part of the region’s history in official retellings, people in positions of authority – specifically TVA – are continuing the narrative that Appalachian communities are uncivilized and in need of industrialization, which is used as a justification for the displacement of people in the region.

TVA acquired the land for Fontana Dam and its reservoir from Alcoa with the intention of building the dam to harvest hydropower for aluminum production and to power nuclear research. When federal agencies and large companies began entering the region, the businesses people in the region had created to sustain their own communities were completely decimated and the land was taken from those who lived there and utilized it. The federal government’s interference in the region for resource extraction purposes led to the displacement of several communities. Official retellings of the region champion Fontana Dam as a major development in the resource extraction potential of the region, but the reality is that communities in the area had harnessed these resources before federal intervention; the federal government just decided these

communities were displaceable, which is where retellings of the region's history begin to be contested.

Resource Extraction in the Fontana Region before Alcoa and TVA

As I discussed in the introduction of this study, western North Carolina was once home to approximately 30,000 Cherokee living in 60 towns (Dennis, Hirschfelder, and Flynn). When Europeans arrived in the area in the 1500s, efforts to take land occupied by the Cherokee began; by the 1800s, the newly established American government began passing laws which forced the Cherokee to leave their ancestral homes, all so the white settlers in the area could make use of the land and its resources. After the forced removal of the Cherokees from the region in 1838, speculators began purchasing large tracts of land with the hopes of "financial gain from the exploitation of the natural resources such as minerals and timber" (Holland 45). As time progressed and the rugged landscape didn't produce the profits the speculators expected, though, the area became practically untouched by industry, providing ideal living conditions for homesteads on the landscape.

Prior to 1900, families living in the Fontana region primarily lived in a subsistence economy, providing for their needs from the land around them. The families in the area had small, scattered farms located primarily in heavily wooded coves and valleys. The resources abundant in the land provided everything these families needed. As Sam Gray describes in a project in environmental education for TVA, WCU, and the Center for Environmental and Energy Education, the forest around the farms "provided wood for building and heating, a rich soil for planting, and a variety of nuts, fruits, plants, and game for eating" (23). The area was so untouched by development that the only city in the area with a name was Bryson City, far east from the farms in the Fontana

region. This changed in 1883 when Jacob Fonslow "Fonzie" Hall visited his brother on Hazel Creek.

Fonzie was in the area searching for mica when he happened to find an abundant copper ore on land owned by Ep Everett, a land speculator who had once been the sheriff and mayor of Bryson City (Altizer, Cyr, and Lofaro; Holland 46). Word of the copper discovery spread and eventually a mineral developer in New York, W.S. Adams, heard of the discovery; by 1889 Adams had purchased the land from Everett, hired a crew, and began constructing a mining town and a road down to the river to haul supplies and ore (Altizer, Cyr, and Lofaro). The mining town contained "about a half-dozen dwelling houses, a bunk house, a cookhouse, shops, and a powder house" (Altizer, Cyr, and Lofaro). Several shafts were sunk by the mining crew and the copper ore was shipped to the smelter, which wreaked havoc on the resources in the area.

In copper processing, tremendous amounts of firewood were needed for the burning process, which led to deforestation in the area of the mine. During the burning process, gaseous sulfuric acid was produced and sunk to the ground, killing all vegetation in the area (Holland 47). The process was lucrative for Adams until another land speculator, George Westfeldt, claimed that he was the rightful owner of the land the mine was on. Adams and Westfeldt spent 26 years in a legal battle for the mine. By 1927, "a compromise was reached with the Adams heirs in control of the mine" and Westfeld heirs retaining "a large interest in the property." When the Great Depression started the heirs lost interest in re-opening the mine, and it ultimately sat untouched until 1942 when a family, the Kalbs from New York, purchased the land (Holland 49). The mine owned by the Kalbs were among the land tracts acquired by TVA in Fontana Dam's construction.

People involved in the area's mining industry were angry about TVA purchasing the mine, with one resident stating in a 1986 interview: "TVA made a bad mistake in where they put

Fontana Dam. They brought it right slap over this copper vein… They drilled straight down in the bottom. That hole went back to about 480 feet and golly bum, they went through copper, copper, copper – 150 to 200 feet of it, and it's still down there" (Holland 49). The vernacular history told here demonstrates just one resident's recollection of what the communities in the area held before TVA bought the land. Official histories of the area emphasize that resource extraction didn't exist in the region until TVA entered the picture, but a long history of mining and economic development in the area as a result of these mines was in place when TVA purchased land tracts in Swain County. The Adams-Westfeldt mine was not the only lucrative mining operation impacted by TVA, though; two other successful mines operated in the region prior to the 1940s, creating jobs for many residents in the area.

A second and larger mine than the Adamst-Westfeldt mine opened just three miles away in 1927 while the compromise between Adams and Westfeldt was in court. It was "first exploited on a small scale by the Montvale Lumber Company" around 1925 before the mine was leased to an affiliate of Ducktown Chemical and Iron Company in 1926 (Altizer, Cyr, and Lofaro). In the mine's active years, it produced over 83 million pounds of copper worth more than $10 million (NPS, "Historic Resource Study" 62). With the mine being so lucrative, more speculators entered the area and opened mines with the hope of generating the same – or more – profit from the land.

Fontana Copper Mine, or the Eagle Creek Mine, opened in the late 1920s and became a "viable commercial operation" in 1931 (Livingston 7). From 1926 through the mine's closure in 1944, 584,350 tons of ore were shipped that produced over 85 million pounds of copper (Holland 55). The Eagle Creek Mine went through several owners before its closure. In 1943, mine management had "realized the impending loss of access to the mine due to the construction of Fontana Lake," especially because in years prior high wartime demand "had resulted in a rob and

retreat approach to ore removal" (Holland 56). Before losing the mine land to TVA, the mining company drilled as much of the site as they could, ultimately flooding the mine to the 8th level. In 1975, a search of retired Fontana mining records concluded that the remaining possible ore body at Eagle Creek Mine had a gross value of $19.7 million (Holland 56). The loss of such a high dollar amount of potential income generated from the mines, as well as the jobs working there would have created, remained a sore subject for residents in the area for decades.

Although Fontana Dam would provide jobs to people in the area for construction, the fact that such a lucrative business would be cut off in favor dam's completion meant the people formerly employed in the area would be left with no jobs to return to after the dam was done. In TVA's official retellings of Fontana-related history, TVA champions itself as an entity which came to an underdeveloped area and lifted it out of poverty by building Fontana Dam. These retellings completely ignore the history of resource extraction in the area prior to their intervention, which heavily diminishes the value of communities in the region as well as the economies they developed through their own utilization of the land's resources.

TVA and Building Fontana Dam[2]

The Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933 marked the creation of TVA, regarded as one of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR)'s "alphabet soup" projects to get the United States back on its feet during the Great Depression ("The TVA Act"). The preamble to the Tennessee Valley Authority Act outlines the purpose of the organization:

> An Act to Improve the Navigability and to Provide for the Flood Control of the Tennessee River: To Provide for Reforestation and the Proper Use of Marginal Lands

[2] Lance Holland, historian and the author of Fontana, is a major source for Fontana Village-related information in this section. Holland is the curator of the Appalachian History Center in Bryson City, NC. Without his meticulous research and regional collections, my own research would have been exponentially more difficult.

> in the Tennessee Valley; to Provide for the Agricultural and Industrial Development of Said Valley; to Provide for the National Defense by the Creation of a Corporation for the Operation of Government Properties at and Near Muscle Shoals in the State of Alabama, and for Other Purposes… ("Tennessee Valley Authority Act" 1)

While the natural resources found within the Fontana region were utilized and developed by corporations prior to the creation of TVA, the federal government's role in establishing the organization was unprecedented. The preamble of the TVA Act uses language that makes it seem as though the organization exists solely to enter areas in the Tennessee Valley – which includes the Fontana region – with the purpose of developing them agriculturally and industrially; what is not explicitly stated, though, is that people in existing communities in those areas would be forced to leave to make room for the agency's projects.

The potential for hydroelectric dams in the Fontana region was precipitated not by TVA in 1933, but in 1886 by an unemployed 22-year-old man named Charles Martin Hall who used his chemistry experience from college to patent a process which would cheaply produce aluminum. When Hall began his experiments with his sister, Julia, aluminum was a resource which held great potential but had yet to find "few practical applications" due to its cost (Holland 119). Hall formed the Pittsburgh Reduction Company in 1888 following the successful patent of his aluminum production method. This company would become the Aluminum Company of America and, in 1907, Alcoa ("Our History"). The process through which aluminum is created requires large amounts of electricity, and as a result Alcoa began constructing aluminum plants in locations where hydro power was readily available (Holland 122). By 1909, Alcoa began to acquire properties along the Little Tennessee River and its tributaries; this region would, in time, become a "bonanza" for hydroelectric power in aluminum production (Holland 123). In 1914,

Alcoa purchased the Tallasee Power Company – shortened to Tapoco Inc. in 1955 – and all of its holdings, with the new subsidiary's responsibility being to construct and operate new dams which would be used to power aluminum production (Holland 124).

Alcoa applied to the Federal Power Commission for a permit to construct what would become Fontana Dam – named for the town of Fontana, which was located at the confluence of Eagle Creek and the Little Tennessee River about a mile upstream from the dam site – in 1941. According to TVA, Alcoa "made the government a gift of its Fontana property – a prime site for a TVA dam – in return for various considerations from TVA" ("TVA Goes to War"). Describing Alcoa's land as a 'gift' means that the land was Alcoa's to give, despite the fact that people living on the land were unaware that TVA's acquisition of the land would ultimately lead to their displacement. Since Alcoa owned the land they gave to TVA, though, the people living on it had little to no say in what would ultimately happen to their homes, reflecting the issue of land ownership in Appalachian communities. Even if only a certain portion of the land is being used for industrial purposes by absentee owners, the daily lives of those occupying it each day can be destroyed with little to no recourse because of eminent domain.

Congress approved and signed the bill which would allow the construction of Fontana Dam just 10 days before Pearl Harbor ("TVA Goes to War"). Aluminum was a valuable resource in the eyes of war strategists at this time, since its potential to be used in warfare was largely unexplored and had great potential; following the end of WWII, about 90% of all U.S. aluminum production went into military uses (Sheller). Aluminum production, as such, was the primary war objective for the Fontana Dam. Additionally, the dam would generate vast amounts of electric power in another war project – the creation of the product U-235, which would ultimately be used in the bomb that leveled Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 (Holland 136).

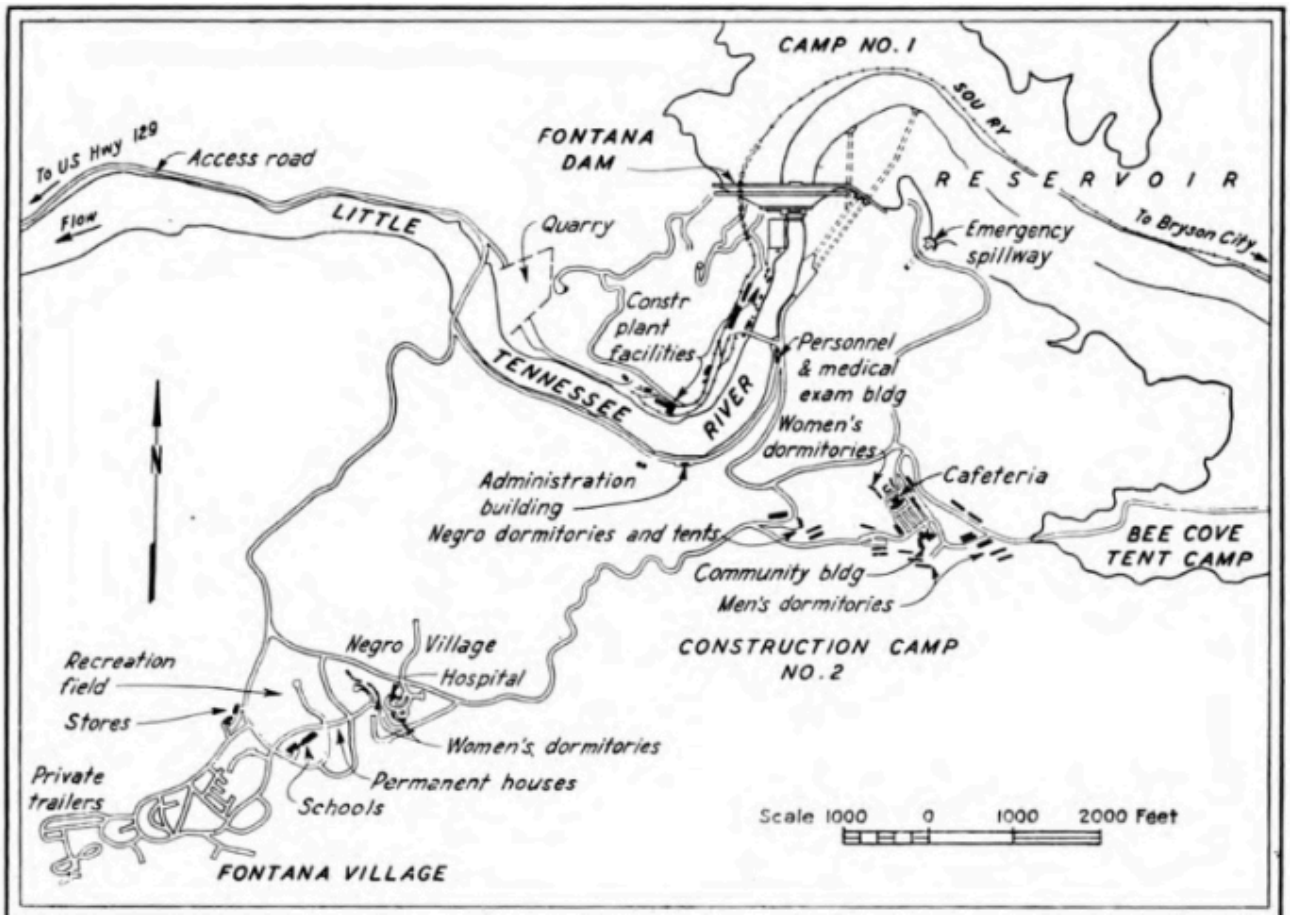

Fig. 1. General Layout of Fontana Village and Construction Camp from TVA, *The Fontana Project.*

The Fontana Agreement was signed on August 14, 1941, and on December 17, 1941 (ten days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor), Congress authorized Fontana Dam's construction as "part of TVA's third wartime emergency program" (Tennessee Valley Authority 1). As such, the construction of the dam was recognized as a patriotic effort, and anyone who took part in its construction was a patriot fighting for the safety and security of his country. In the introduction of the Construction and Maintenance (C&M) Division of TVA's "Final Cost Report" (provided by Lance Holland in his book *Fontana*), the plan to build a village for workers to live in full time is outlined: "By June 1, 1942, or less than 6 months after" the beginning of construction, "a

complete camp for men had come into existence with all facilities to handle up to 2500 men" (quoted in Holland 138-9). A second tent camp was constructed near what is now the intersection of N.C. 28 and the top of Fontana Dam; the second camp consisted of 11 dormitories for single men and three for single women (Holland 143). As figure 1 shows, the camps contained dormitories for the workers (and their families, if they weren't single) involved in the dam's construction, an administration building, recreation fields, schools for children of the workers, a community building (which contained a movie theatre, auditorium, library, post office, class rooms, a commissary, and a fire department), stores, and several other structures (Holland 144). Fontana Village contained facilities for black workers, too, since segregation was enforced in the 1940s. Black workers were recruited for the dam's construction and contributed heavily to the project's success; separate housing, dining, recreational facilities, and a school were built for the use of these workers and their families (Holland 160).

In time, Fontana Village became a bustling and close-knit community, which remained the case for former residents long after they moved on when the dam was completed. Although the people who lived in Fontana Village knew they were not going to be living there forever, the years spent there were, for many families, fond memories worthy of preservation. For instance, the children who lived in Fontana Village alongside their families attended school in the village. Between 1942 and 1946, over 600 students attended classes in the schools. Although the children and teenagers living in Fontana Village were given the opportunity to continue their education, the Fontana project was always of utmost importance in their lives. Lance Holland conducted an interview with a former resident of Fontana Village, Eloise Barton Brock, who recalled her memories of the school as follows:

> The fact that all families were engaged in what was considered an essential project, helping the war effort, made us all feel one family, united in one cause. As far as I was able to tell, there was no class distinction… we were all there for one reason, to build the dam as quickly and as safely as possible. (quoted in Holland 157)

Years after Fontana Village was flooded following the dam's completion, two alumni of the Fontana Village school organized a school reunion with their former classmates, who now call themselves "Dam Kids" (Holland 155). For many of the people who lived in Fontana Village, their years in the community represented a sense of normalcy in what was a very uncertain time in America. Families from 48 different states in the United States flocked to the community to contribute to the building effort, uprooting their lives to serve the country.

After Construction

Following the completion of Fontana Dam's construction, area residents were heavily impacted by the reservoir preparation portion of the project. Alcoa had purchased just over 15,000 acres of land that would ultimately be filled by the lake, and this land was transferred to TVA under the Fontana Agreement (Tennessee Valley Authority 7). According to TVA's *The Fontana Project,* the only urban community directly affected by the Fontana project was Bryson City (497). The inhabitants of Fontana Village had always known the village site would be drowned when the reservoir above Fontana Dam was filled. The main issue following the completion of Fontana Dam surrounded the construction of the new NC Highway 288, which was also drowned in the reservoir.

Old NC Highway 288, according to TVA, was "a narrow unpaved road… which extended along the right banks of the Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee Rivers from Bryson City to the Tennessee State line. Because of its low standards, the highway carried little, if any, through

traffic and merely served local needs in a very rugged, sparsely settled territory" (Tennessee Valley Authority 499). Although the report describes the communities connected to Bryson City through Old NC Highway 288 as "sparsely settled," the communities impacted by the flooding included residences and generational cemeteries. The area served by the old highway included a strip of about 46,000 acres which contained several small towns, copper mines, and railroads; interestingly, this strip was intended to be encompassed in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP), but a lack of funds ultimately excluded the strip from the original park boundary (Holland 186).

It was soon realized by the public that a substantial portion of Old NC Highway 288 was to be rendered inaccessible with the flooding of the reservoir, meaning that a number of families living in the region who relied on the old highway to be connected to Bryson City (Holland 187). TVA's *Fontana Report* identifies a total of 240 families who were serviced by Old NC Highway 288, and that these families were only able to access "the outside" through either the highway or steep sled roads and trails leading south over the mountains (43). To relocate the highway using "comparable low grade construction standards" would have cost at least $1.2 million, "a figure TVA deemed more than the value of the land served" (Holland 187). In response to this problem, TVA planned to fund the construction of a new Highway 288 that would be built high enough on the mountain side to avoid flooding by the reservoir at Fontana Dam (Holland 140). After the dam's completion, though, construction on the new Highway 288 halted.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, NC Governor Luther Hodges and other lobbyists pushed the government to continue the road construction promised in a Memorandum Agreement in 1943 (*Memorandum Agreement 1943*). The state of North Carolina fulfilled its part of the agreement by completing 2.67 miles of road from Bryson City to the boundary of GSMNP, and between

1963 and 1971 the Park Service constructed six miles of the new NC Highway 288, known also as North Shore Road, ending at a 1,200-foot-long tunnel (191). This road and the tunnel are commonly referred to as "The Road to Nowhere" today.

The history of the Road to Nowhere is riddled with hard work, sacrifice, and displacement. Lauded as patriots, the men and women who constructed the dam were convinced that their efforts in Fontana Dam's creation and operation would be considered heroic; in the years after the completion of the dam, though, all that these workers could see was a government going back on promises made to the people of the region, which made them feel used and discarded. Even those who were not directly involved with the construction of the dam began to share these sentiments as time passed and the construction of new NC Highway 288 made no progress.

Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere as Contested Sites of Public Memory

Much of the tension between residents of Swain County and the federal government lies within the history of exploitation within the region. Before Fontana Dam's construction, communities in the area utilized the land around them to further their own economic development, establishing ways of life that were more than satisfactory for the people in the region. Contrary to Appalachian stereotypes, these communities were not impoverished, lawless, or peculiar; they were home to families, facilities, and businesses functioning similarly to communities outside of Appalachia. Memory is, as Dickinson, Blair, and Ott outline, "partial, partisan, and thus frequently contested" (9). If TVA were to acknowledge the displacement the Fontana project caused in the region, public opinion of the organization would be impacted negatively. To avoid this, TVA's best interest is to focus on what Fontana Dam did positively in the region, which their retellings focus on by ignoring the displacement aspect of the history and

prioritizing the role of the dam in ending WWII. For Swain County residents, though, the memories of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere are reminders of the federal government's involvement in taking over 75 percent of their total land, the lack of urgency with which the government fulfilled promises made in the 1940s, and continued beliefs that they are less important than non-Appalachian communities.

In the next chapter, I examine instances of visual rhetoric from the Fontana Dam construction site which are used in both official and vernacular retellings of the region. Fontana Dam was a war project, and billboards posted throughout the construction site were used to ensure that the morale of workers stayed high. When the dam was completed and the workers relocated, TVA began using these images in official retellings to champion the dam as the project that led to the end of WWII. Through Laurie Gries' framework of rhetorical transformation, I look into the initial impact of these rhetorics as well as how they have evolved overtime to be used in modern rememberings of the history in the Fontana region. The transformation of these visual rhetorics matter because TVA uses them as a distraction of sorts to avoid memorializing the negative impacts Fontana Dam's creation had on the region.

CHAPTER TWO: PATRIOTISM RHETORICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FONTANA DAM

"So, in this room is where the great dam is really built."

"No, the dam is really built back in our town where the workers live." – A conversation between a TVA manager and Fred Schlemmer, project manager of Fontana Dam (Holland 163)

A Shared Experience

Since public memory is historically situated, examining the patriotic roots of Fontana Dam is important for context in this case study. While everyone's personal histories are unique, the shared experience of those with ties to Fontana Dam span generations and demographics. Not only does the dam's construction represent a portion of resource extraction's long history in Appalachia, but it also stands as a visible reminder of how people in Appalachia contributed to the war effort during WWII. The dam was considered an important war project, and anyone who relocated themselves to Fontana Village to contribute to it was considered patriotic. Simultaneously, an exploited region of the United States became the workforce behind a secret project in Oak Ridge, TN which would effectively end the war. The widely circulated rhetoric surrounding the dam's importance in the war meant the displacement of rural communities was considered necessary for the good of the country, which continues to impact official and vernacular retellings of the area's history today. Current official and vernacular retellings both touch on the patriotic status of Fontana Dam, focusing primarily on either the sacrifices workers made on the job for the sake of the country or the importance of the project's completion in ending WWII. The elements of these retellings are rooted in visual rhetorics on the Fontana Dam construction site, which surrounded workers daily as they worked to complete the dam.

Images chronicling Fontana Dam's construction are readily available in multiple archives, such as TVA's Historical Photograph Collection, the Western Carolina University Hunter Library, and the Records of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the National Archives. These images showcase everything from the buildings occupying Fontana Village to close-ups of workers as they carry out their daily work-related tasks. Some of the most interesting visual elements related to the Fontana Dam project memorialize the billboards erected around the worksite. Based on these photographs alone, the messages used to encourage those in active combat were also utilized to boost the morale of workers contributing to wartime projects on American soil, such as the men dedicating time to building Fontana Dam. These visual artifacts are important not only as we examine the history of the dam, but the impact this patriotic rhetoric had on those who spent their days assisting in the war effort through the dam's construction. Following the end of WWII and the completion of Fontana Dam's construction, those who worked on the dam viewed their work as something to be proud of, which cemented both the dam itself and the work it took to build it as a physical embodiment of hard work and sacrifice during WWII.

The three billboards I chose to analyze in this case study represent common themes in patriotic rhetoric from WWII-era America. For people who were not fighting overseas, the government released a wide variety of images and campaigns encouraging them to do what they could from home to positively contribute to the war effort. Much of this rhetoric was praise-based, unifying imagery, forging a national identify for Americans to encourage people who were not overseas to identify with the troops involved in conflict on battlefields. The history of the wartime project of Fontana Dam contributes heavily to the modern memorialization of Swain County history. Swain County is a county which heavily praises the efforts of veterans from all

wars. The Swain County Wall of History's main dedication reads: "THIS WALL CONSTRUCTED TO DISPLAY, PRESERVE, AND SHARE SWAIN COUNTY'S HISTORY AND HONOR OUR VETERANS." Given the importance of Fontana Dam in the research which would ultimately end WWII, the history of Fontana Dam's construction is important to the Swain County community. It is also important as we examine current discussions surrounding the unfinished Lakeview Drive as this patriotic history is weaponized by official retellings to justify the displacement of communities in the Fontana region.

On the Fontana Dam construction sight, various examples of patriotic rhetoric were posted to encourage the workforce to work efficiently. The presence of these rhetorics around the construction site solidified Fontana Dam's importance in the war effort, and the impact this status has on historical retellings of Fontana Dam can still be seen today in rememberings of the region. In an examination of the impact of visual rhetorics through the passage of time, Laurie Gries argues that futurity is crucial in understanding the rhetorical transformation of these rhetorics. Futurity, she says, refers to "the strands of time beyond the initial moment of production and delivery when rhetorical consequences unfold, often unpredictably, as things circulate and transform across space, form, genre, and function" (14). At the time of these billboards' conception, America was in the throes of WWII. The images were used as a way to boost the morale of workers to encourage them to complete Fontana Dam efficiently for the good of the country. Gries' concept of rhetorical transformation examines "how an image becomes rhetorical in divergent ways as it circulates with time, enters into new associations, transform, and generates a multiplicity of consequences" (14). As time passed and the history of the region was told and retold, the purpose of the rhetorics employed on the construction site changed. Since the war was over and workers were no longer on the site, these patriotic rhetorics shifted

and became a way to both remember the importance of the project *and* to justify the displacement of communities in the dam's bounds.

The patriotic images from the Fontana site continue to be circulated for different purposes today, depending on who uses them. Official retellings use these patriotic rhetorics as a justification for the displacement of communities in the region, or as a way to ignore the impact of displacement on the Fontana area entirely. The rhetorical transformation of visual rhetorics through time and space directly relates to the establishment of certain locations as places of public memory because both processes are heavily influenced by the concerns and/or issues of groups in the present. The use of patriotic images from the construction of Fontana Dam are used by TVA today to deflect attention from the displacement of communities in the region, and the same images are used in vernacular retellings to commemorate a part of Swain County's history. Many of the people who worked at Fontana Dam were residents of Swain County, and many people involved in the Lakeview Drive issue today believe the government's inaction in reaching a compromise with the county is an act of disrespect against the same people who brought an end to WWII.

"Work! or Fight!" – The War Effort Comes to Appalachia

Rather than simply entering the area to exploit natural resources, TVA promoted patriotism to start the Fontana project. Before TVA acquired the land for Fontana Dam's construction, the aluminum company Alcoa owned the rights to develop the area for hydropower. Resource extraction is nothing new in Appalachian communities. From the earliest days of writers putting their interpretations of Appalachia into the public sphere, an idealized image of the region as a "reflection of a simpler, less complicated time" perpetuated harmful stereotypes about Appalachian people. On another end, people with faith in the capitalist frame of America

believed Appalachian communities were isolated and backwards and "sought to uplift the mountain people through education and industrialization" (Eller 1-2). Ultimately, corporations and other entrepreneurs viewed the region as being perfect for resource extraction in the name of development. This was partly because Appalachia is rich in natural resources, and partly because the common view of Appalachia meant influential entities viewed Appalachian communities as a lesser, uncivilized "other." Because of this viewpoint, bringing industry to the area was touted as being a noble endeavor, all for the good of the mountain population.

When TVA purchased the land from Alcoa to build Fontana Dam, aluminum was in high demand for military uses. Hydropower was a major electricity source for aluminum production, so TVA and the federal government pushed the project as being necessary to supply troops overseas with equipment to end the war. What workers at the site didn't know, though, was that the actual purpose of the dam was much more important to the war effort: it was actually constructed to supply power to the secret facility in Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee. This laboratory was directly involved in Robert J. Oppenheimer's Manhattan Project. Three massive uranium enrichment facilities were housed in Oak Ridge, as well as the world's first plutonium-producing reactor. The research conducted there would contribute heavily to the use in Little Boy, the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945 ("About Oak Ridge"). In recent years, the story of this project has been widely discussed in the media. Notably, it was the subject of Christopher Nolan's 2023 film "Oppenheimer," which has won several of the highest awards in the movie industry. The workers involved in the dam's construction were frequently reminded that their efficiency was priority in the building project. Although the men and women at the Fontana Dam site didn't know the specifics behind the

activities at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, they were reminded daily to work as hard and as quickly as they possibly could in order to serve their country.

Workers at Fontana Dam were surrounded daily by reminders of how necessary their work was, as well as by morale-boosting messages to assist them in maintaining their speed and efficiency as they completed the project. The project manager, Fred Schlemmer, frequently utilized communication methods like billboards and bulletins to encourage the workforce towards maximum production (Holland 163). The phrase "Work! or Fight!" was posted throughout the construction site and Fontana Village both to remind workers that their jobs allowed them to stay in America rather than being sent overseas *and* that their choice to work was a job of great importance. For instance, signs reading "Work! or Fight!" were posted over the entrances to the cafeteria in Fontana Village, ensuring that workers would think about the Fontana project even during breaks from the job (Holland 163).

Images chronicling Fontana Dam's construction are readily available in multiple archives, both online and in person. These images showcase everything from the buildings occupying Fontana Village to close-ups of workers as they carry out their daily work-related tasks. Some of the most interesting visual elements related to the Fontana Dam project memorialize the billboards erected around the worksite. Based on these photographs alone, it is clear that the messages used to encourage those in active combat were also utilized to boost the morale of workers contributing to wartime projects on American soil, such as the men dedicating time to building Fontana Dam. These visual artifacts are important not only as we examine the history of the dam, but the impact this patriotic rhetoric had on those who spent their days assisting in the war effort through the dam's construction. Following the end of WWII and the completion of Fontana Dam's construction, those who worked on the dam viewed their work as

something to be proud of, which cemented both the dam itself and the work it took to build it as a physical embodiment of hard work and sacrifice during WWII.

In this chapter, I am examining three billboards from the Fontana Dam construction site. Each of the billboards illustrate not only the amount of effort put into keeping workers on site efficient and motivated, but the heavily circulated patriotic rhetoric so common in WWII-era America. The impact of patriotic rhetoric in several spheres of American life – from advertising to photographs in newspapers – has been examined deeply in academia (see Johnson; Witkowski; Tansey & Hyman; and Noon). A common theme among wartime advertisements and media directed at the workforce specifically was to encourage viewers and/or listeners to work together to do everything they could to bring WWII to an end. This media can broadly be divided into two categories: praise-based messages, which remind civilians and workers that they are all Americans capable of helping to end the war; and guilt-based messages, which relied upon morbid imagery to remind workers that while they were home, countless young men were dying overseas. In Fontana Dam's case, workers were reminded that their productivity had the potential to lead to more deaths overseas *or* to bring an end to the war. The slogans and imagery used in the billboards throughout Fontana Village at the Fontana Dam building site were not advertisements or photographs, but they did elevate the sense of patriotism and togetherness which remained in the minds of Fontana Dam's construction employees, all the way from the 1940s to the present day.

Billboard 1: "WORKERS HELP! THE WAR EFFORT [,] SHIRKERS HURT!"

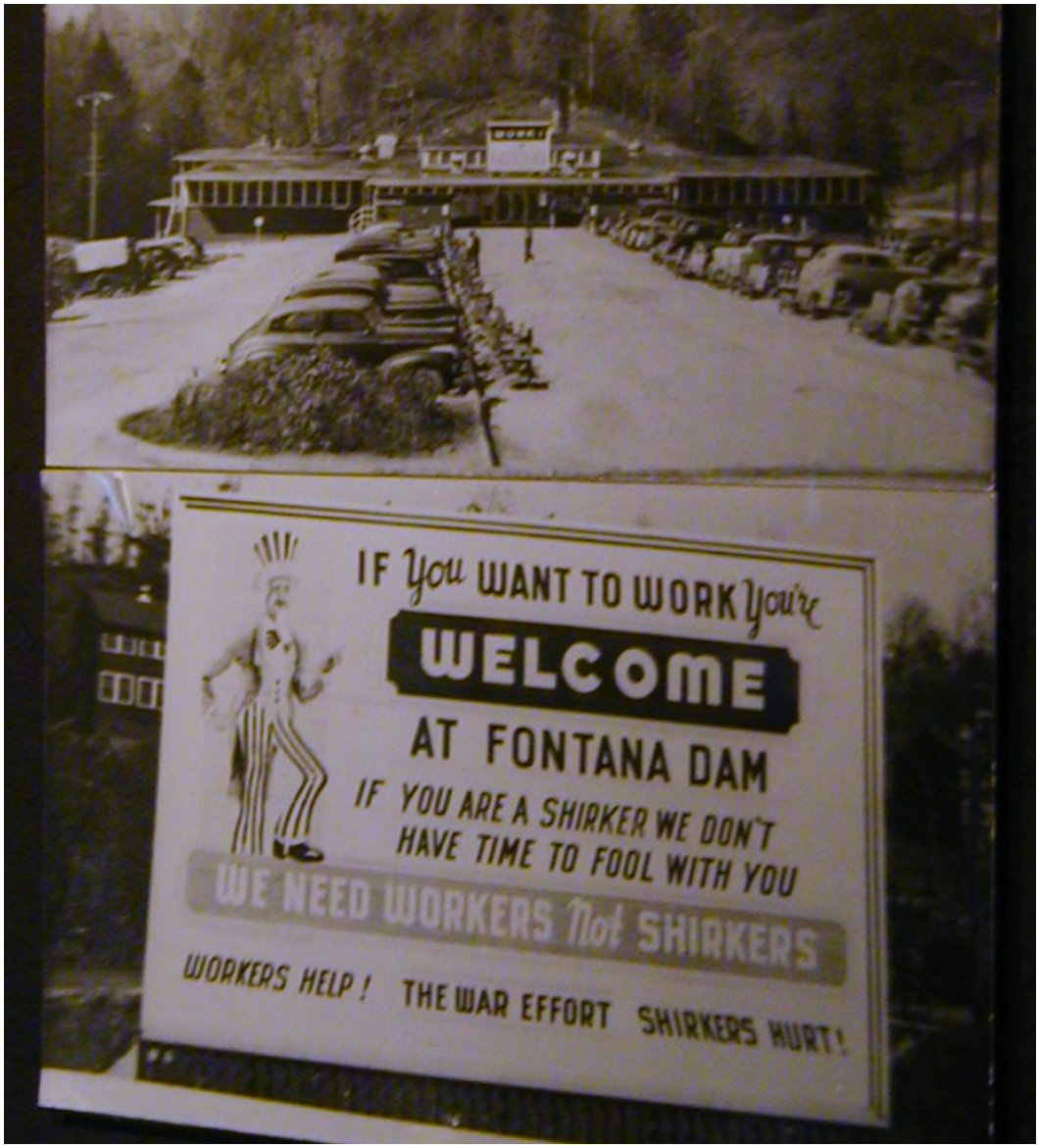

Fig. 2. North Carolina ECHO, "Historic Fontana Village."

One of the first billboards new employees and visitors saw (see fig. 2) as they entered Fontana Village featured the popular patriotic icon Uncle Sam, appearing to say: "If you want to work you're welcome at Fontana Dam [.] If you are a shirker we don't have time to fool with you [.] We need workers not shirkers [.] Workers HELP! The war effort [,] shirkers HURT!" (North Carolina ECHO). This billboard conveyed several crucial messages to anyone, especially

workers, entering the Fontana jobsite. Uncle Sam, as a personification of the United States, reminded workers that they were here to serve their country; that as long as they worked hard, they would be welcome at Fontana Dam (and, by extension, welcome in Fontana Village with all of its available accommodations); and that, if they were to slack off, they would not only be unwelcome at the dam, but hurting the war effort for the United States.

Many advertisements and other circulated images during WWII often discussed the consequences of absenteeism in the war effort. The framework of epideictic rhetoric is helpful in examinations of these ads because the messaging used within them reflects broader societal values during the time of WWII. Epideictic rhetoric also allows for more thorough examination of the impact the ads had on the American people, since these ads were so widely circulated that they spawned a debate throughout the country over the moral and social duties of war workers (Tansey & Hyman 138). A machine-tool firm in Cleveland, for instance, "used anti-absenteeism themes in ads that urged workers to work harder and produce more" and "that workers and soldiers shared wartime duties, that absenteeism prolonged the war and increased casualties and fatalities among soldiers" (Tansey & Hyman 134). In other words, workers slacking off on the job or failing to report for duty was considered reckless and unpatriotic, and anyone working to supply the war effort was constantly surrounded by messages reminding them of this. As the war raged on, absenteeism began to be associated more and more with dead soldiers through complex, graphic imagery on the home front.

The strategy of project managers and other bosses to use and/or conjure images of dead soldiers to maintain productivity on the job was used in several industries, from car manufacturers building tanks and artillery to everyday citizens purchasing war bonds. An official U.S. Army poster widely circulated in 1945, for instance, reproduced a photograph of a dead

soldier covered in blood. The message accompanying the photograph read: “This happens every three minutes. STAY ON THE JOB AND *get it over*” (Kimble 536).

Another strategy commonly seen in WWII imagery was to turn laborers into soldiers, using characters such as the U.S. Treasury’s Minute Man insignia to portray a civilian “turning away from his plow and raising his musket to fight.” Other images turned everyday items used by both workers and homemakers – such as war bonds, scrap metal, kitchen grease, and food – into “weapons for use by America’s home front soldiers against the Axis.” While these images were initially helpful for national identity and the morale of workers, it also had “the built-in potential to rupture” since frontline soldiers were suffering painful wounds, losing limbs, and dying as those at home continued to work and experience a sense of normalcy (Kimble 545). These images doubled as a motivating and uplifting metaphor for national identity and as a point of tension as the war continued and more men returned home grievously wounded or dead (Kimble 546).

Workers at Fontana Dam were not exempt from this imagery, despite the relative remoteness of the job site. They were surrounded by billboards “reminding [them] that Fontana Dam was an essential war project” and other visuals and flyers “asking how many men will die in battle today because [the workers] laid out of work.” Other signs were posted in the facilities around Fontana Village simply reading “Work! or Fight!” (Holland 163). Anyone working at Fontana Dam was frequently confronted with two contrasting messages. The first was that their work was essential to the war effort, and that their progress in building the dam was the homefront equivalent of battling overseas. The second was more sobering: while they were home with their families, millions of men overseas continued to be injured and killed in combat, and this suffering would not end unless they continued to work quickly.

Being confronted with the reality of war on the homefront was a strategy used both to show workers that they were essential to defeating the Axis and to remind them that the reason they were working was to support those on the frontline overseas. To counteract the bleakness of the messages focusing on potential fatalities overseas (and the potential rhetorical challenge of messages which would likely have led to feelings of guilt), Fred Schlemmer posted motivational, praise-based billboards with the purpose of uniting the workers in the common cause to build the dam and end the war.

Billboards 2 and 3: "IT TAKES TEAM WORK TO DO BOTH JOBS"

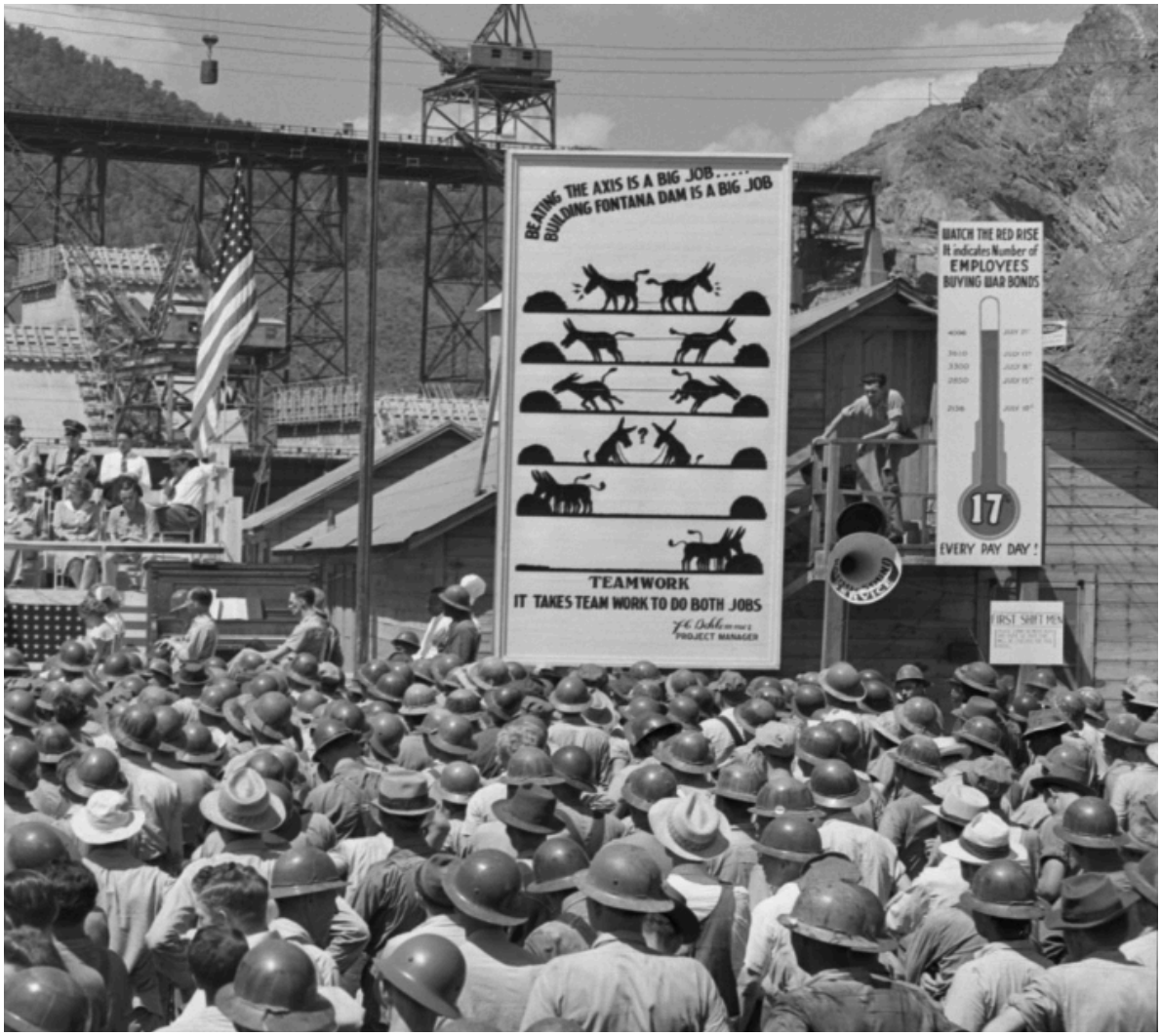

Fig. 3. Tennessee Valley Authority, "Bond Celebration"

The Fontana Dam workers showed their value in the war effort in more ways than one. For starters, the speed with which they worked was notable. In 1944 the crew set a national record by placing 11,419 cubic yards of concrete in just 24 hours (*Information About Fontana Dam)*. Working quickly was not the only triumph of the Fontana Dam crew, though; the workforce actually paid for a large portion of the dam through purchasing war bonds, a method employed by the federal government to gather funds from the public to financially support the war effort ("War Bonds: Funding the War Effort"). For the workers at Fontana Dam, teamwork consisted both of unity construction and monetary contribution, and messages related to both of these actions were created and posted by Schlemmer throughout Fontana Village and the dam site. Figure 3 showcases two of these billboards as workers gathered for what they called a "Bond Celebration" in 1943.

The poster on the left side of figure 2 reads: "DEFEATING THE AXIS IS A BIG JOB… BUILDING FONTANA DAM IS A BIG JOB[.] TEAMWORK[.] IT TAKES TEAM WORK TO DO BOTH JOBS," signed underneath by Fred Schlemmer. The focal point of the poster is a six-panel cartoon depicting two donkeys trying to eat piles of hay, but they are unable to reach the hay in front of them because they are tied together. They then use teamwork and walk side-by-side to both piles of hay, solving the initial problem. The drawing was created by Schlemmer himself; he commonly created and distributed his own visuals for the dam site as a way to engage with the workforce.

The image of a donkey attempting to eat hay reflects imagery commonly associated with Appalachia's farming community, as well as the pioneer stereotype applied to Appalachian people. In the pioneer image of Appalachia, images including cookware, fireplaces, self-run farms, and livestock cultivation are used to represent the way of life in the region. One of the

popular stereotypes attached to Appalachian people is that of being "stuck in time," or not partaking in modern conveniences (i.e., electricity, going to the store to buy food). The cartoon is humorous and lighthearted, but using farmland imagery commonly associated with Appalachian living was intentional. Although the workforce was not made up of Appalachian locals alone, the people who came to the region would have been familiar with common imagery used to represent the land and the people who lived in it. Donkeys are animals typically used to haul loads, much like the men and women on the dam site were expected to carry the project on their backs.

Posters focusing on unity and teamwork targeted all members of American society during WWII, from children to homemakers to soldiers overseas. Numerous posters circulated during this period in American history, such as Rosie the Riveter, have remained iconic. The purpose of these motivational, team-based visuals was not simply to encourage people to work together in the war effort; they were used to forge and maintain a strong collective identity for Americans in an incredibly uncertain, frightening time. Understanding the background behind the ideological change in the American consciousness during WWII is crucial when examining teamwork-based rhetoric from this time period. In order to understand why the visual rhetoric from this time period was so impactful on the workers at Fontana Dam, we first have to understand how and why these slogans and posters were created and circulated, as well as what "American identity" meant in wartime America.

The concept of American identity has a long history filled with prejudices (from racism to classism to sexism and beyond), and the impact of this history made it difficult for Americans of different demographics to use the term "assimilation" by the start of WWII. When war came along, the concept of American identity began to shift, focusing more on democratic values and –

differently from previous narratives of what an American 'should' be[3] *and* American individualist values – unity through pluralism (Gleason 515). In other words, WWII focused more on what made people in America alike rather than what divided them; although prejudicial attitudes still existed (and would continue to exist in the years after the war ended), the wartime years sparked an ideological reawakening of sorts. This reawakening did several things at once: it "promoted national unity on the basis of value consensus… exalted toleration and respect for cultural differences as the means of attaining intergroup harmony… and stimulated curiosity about the way in which the American social and cultural environment shaped persons of all derivations toward a common national type" (Gleason 516). It was on these principles that wartime flyers, billboards, and posters were created, and the lasting impression of such a widespread collective American identity was impactful both during and after WWII.

Labor shortages were common in most war industries, and the remote location of Fontana Village combined with the pre-existing shortages made it difficult to recruit workers. The project manager, Fred Schlemmer, fully believed that contented workers were more productive. To recruit workers, they were given "inviting booklets that touted the good living, food, recreation, and educational opportunities at the project" (Holland 162). The work at Fontana Dam was most definitely grueling and dangerous, but Schlemmer made an effort to ensure the workers he oversaw were feeling encouraged and satisfied. Focusing on teamwork and praise-based messages was one of the ways he did this.

[3] The specifics of American identity leading up to WWII are an important topic of study. The scope of this thesis cannot do this topic justice, but a number of works discussing changing American identity leading up to WWII and the problematic histories behind it are available and should be acknowledged (see Mirel; Morehouse; Lee; Buckley; MacGregor & Nalty; Hirschman & Mogford; Del Castillo; Goldin; Holm; and Rollings). I have by no means named all of the in-depth scholarship covering the rich history of minority groups in America, but to fail to give some sort of starting point here would be a disservice.

Many companies in a number of industries during wartime utilized this approach, both to garner business and encourage workers towards maximum efficiency. Timothy Johnson writes about this strategy in his book, *Rhetoric, Inc.: Ford's Filmmaking and the Rise of Corporatism:*

> Across wartime propaganda films, as workers were shown toiling and tanks rolled out of factories, narrators punctuated footage of assembly lines with praise-oriented claims like 'here is the Arsenal of Democracy' or 'this is mass production, as only American engineers know how. (156)

Through praise-oriented, unifying rhetoric, the industrial regime in wartime America became central to both the time period and American identity as a whole. In this era, working became a patriotic act which was directly equated to fighting the Axis. Similarly to the brotherhood experienced by soldiers, the workers on the Fontana Dam site developed a sense of community with one another. Outside of the construction site, the same people who spent every day building the dam participated in group activities such as plays in the community building and attending church services (Holland 160, 162). Most importantly, though, they were united in the common cause of completing Fontana Dam, both through their labor and another important act – buying war bonds.

Fig. 4. Tennessee Valley Authority, “Bond Celebration”

In figure 4, a billboard displayed to the right of the “Teamwork” poster (seen in fig. 3) reads: “WATCH THE RED RISE[.] IT INDICATES NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES BUYING WAR BONDS EVERY PAY DAY!” Positioned in the center of the text is a thermometer with a rising red bar; this bar represents the total number of war bonds purchased by workers at Fontana Dam on each pay day. The left side of the thermometer tracks the rising number of war bonds purchased, and the right side indicates the date the workers were paid. War bonds were a program pushed by Franklin Roosevelt and the American government during WWII to encourage

American citizens to donate money to the federal government to pay for different dimensions of the war. Americans contributed to the war bonds program in droves. From May 1941 to December 1945, 85 million people invested nearly $186 billion in war bonds. Citizens of working age were able to save a percentage of their income in war bonds through payroll savings plans at work, and even schoolchildren and newspaper carriers purchased war bonds with their own money (Adatto 381). War bonds were yet another means of uniting the American population under a common cause, and people of all demographics, jobs, and locations participated in the financial effort. Part of why the war bond program was so successful was because of efforts by the federal government to appeal directly to the American people through messages of unity, duty, and sacrifice, which were largely held values in WWII America as the population hoped to see the war come to an end.

To communicate these messages to the country, President Franklin D. Roosevelt developed a radio campaign in which he directly spoke to the people of America. These radio discussions, called the fireside chats, were a series of evening radio addresses broadcasted between 1933 and 1944. These talks are commonly referred to as intimate discussions between the president and the American people, particularly because no president before Roosevelt had communicated with the American people so directly ("FDR's Fireside Chats"). The chats were widely listened to and changed the landscape of White House communications for over a decade.

In a fireside chat on April 30, 1941, President Roosevelt effectively launched a campaign in which any and all Americans were able to contribute financially to the war effort. On April 30, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt conducted a radio address as part of his series of fireside chats; in this address specifically, he discussed his own purchasing of war bonds and implored Americans to purchase them. Over the radio, Roosevelt said:

> …At this time we add another call – a frank and clear appeal for financial support to pay for our arming, and to pay for the American existence of later generations… Yes, your Government is asking you to make this sacrifice. But is it a sacrifice? Is it a sacrifice for us to give dollars when more than a million of our finest young men have been withdrawn from civilian life to accept the discipline of military life in defense of our country? No, I do not think that sacrifice is the word. This defense savings program is rather a privilege and an opportunity – an opportunity to share in the defense of all the things we cherish against the threat that is made against them. We must fight this threat wherever it appears; and it can be found at the threshold of every home in America. And so my fellow Americans, I ask you to demonstrate again your faith in America by joining me in investing in the new defense savings bonds and stamps. I know you will help.

This quote is an excerpt from the discussion Roosevelt led on April 30, 1941, in which he encouraged Americans to buy war bonds.

Ultimately, the success of Roosevelt's radio talks were apparent in the public's growing trust in the president and the participation of the public in programs pushed in the chats (Sterling 2). Many people believe the fireside chats were so successful because they had an intimate feel to them, but Elvin T. Lim argues that the intimacy was an illusion. According to Lim, the success of the chats could ultimately be contributed to Roosevelt's ability "to project both strength and meekness" as he spoke, especially given the context of the general uncertainty and chaos of the WWII era (Lim 454). Ultimately, the fireside chats helped Americans feel as though they were truly understanding the current state of the country; after all, the president himself was updating them on it on the radio. Once WWII began, Roosevelt's chats shifted gears to focus primarily on war news. He even "invited his listeners to have a map handy so they could follow his discussion

of the strategic direction of the war." Listenership for the fireside chats often rated higher than usual comedy and drama shows broadcasted on the radio (Sterling 2). The American people wanted to hear what Roosevelt had to say. Given the fireside chats' ability to provide much-needed direction and knowledge to an uncertain populous, the public wanted to listen to Roosevelt when he told them about how war bonds could help bring the war to an end.

Following the April 30, 1941 fireside chat, Americans contributed to the war bonds program in droves. From May 1941 to December 1945, 85 million people invested nearly $186 billion in war bonds. Citizens of working age were able to save a percentage of their income in war bonds through payroll savings plans at work, and even schoolchildren and newspaper carriers purchased war bonds with their own money (Adatto 381). War bonds were yet another means of uniting the American population under a common cause, and people of all demographics, jobs, and locations participated in the financial effort.

War bonds were not only a means of financing the war, but also meant to help curb inflation. The campaigns for war bonds included appeals to economic interests, as well as focusing on savings as an "obligation of citizenship, as a way of honoring the sacrifices of America's fighting men, and as an expression of national and intergenerational solidarity" (Adatto 384). For those who were unable to work or fight, war bonds offered an additional outlet to participate in achieving American victory in the war. Campaigns encouraging people to purchase war bonds were a constant during WWII, and there was not a sphere of American society exempt from these campaigns. Actors and musicians used their own platforms to promote purchasing war bonds; national landmarks, such as the Washington Monument, were used "as a gathering point for war bond rallies;" and parades were held in town squares across the country, all to raise awareness of the war bond program and the patriotism involved in purchasing them.

Norman Rockwell's iconic paintings "The Four Freedoms" were also used in war bond posters, linking American democratic pillars with financial contribution to the war effort ("War Bonds: Funding the War Effort"). Fontana Dam workers were working, of course, but they also participated in the war bond program in droves.

The men and women employed by the TVA to build Fontana Dam served the country both by building the dam *and* helping to pay for it. The war bonds purchased by workers on the site not only contributed to the production of arms for battle, but also to the cost of building Fontana Dam. Their contributions stood out so much that "in 1943, the government recognized the TVA after 90 percent of the agency bought war bonds, raising more than $16 million toward construction" (Gerard). Figures 3 and 4 are from the celebration held at the work site following this national recognition. The work at the dam site was hard, dangerous, and constant, and the men and women involved in its construction participated in the financial effort frequently and plentifully. By the time the project was done, 34.5 million man-hours had been used to build Fontana Dam; 2.8 million cubic yards of concrete were put into its construction; and the final cost for the project came out to $74.7 million, meaning the workers at Fontana Dam financed approximately 22% of the project.

The work ethic of the men and women employed at Fontana Dam is clear based on statistics alone, but the recognition of the workers on the site makes the project stand out. In a letter written by Fred Schlemmer titled "To the men and women who are building Fontana Dam" he wrote:

> Mr. Donald M. Nelson, Chairman of the War Production Board visited Fontana Dam on June 1 and 2. Mr. Nelson was very high in praise of the outstanding accomplishment made to date in the construction of Fontana Dam, by YOU, THE MEN AND WOMEN

> WHO ARE DOING THE JOB. He said that he was thrilled beyond words to see what is being done by an interested and patriotic group of American citizens who are proving that they understand the need for those at home to supply our fighting men with the things they need to WIN THE WAR. Mr. Nelson was greatly impressed with all that he saw, and with the evidence of the atmosphere of TEAMWORK which he observed… [he] said that it was a fine example for the entire country to follow. (quoted in Holland 163)

From this letter, we see that governmental figures were pleased with the work the men and women at Fontana Dam were putting into the project. Not only was the project manager supportive enough to pen this letter to the workforce, but the Chairman of the War Production Board was impressed by the progress they were making in the project. Again, the message of patriotism and teamwork is highlighted.

By the time the project was opened on November 7, 1944, thousands of workers had contributed both physically and financially to its completion. The payment received by the workers ranged from $.50/hour to $1.88/hour, which was very good for the time, and at least 10 percent of those payments went into the war bonds campaign on every pay day (Holland 173). Many workers worked seven days a week, sometimes going up to a year without a single day off (Holland 173). Not only did they sacrifice their time to the project, but also their health: during the years of construction, 14 men were killed, 11 were permanently injured, and 447 suffered serious industries (Gerard). The messages of teamwork and democratic duty doubtless encouraged these already patriotic workers to put their all into the project, and that is exactly what they did until the time came to vacate Fontana Village and open the dam to the public.

Conclusion: The Transition Back

Given the history of corporations and other entities, such as TVA, viewing Appalachia as remote and "backwards," the acquisition of the land tracts surrounding Fontana Dam cannot be separated from the idea that certain communities are deemed displaceable while others are not. In this case, residents were forced off their land in the name of funding the war effort; many of these people wanted to do what they believed was right for the good of the country, but in the years following the dam's completion the same people who had been forced to leave felt like the government continued to take advantage of them. This was especially the case when New NC Highway 88 was promised to be built, but ultimately sat abandoned, leaving former residents of the area without access to generational cemeteries and ancestral land.

TVA conducted field investigations to determine the extent to which individual tracts of land – including everything from farms to residences – would be impacted by the reservoir clearance. For each tract, "land acquisition maps were made that showed the landowner and tract size, as well as landscape features… and all improvements, even the corn cribs and outhouses" (Holland 181). The average price paid for the 68,291.97 acres acquired by TVA was approximately $37.76 per acre; this was one of the lowest prices paid for reservoir lands in TVA history (Holland 182). In previous chapters I have discussed how the federal government and extractive industries have been able to use negative Appalachian stereotypes for their own advantages. In this case, the low price TVA paid to acquire the acreage for what would become Fontana Lake was justified by the perceived underdevelopment of the area, despite the fact that the region had been home to successful businesses and communities for years.

Of the land purchased by TVA, "88.4% of the landowners sold voluntarily at the appraised price, 8.2% by condemnation in order to clear up title problems, and only 3.4% by condemnation because the owners refused to sell" (Holland 182). Many of the landowners stayed

in the area to help build the dam, not least because they were not required to surrender their property until it was actually needed for the reservoir clearing process. During the dam's construction, the people from the area who worked to build the dam were praised as heroes. After the dam was done, though, they were expected to leave promptly, and their accomplishments would later be used by officials as a justification for their removal.

Landowners impacted by the reservoir clearance were aware that they needed to surrender their property and vacate the area following the dam's completion, but the preparation given by time didn't make the displacement easier for residents in the area. In an interview Philip Gerard conducted with Juanita Shook, a former resident of the Fontana area, she stated the following as she recalled the moment her family was notified that they would need to vacate their home:

> A man from the Tennessee Valley Authority came walking toward them. He… had done his best to persuade her grandfather, Scott Anthony Shook, to give up his land. It was needed for the war effort, the man said… The man held out a check and said, *Now, Mister Anthony, you take this check and be out by Monday.* "Finally, at last, Grandpa reached up and took the check, and his hand was trembling… And he folded it and put it in the bib of his overalls… And when we went into the house and told Grandmother about it, she cried. (Gerard)

Because of eminent domain, these residents had no choice in their displacement. Even though the project had a viable public purpose, the process of acquiring the land on the reservoir's landscape reflects a broader issue: the fact that the process of deciding which residents are "displaceable" is riddled with "various circumstances and degrees of classism and racism," and the value of

communities deemed displaceable have no standing in the vision of furthering the "public good" (Powell 148).

Before Fontana Dam was opened to the public and the land in the reservoir area was cleared, the project was heavily publicized as being important to the war effort. As a direct result of this, citizens in the area (mostly) voluntarily vacated their land in order to help the country. As Lance Holland writes, "most of [the people impacted by the reservoir clearing] cooperated with the removal – they were doing their part for the war effort" (190). Of course, the people displaced from the area had no idea that Lakeview Drive would never be constructed; they also didn't know that the issue would be unresolved for 75 years, that their generational cemeteries would only be accessible through hikes and boat rides, and that TVA would gloss over the history of displacement involved in the project.

Now that the patriotic roots and rhetoric behind the Fontana project are established, the next chapter will examine rhetoric employed by TVA in the displacement of communities from the Fontana region following Fontana Dam's completion. Much of the language employed by the TVA was both dismissive of the value of these communities and the people living in them, with the value of their lives being reduced to the smallest monetary price in TVA history. The language used by TVA to justify the displacement of these communities is still employed today in negotiations to solve the Lakeview Drive problem; additionally, the dismissive nature of TVA's role in this displacement is a major point of tension between residents of Swain County and the federal government.

CHAPTER THREE: *THE FONTANA PROJECT:* DISPLACEMENT, RELOCATION, AND THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

"The animosity for the federal government has been tremendous. This is a healing process. It won't bind all wounds. We will still have the scars on our heart." – Rep. Mike Clampitt (Knoepp, "'Road to Nowhere' Debt Repaid")

Communities Lost

The Road to Nowhere has become a symbol for displacement, the inaction of the government, and the tendency for people in power to disregard Appalachian communities in the name of "the public good." Economist and Appalachian scholar John Gaventa's research into land ownership in Appalachia states that land use and land tenure in the Appalachian region are heavily influenced by "the financial, human, environmental, and social capital of any community or region" (242). His study on land tenure in Appalachia also suggests that both politics and power play a role in how land is determined to be of use, specifically in relation to public use or development for the public good. He states that "the historical literature of Appalachia and the South evokes themes of rugged individuals and self-sufficient farming families," but that the "data on patterns of landownership and land concentration" in the region do not reflect that stereotype (228). This discrepancy is due in large part to the continued resource extraction in the region, when companies and other entities purchase tracts of land for the sole purpose of mining it for resources (whether this be in the form of mines, timber companies, or reservoir clearance). In a region as rich in resources as Appalachia, companies and organizations like TVA see potential for land use and little else; this is hinted at when *The Fontana Project* describes the low price paid for the acres of land as being justified due to the "mountainous character" and "remoteness" of the future reservoir's bounds. Additionally, the language used in *The Fontana*

Project reflects themes commonly used in rhetoric against the displaced. According to Katrina Powell, rhetorics of displacement have traditionally included "degrading remarks… [which are], if not outright racist or classist or full of disdain," as well as "paternalistic and condescending" (163). Throughout the document, the lives of both people local to the Fontana region as well as the people who came to the dam to aid in its construction are dismissed and downplayed.

Contrary to the rhetorics employed by TVA, land does not just have value in how it is used or how much money can be made from its use; additionally, the displacement of residents from their land does not end with their displacement. The psychological consequences of displacement on communities contribute to "alienation, socioeconomic dislocation, and feelings of loss and hopelessness," all of which are incredibly heavy burdens for individuals to bear. (Holtzman and Nezam 92). When an entire group of people experiences these psychological effects, the collective memories of that group are forged through trauma. For a location to be a place of public memory, collective memory is necessary in retellings of the location's history. As Dickinson, Blair, and Ott write, public memory is "theorized… as narrating a common identity, a construction that forwards an at least momentarily definitive articulation of the group" (7). In rhetorical rememberings of the Fontana region, emphasis is placed on the numerous losses suffered by those in the area: they lost their economic ventures, their homes, and even access to cemeteries their family members are buried in.

Vernacular retellings of the Fontana region's history give a voice to the dispossessed, placing emphasis on the lives in the region prior to displacement. In official retellings of the region's history, the voices of the dispossessed are brushed aside, which is a major point of tension between Swain County residents and the federal government. Rhetorics of displacement, as outlined by Katrina Powell, have "traditionally included… disregarding remarks [which are] if

not outright racist or classist or full of disdain, are paternalistic and condescending… [and] disregard for the voice of the displaced" (163). In original documents written and distributed by TVA, language consistent with Powell's descriptions of displacement rhetorics can be seen as residents of the area are described as "a problem" needing to be solved. The value of these people and their ways of living are ultimately diminished to an economic value, completely discounting the inherent value of human life. Most of the people living in the area at the time Fontana Dam was constructed were located within the future bounds of the dam's reservoir, which is now Fontana Lake.

Reservoir preparation was what caused the most displacement among residents surrounding Fontana Dam. When TVA was authorized to build the dam, they began notifying anyone on properties within the reservoir boundary that they would need to vacate their land. Many people agreed to leave, believing that they were contributing to the war effort by complying. In *Fontana,* Lance Holland describes most of the impacted residents as "very patriotic," and the extensive patriotic rhetoric surrounding the Fontana Dam project would certainly have impacted their decision to cooperate with relocation (190). Part of this cooperation was patriotic, but what also contributed to the ease with which many vacated their land was because of the Memorandum Agreement of July 30, 1943, in which the state government of North Carolina and TVA agreed to close and ultimately replace Old NC Highway 288 (3). The New NC Highway 288, officially named Lakeview Drive, served an area of land acquired by TVA containing cemeteries, six small towns, several copper mines, and railroads (Holland 183, 186). Following the end of WWII, however, the road that had been promised to displaced residents was never constructed; only a six-mile stretch of pavement ending on the other side of a covered tunnel was complete, and construction halted, bringing the Road to Nowhere into being.

The Fontana Project written and distributed by TVA contains all relevant information related to the construction and design of Fontana Dam. Additionally, the report contains detailed plans and reports surrounding the reservoir preparation that ultimately led to the displacement of 1,311 families. In this chapter, I focus specifically on sections of the report related to the acquisition of land; displacement of residents; procedures surrounding evacuation; cemetery relocation; and determining the value of the seized land. These sections not only outline the exact number of people and communities displaced by the Fontana project, but also shed light on the language TVA used to justify the removal of these communities. Additionally, the sections I focus on intersect with Katrina Powell's descriptions of the language used in displacement rhetorics to justify the removal of people and communities from government-owned land.

The Reservoir Clearing and Eminent Domain

For the reservoir at Fontana Dam to be filled, tracts of land were acquired by TVA for the sole purpose of eventually being flooded. *The Fontana Project* reports the following in preparation for the reservoir flooding: "surveying and mapping of 79,947 acres of land; acquisition of 68, 291.97 acres of land; and the clearing of 5,125 acres of land" were conducted (453). TVA began notifying residents on the affected tracts of land following the authorization of the construction of Fontana Dam on December 23, 1941. Residents were notified that "the date for surrender of possession specified in the acquisition… was December 31, 1943," with "early possession being required on tracts in the vicinity of the dam and possession being postponed until December 1944 for isolated properties" in the area of Cable Cove, located along Hazel Creek approximately 4 miles from Fontana Dam (Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project* 471). Evacuation of the area officially began on January 1, 1942, and continued into 1945 (Tennesee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project* 484).

The impact of the reservoir clearing process was massive, and the manpower it took to clear the land for the reservoir was incredibly dangerous. According to *The Fontana Project,* "reservoir clearance [was] rated as one of the most hazardous of all logging operations," and "28 temporary chargeable injuries" were suffered, "and 2,393 days were charged as lost" as a result of injuries sustained by workers on the project. A total of 1,541,355 hours were worked by the people employed to carry out the reservoir clearance (488). Around 500 workers, including 50 Cherokee Indians, were hired to clear the tracts of land for flooding (Holland 183). The biggest impact was, of course, on the families who settled in the area prior to the Fontana Project's beginning.

TVA first estimated that the total number of families who would be impacted by the reservoir was 275; however, this number increased exponentially in the years it took for the dam to be built as people moved to the area – and purchased land to live on – to join the construction project. By the time the project was done, the total number of families removed was 1,311, "of whom 711 were transients" (i.e., people who purchased land to live on while helping to build the dam) "and 600 were residents of the area before construction of the dam began" (483). When TVA began acquiring land to build Fontana Dam and to clear the reservoir, residents of the local area had no choice but to give up their land. 68,291.97 acres were acquired for the Fontana project, and 1,064 tracts of land were purchased for the project. 88.4 percent of these tracts were purchased voluntarily, 3.4 percent were acquired by condemnation because the owners refused to sell, and 8.2 percent were taken by condemnation in order "to secure a good title" (Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project* 478). TVA set up what they call a "population readjustment staff" in the impacted area to organize and provide resources to be used to assist families in the relocation. *The Fontana Project* states that the staff's methods "followed the

provision of the TVA act, which authorizes TVA to advise and cooperate with families displaced by construction projects and to cooperate with Federal, State, and local agencies" (Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project* 484). To suggest that the people displaced from the communities in the reservoir bounds needed to be encouraged to be cooperative with the state and federal governments and local agencies directly contradicts the actions of those in the area leading up to and during the construction of the dam. During the dam's construction, people from and around the area were among the workers responsible for its completion. They worked essentially nonstop for seven days each week to complete the project and to bring the war to an end. When residents were told they needed to evacuate, a vast majority of the residents in the future reservoir area readily complied with TVA's orders to leave; they were "very patriotic, and were doing their part for the war effort" (Holland 190). With the Fontana Dam project being heavily publicized as a wartime job, the people in the impacted areas saw their leaving as their duty for the good of the country. Different families attempted to receive a higher price for their land, but none of those attempts were successful. Even if people in the area attempted to protest the removal, they would have had no choice but to leave.

This situation is very similar to what happened to residents in the creation of Shenandoah National Park (SNP), which Katrina Powell outlines in *The Anguish of Displacement.* In SNP's formation, a total of five hundred families from eight counties were removed from their land to allow the Park Service to turn it into the national park (K. Powell 1). Many of these families "sold their homes to the state at 'fair market' price and left to find housing elsewhere," while other families "who did not own land or who had little means to move" remained in the park as they waited for government assistance in their move (K. Powell 1, 3). The people who remained in SNP after its creation protested their future removal through letters to state and/or park

officials, but the rules of eminent domain, perceptions of Appalachian peoples, and the potential economic value of the land prevented them from keeping their homes, regardless of their efforts (K. Powell 3). Displacement and the laws of eminent domain go hand-in-hand, and Appalachian communities have been a target of these laws time and time again.

The factors that played a role in "influencing evacuation" are outlined in the report. On the surface, the sole purpose of the relocations was to clear land for the reservoir. The language used in this section of the report, though, is riddled with rhetorics commonly used to justify the displacement of groups of people. Katrina Powell writes that the rhetoric used both to justify displacement and to work against the dispossessed are "if not outright racist or classist or full of disdain… paternalistic and condescending. In either case, one group is deciding that it knows best over another" (Powell 163). *The Fontana Project* justifies the relocations in this section by employing this type of rhetoric, going into detail about the way of life those in the area were living:

> The transient influx was a problem from the start. Because these people were needed to furnish labor for the project, the task in population readjustment became for a time as much a problem of temporary repopulation as of permanent family removal… TVA also acquired rights to control sanitation on certain areas adjacent to [Fontana Village], and the North Carolina Department of Health assisted by enforcing State sanitary regulations for those families who remained in scattered locations… Difficulties of access caused residents to resort to many devices in moving. Sleds were used in sled roads and trails leading to the highway, and in some cases it was necessary for members of families to carry their belongings to points where vehicles could be brought. (485-6)

Leading this section by calling the workers in the area a "problem" is characteristic of degrading remarks heavily used in rhetorics of displacement. In the language of *The Fontana Project,* TVA officials are referring to the workers on the dam as if they are a problem, which is certainly full of disdain. To the TVA, the influx of workers arriving to work on the dam were both a problem *and* needed to build the dam; in the same breath, the workers are viewed with disdain and as a commodity.

The language used to describe *why* the relocation of families native to the area took place is riddled with paternalistic rhetoric, which is typical of messages which display unequal power relations between Appalachian people and agencies in power. This approach to relations with people in Appalachia is supported in large part by the stereotypes associated with the region and the people within it. The introduction to *Appalachia in the Making* outlines the major stereotypes associated with Appalachians, including characterizations of being individualistic and self-reliant, traditional, fatalistic, religious, uneducated, hostile, and peculiar. The application of these stereotypes onto communities in Appalachia contributed heavily to the ease with which entities in positions of authority determined communities in the Fontana region as displaceable. When authorities like the federal government view communities as displaceable, it makes the process of entering the area to exploit the land much easier. Land tenure in Appalachia has "often been linked to development patterns of the region, including to patterns of financial and manufactured investment… The development of the Appalachia and the South is related to the 'colonial' nature of the region" (Gaventa 10). In the Fontana area, this 'colonial' nature lies within the history of the federal government entering the region to exploit the natural resources the land provided with little regard for those who called the area home.

Notably, the workers employed to Fontana Dam are referred to as "a problem" in this section of the report, directly contradicting messages on the construction site and by both TVA and the federal government lauding them as patriots and heroes. Wartime labor shortages meant it was difficult to find employees to construct Fontana Dam, which was a problem since the hydropower was being used for research in the Manhattan Project and for aluminum production. TVA and the federal government were desperate for workers, and that contributed to their decision to build these settlements and to take control of the sanitation in these camps to make them more livable for workers. The men and women who TVA called "a problem" were the same people who willingly came to Fontana Dam to serve their country. While their labor was considered a plus for TVA, the fact that they needed to be able to live there was inconvenient.

Since so many workers were coming to the area from all over the country, TVA built temporary shacks for people to live in until Fontana Village was completed as well as a temporary trailer camp in Bee Cove. They also acquired the rights to control a tract of land below the dam known as Tipton Camp, where families had congregated for an unspecified amount of time. The settlements below the dam were dropped from the list of evacuations temporarily. TVA stated in *The Fontana Project* that "the extension of possession dates beyond those originally scheduled assisted in a more orderly evacuation, retained workers on the project during a critical period, and helped reservoir families to accumulate savings needed in their relocation" (485). In other words, TVA purchased land to provide a place for "transients" (people who came to work on the dam) to live with the understanding that the people living there would be required to leave once their work was completed. Although these settlements were built and maintained by TVA, the people who lived there were viewed as a future problem because of the ultimate need for them to leave the land once the project was done.

As I have previously discussed, resource extraction is a continued issue in Appalachia, and when industries come into the region, dominate the market, and then move on, economies and ways of life are impacted tremendously. While land ownership is a national issue, it is an issue which is heavily present in Appalachia. In rural areas, "land joins capital, labor, and technology as a crucial ingredient for economic growth… The ownership and use of the land affect the options available for future developments" (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force 1). While TVA was able to generate substantial profit from the hydropower Fontana Dam provided, the people who lived in the area prior to its creation were not able to continue working in the area and were given the lowest per-acreage payout in TVA history for the land they had cultivated for years. Some families attempted to negotiate to sell their land tracts for a higher price, but none of these negotiations yielded the desired result for the landowners. Even if they attempted to resist TVA's low buying price, the rules of eminent domain meant they had essentially no choice but to comply.

Due to the rules of eminent domain, all of the tracts of land included in TVA's survey were obtained to allow the flooding of the dam. Eminent domain has a history of generating feelings of anger, especially since it is essentially impossible to refuse. When eminent domain is enforced in a property's acquisition, the only thing a landowner can do is fight to receive higher compensation for their land. While "eminent domain" is not explicitly written in *The Fontana Project,* landowners and their families had no choice but to vacate when they were given notice by TVA. Interestingly, negotiating for higher prices to be paid by TVA was prohibited: "Prices to be paid for the land were fixed by TVA's appraisal staff. No price-trading was permitted to enter into the negotiations and the property was either purchased at the appraised price or condemned" (478). When it came to determining the value of land tracts, TVA's "governing price policy" was

used, in which TVA "purchase[d] land and rights required at prices which [would] enable owners to relocate… on properties at least equal in value to those they previously owned" (Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project* 478). Monetarily, the average cost for each acre came out to $37.76. This price, according to *The Fontana Project,* was "one of the lowest for any reservoir acquired to date and reflects the mountainous character and remoteness of the reservoir setting" (479).

Displacement of Residents and Cemetery Relocation

The Fontana Project outlines the demographics of the inhabitants of the region. More specifically, the families living on the land were classified as either "farm families" (99 total landowners, plus 82 tenants) or "nonfarm families" (103 total landowners, plus 316 tenants) (484). This section of the report is relatively small at only a paragraph and an additional sentence in length:

> When Fontana lands were first being purchased, principal access to the reservoir area consisted only of one narrow, dry-weather road crossing the northern portion. The reservoir area was approximately 10 to 30 miles from highways at Bryson City, N.C., and 15 to 35 miles from U.S. Highway No. 129 at Deals Gap on the Tennessee-North Carolina line. The steep mountain slopes were mostly wooded, leaving only the river-bottom lands and coves for cultivation. The economy of the region was built around small subsistence farms, a little retail trade in five small community settlements, lumbering which had some time before exhausted most of the merchantable timber, and employment at copper mines in one of the coves. The principal livelihood of many families had been cut off by the closing of several large lumber companies some time previously, leaving a large portion of the families practically stranded… In addition to

families, it was necessary to remove 74 institutions, including churches, stores, schools, mills, and mines. (Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project* 483-4)

Although this section of *The Fontana Project* is small, what readers can gather from the outline of the demographics of the area is that communities and families were, in fact, thriving there at the time Fontana Dam was approved, constructed, and opened to the public. Describing these communities as being "practically stranded" is not only inaccurate, but ironic given the impact TVA had on the area. The report states that the closing of lumber companies in the area cut off the livelihood of the people living there, but the reason these companies closed was *because TVA purchased the land they used for their businesses.* Additionally, saying that the people living in the area were "practically stranded" reads as a paternalistic statement, as the writer assumes the people in the area need to be forced to leave the area in order to make a better life for themselves elsewhere. Following this description of the communities as being "stranded," the writer goes on to describe the institutions in the area, which directly contradicts the idea that these families were living in a desolate community unable to support life. The institutions included in the list are not all that were lost to flooding, though; the process of relocating residents included the relocation of graves, since several cemeteries would either be submerged in water or left inaccessible for a time after Old NC Highway 288 was flooded.

One of the major problems related to the flooding of the reservoir at Fontana Dam relates to the cemeteries that would either be submerged in water or rendered inaccessible due to the flooding of access roads (such as Old NC Highway 288). TVA conducted a number of surveys of all cemeteries within the reservoir area, marking each gravesite with a stake and identifying number. Additionally, TVA recoded the name and nearest relative of each buried person (Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project* 467). The relatives of the dead were given

three choices: “leave the grave undisturbed even if it would be underwater; move the remains to a re-internment cemetery at TVA expense; or move the remains to a distant cemetery, with long distance transportation costs paid by the family” (Holland 185). With the promise of North Shore Road in the minds of these people, many made the choice to leave the graves of their ancestors undisturbed, comforted by the fact that they would be able to visit the graves upon North Shore Road’s completion.

TVA ultimately relocated 1,576 graves to the reinternment cemetery, paid for by TVA; in total, 2,043 known graves were relocated[4], meaning 467 graves were moved to distant cemeteries at the cost of their relatives (Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project* 468; “Fontana Dam (Q-53)”). Gravesites that would not be submerged in water when the reservoir was flooded were not relocated. The relatives of those buried there were under the impression that Lakeview Drive would, upon completion, connect the cemeteries to Bryson City. Of course, Lakeview Drive was never completed; this has been the major source of controversy surrounding the Road to Nowhere, as well as the reason many former residents of the area feel that their government lied to them (Holland 194).

The Road to Nowhere

In vernacular retellings of the Fontana region’s history, tensions between Swain County residents and the federal government are most apparent in rememberings of Lakeview Drive. At the start of the Fontana project, officials told residents of communities which would ultimately be inaccessible due to the flooding of the reservoir that a road would be constructed to allow

[4] It is important to note that the Wall of History, a monument designed by the Swain County Heritage Board and the Swain County Historical and Genealogical Society, located outside of the Swain County Courthouse records that a total of five cemeteries were removed and 1,047 graves relocated. This is likely because the Wall of History focuses on the figures directly related to Swain County, while TVA’s figures are based off of the total amount of land acquired for the dam (located in both Swain and Graham counties).

them access to their family cemeteries and, by extension, some of the land they lost. As the years passed, though, residents began to feel that they had been lied to by the government so they would leave the area without resistance. In other cases where communities have been displaced for federal and state purposes, resistance was a common route the dispossessed took to try to preserve their rights. In the formation of Shenandoah National Park, for instance, residents were notified that they had to leave their land to allow for the creation of the national park. Land was purchased from these people at "a 'fair market price' and then 'donated' to the federal government," and in an attempt to prevent residents from resisting this, "park promoters began a campaign to assuage local oppositions by representing mountain residents as in need of the services" that they would be able to access if they left their land (K. Powell 34). After these people left the park, though, these resources never came. For people in Swain County, the continued back-and-forth with the federal government to receive compensation for the Road to Nowhere is seen as an effort by the government to continue taking advantage of their land.

In the *Memorandum Agreement of July 30, 1943,* the plan for the construction of Lakeview Drive is outlined. Old NC Highway 288 could have been relocated using low-grade construction standards for $1.2 million, but TVA deemed this figure "more than the value of the land served" (Holland 187). As a result, a solution needed to be reached to build a new road to connect the area served by Old NC Highway 288 with Bryson City and, on a larger scale, the rest of the state. The agreement, referred to as "The 1943 Agreement" from here on, had several provisions addressing the construction of Lakeview Drive. The provisions of interest are as follows: 1) TVA would acquire and privately own 44,400 total acres between the existing Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) boundary and the north shore of the new reservoir, excluding 1,900 acres owned by the North Carolina Exploration Company containing the

Fontana copper mine; 2) Following TVA's acquisition of these acres, it would transfer the land to the Park Service for inclusion into GSMNP; 3) The Park Service would build a park road in the lands the TVA transferred to them connecting a point near Fontana Dam to Bryson City as soon as Congress approved the construction funds after the end of WWII; 4) The state of North Carolina would build a road from Bryson City to a new point given by the Park Service to connect the park road to U.S. Highway 19; 5) The state of North Carolina would pay TVA $100,000 to help purchase the land; and 6) TVA would pay the North Carolina Local Government Commission $400,000 to set up a trust fund for Swain County, which would be used to pay off the principle of the outstanding road bond on Highway 288. The payment was to become due on August 1, 1975. Interestingly, something not addressed in the 1943 Agreement is the cemeteries or access thereto; what was undeniably promised, though, was that a promise for Lakeview Drive was made.

By late 1944, all parties had fulfilled the obligations outlined in the 1943 Agreement *except* for the road construction (Holland 188). In the 1950s, North Carolina Governor Luther Hodges led lobbying groups' attempts to carry out the construction promised in the 1943 Agreement. Ultimately, this led to the state government of North Carolina fulfilling their end of the agreement in 1959 by completing 2.67 miles of road between Bryson City and the boundary of GSMNP. Between 1963 and 1971, the Park Service constructed 6 miles of the new road, ending at a 1,200-foot long tunnel. The construction of the road halted when construction exposed rock containing Anakeesta rock, which contains pyrite crystals. When exposed to air and water, these rocks produce a sulfuric acid runoff, which has the potential to destroy ecosystems. Given this environmental issue, construction of the road was halted. Modern engineering techniques are able to combat this runoff, but considerable expense would need to be added to

the construction process. As a result, construction never resumed and negotiations to reach some sort of settlement for the road began.

A chronological summary of the events related to the 1943 Agreement controversy was outlined by Bryson City historian, naturalist, and author George Ellison. The chronology clearly lays out the legal and political issues and motives associated with the road, as well as attempts by Swain County residents and politicians to reach a resolution which were ignored time and time again. In 1965, an amendment was proposed to the 1943 Agreement substituting a 34.7 mile trans-mountain road to Townsend, TN from Bryson City in place of Lakeview Drive. The Secretary of Interior ultimately refused to build the road in 1967, but promised to build recreational facilities and a marina. This never happened. In 1968 North Carolina governor proposed an extension of the Blue Ridge Parkway to Deep Creek in Bryson City as an alternative to Lakeview Drive and the road proposed in 1965, but this led nowhere. Various other attempts to reach a settlement were made by Congress members between 1971-1974, but none of these attempts led to a resolution.

When the 1970s were nearing an end and still no resolution was made, former residents of the area organized the North Shore Cemetery Association. The two women who headed this effort were Helen Cable Vance – valedictorian of the final graduating class at Proctor High School on Hazel Creek in 1943 – and her sister Mildred Cable Johnson (Holland 193). The immediate aim of the organization was to gain access to the cemeteries along the North Shore of the reservoir in conformity of the 1943 Agreement's provisions, as well as to plan decorations and maintenance for the cemeteries in the area. The organization was, and is, made up of former residents of communities lost to the Fontana Dam reservoir and their descendants (Swain County Heritage Museum). The formation of the North Shore Cemetery Association is a ritualistic

performance serving to memorialize the history of the region. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott's fifth characteristic of public memory states that memory "relies upon material and/or symbolic supports" such as ritual performances, objects, and places (10). The collective identity of the people involved in this group was forged through the displacement of residents from their cemeteries, and returning to the cemeteries to maintain the gravesites serves as a way for the families to heal from the trauma of losing access to them.

Lance Holland describes the outcome of this group's formation in *Fontana:* "By the early 1980s, a regular schedule of decorations was held each year for as many of the 26 North Shore cemeteries as could be found" (194). To this day, descendants of the dead gather on boat ramps on the south shore of the reservoir to take boats contracted from Fontana Village by the Park Service for the first part of the journey across the reservoir. When they reach the North Shore, they board Park Service trucks and jeeps before hiking up ridges to each of the cemeteries. The visits take place in July, August, September, and October, and the association works to preserve Fontana's history and to maintain the cemeteries cut off from the rest of the state.

On November 28, 1980, the Secretary of Interior, Cecil Andrus, agreed to a proposed cash settlement of $1.3 million compounded annually from 1940. The compounded rate means that, by 1991, the value was $16,044,321.43. Also in 1980, HR 8419 introduced by Congressman Lamar Gudger provided for a $9.5 million cash settlement and cancellation of a $3.2 million school construction loan to Swain County. The House passed the bill, but Congress adjourned prior to the Senate's passage of the bill. By 1983, further congressional attempts were made to reach a cash settlement with Swain county, but none of the legislation was enacted. The discussions about reaching a settlement essentially halted until 1989 when Neil Murphy, Chairman of GSMNP Commission wrote Senator Jesse Helms a letter stating that the

Commission favored compensating Swain County for all they had been through with the road's abandonment and the government's inaction. Additionally, the Commission opposed Lakeview Drive, citing environmental concerns (i.e., the sulfuric acid runoff) as their reason; instead of the road, the Commission supported a formalized guarantee that the cemeteries could be accessed. By 1991, none of these resolutions were put into effect and the issue remained unaddressed until right before the November 2000 elections.

U.S. Representative Charles Taylor and Senator Jesse Helms received approval for $16 million towards the construction of Lakeview Drive in 2000. The approval for the funds was within a transportation appropriations bill signed by President Bill Clinton; this result caught many people off guard, including Swain County administrators and members of the GSMNP administration. The $16 million wasn't even enough money to cover the cost of the road's construction, which was estimated to be $136 million by 2000. It was speculated by Charles Taylor's political opponent, Sam Neill, that the approval for the funding money was nothing more than an attempt to gain public support rather than a genuine effort to bring closure to the Lakeview Drive issue. In 2010, Phil Carson – Chairman of the Swain County Board of Commissioners – took part in a decision "to favor a $52 million dollar settlement from the government instead of asking for the road to be completed," and he also "helped file the county's lawsuit in 2016 after payments for the settlement stopped coming in" (Knoepp).

In July of 2018, Swain County received a check from the federal government for $35.2 million dollars, representing the final payment for the unfinished Lakeview Drive. The full $52 million dollar price was promised to be paid by 2019. The settlement was deposited in an investment account at the North Carolina state treasury; Swain County was unable to take any money out of the account, instead receiving a check for the interest each year. Reaching a

settlement for Lakeview Drive does not mark the end of the emotional scars inflicted upon Swain County residents. The blatant disregard for the people impacted by the government's inaction throughout the Lakeview Drive controversy sticks with residents despite the payout to the county. The major issue for people in the area was the fact that the county was unable to access the trust fund. Swain County Manager Kevin King explained that the local government wanted to be able to invest the fund more efficiently so that it could generate more money for the betterment of the county (Knoepp, "This Senate Bill"). A bill was filed in the North Carolina General Assembly in 2019 which would "allow the Board of Commissioners of Swain County to manage the Swain County Settlement Trust Fund and to withdraw certain assets from the fund" (North Carolina General Assembly). The bill was passed in March of 2019 and referred to the Committee on Rules and Operations of the Senate. Since then, nothing else has happened to bring the act into law.

I am unable to find any reasoning as to why the federal government decided not to allow Swain County access to the fund, but it certainly contributes to the distrust Swain County residents hold towards the federal government. This paternalistic, condescending attitude is yet another example of displacement rhetoric at work. During TVA's initial acquisition of the tracts of land, families were told that they had no choice but to leave. According to several former residents, TVA staff members encouraged them to leave to live a better life. Christine Cole Proctor, a descendant of a North Shore family, was interviewed in 2018 and had the following to say: "[TVA] told big fibs to be honest with you because they promised paradise saying you people need to move – you can have better electricity, which we didn't have down there. Of course we didn't care. We gave and we gave and we gave" (Stone). TVA encouraged people to leave their established homes by comparing their rural way of life with more industrialized

lifestyles, which is typical when institutions of power interact with people in Appalachia. Of course, TVA didn't actually plan to help these families move anywhere with electricity and other luxuries; the $37.76 average given to families for their land wouldn't have covered the costs. According to another North Shore descendent, Henry Chambers, TVA paid for some land and not for other land: "If you owed back taxes they took the land for what you owed" (Stone).

This situation mirrors what happened to families forced to leave SNP, too. During the formation of SNP, park officials told residents that they "could continue living in the park but their land would be considered park property," which made residents feel tricked when policy changes ultimately resulted in the residents being unable to live in government-provided homesteads, as they originally believed they would (K. Powell 33). For residents to be able to live in these homesteads, they needed to receive government-assisted loans; these loans were only granted if they qualified, and many of the people who received these loans were often unable "to make their loan payments on their resettlement homes" (K. Powell 34). The residents in this area believed they were going to be given resettlement homes, only for these homes to be taken away or to be made unaffordable. The feeling these people had of being tricked is similar to feelings people in Swain County have related to the broken promise of Lakeview Drive.

The decision to not allow Swain County access to their own compensation fund made many people feel like the federal government was still not trusting them to make decisions that would benefit their community, even after all of the sacrifices the community made during and after the war effort. These people lost their land, their way of life, and access to cemeteries. They voluntarily applied to work on the construction of Fontana Dam seven days a week for grueling hours, all for the good of the country. They went back and forth with Congress for 75 years, with no resolution being reached until the Swain County government threatened to sue the federal

government in 2016. After everything they have been through and all of the disregard they have been shown, it is no wonder why the scars associated with the Road to Nowhere have not healed.

As the language in *The Fontana Project* suggests, the federal government had very little respect for both communities in the Fontana region *and* for those who built the dam, despite the fact that these workers were responsible for the dam's speedy completion. The federal government and TVA identified Fontana Dam as being a project crucial to ending WWII, and yet the people who built it were referred to as a problem, as if they were only objects to furnish labor. The workers on the dam lived in the area to complete what was called a necessary war project, but their status as human beings in Appalachia mattered little to those in power. Despite TVA's clear disdain for the workers who remained in the area after completing the dam, current retellings of TVA history in the Fontana region praise these workers as being highly patriotic and crucial to ending WWII. In TVA's official retellings of their involvement in the Fontana region, the efforts of the men and women who built the dam are praised and championed, which is a stark contrast to the language used in *The Fontana Agreement.* The juxtaposition between modern retellings of the Fontana Dam project and the language used to describe the workers at the time is certainly notable, especially because TVA's retellings aim to improve public perception of the organization rather than to portray the full history of the region.

In the next chapter, I examine three sites of rhetorical remembering about the Fontana Project's history. A major factor behind Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere's statuses as contested places of public memory lies within the way the history of the area is told, both officially and vernacularly. The language used by TVA at the time of the project in the context of current retellings of the history makes it clear why people in Swain County hold animosity towards the federal government and TVA; it is clear from *The Fontana Agreement* that these

workers were never truly respected, so TVA's approach to championing them today seems disingenuous to people in Swain County. Vernacular and official retellings by people in Swain County aim to tell the story of the county's involvement in Fontana Dam, as well as to memorialize the voices of the people and communities lost to the project.

CHAPTER FOUR: RHETORICAL REMEMBERINGS OF THE FONTANA REGION

Introduction

I arrived in Bryson City to visit Lance Holland's Appalachian History Center on a sunny spring day. As I passed tourists visiting the area toting shopping bags and ice cream cones, I looked for a particular landmark: a statue of a black bear holding a sign displaying the name of Holland's store, "Appalachian Mercantile." Walking in I was greeted with rows upon rows of products from local businesses and hiking guides before I spotted a man sitting at the cash register, reading something on his laptop. I had looked for pictures of Lance Holland on Google prior to my arrival, and since I was pretty sure it was him at the register, I approached to introduce myself. After explaining who I was and what I was researching, Holland and his dog – who was comfortable in her bed next to his chair – led me to the back of the store, which serves as the Appalachian History Center. As Holland talked to me about his archives and the research about the Fontana region he has meticulously conducted for decades, he stressed the fact that people in the area still feel very strongly about the actions of the government and TVA. I also learned that Holland has become a major authority in the preservation of Fontana's history; many of the boxes of files he has were given to him by relatives of Fontana natives *and* TVA members. By the time our visit wrapped up, I had an entirely new understanding of the area and how complex the history in the region truly is. I also learned about the different ways people in Swain County have contributed to remembering the history of the Fontana region, the work the men and women who built Fontana Dam completed, and the way the government essentially neglected the county for decades.

The stories Holland told me about the Fontana region serve as an example of a vernacular retelling of the area's history. In his retellings, the impact of TVA operations on the local

population were at the forefront, whereas official retellings from TVA and the federal government tend to ignore the voices of the displaced. The histories of Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere are told through both official and vernacular histories, which is important in analysis of how the history of the region is told through rhetorical remembering. John Bodnar writes that "public memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions," identifying official histories as "the concerns of cultural leaders or authorities" in society, and vernacular histories as representative of "an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole" (13-14). Travis Rountree expands upon Bodnar's definition of vernacular histories, adding that they "ask us to participate" (11). In other words, places of public memory are characterized by official narratives expressed and circulated by those in positions of authority, and vernacular histories made for and of the people.

In his own case study surrounding rhetorical rememberings of a notorious shoot-out in Hillsville, Virginia, Travis Rountree writes that "each museum retells [a] story in different ways… [which] reveals what the curator or collector of the museum deems valuable" in the retelling of the history (Rountree 92). This argument applies as we examine sites of rhetorical remembering in Swain County because they communicate different points in the Fontana region's history as a whole, and each site clearly shows what the curators value about the history.

Vernacular histories, or histories of the people, are shaped by epideictic rhetoric. Epideictic rhetoric, according to Travis Rountree, "develops from the conduct and values of the society that constructs the piece of rhetoric" (92). The stories told by people in a group evolve through time and space to serve the needs of those in the present. Essentially, as Dickinson, Blair, and Ott note, memory "is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties" and memory has historical significance (6). Rountree also notes that "the retelling of a historical event becomes

rhetorical as it interweaves the historical and personal aspects of the history… through these vernacular histories, an official history develops that is generally couched in the public sphere, i.e., a place of public memory or remembrance“ (Rountree 92). The process through which these retellings circulate are heavily influenced by the values of the society in which they originate, and vernacular histories have the potential to lead to official retellings of a historical event.

In this chapter, I identify and analyze three sites of rhetorical remembering for Fontana Dam and the Road to Nowhere in Swain County. The first location, TVA's Fontana Dam Visitor's Center, is a site of official history, where TVA has exhibits focusing on the positive developments TVA brought to the region. The second location is the Swain County Wall of History, located right outside of the new Swain County Courthouse in Bryson City. Members of the Swain County Heritage Board and the Swain County Genealogical Society raised $100,000 dollars for the monument. It casts the history of Swain County (including the communities lost to the Fontana project) in massive marble slabs, directly outside of a building representative of justice. While the Wall of History is an official retelling of Fontana-related history, the information included on the wall was voted and agreed upon by members of the community, directly involving them in the process of what would be showcased on the wall; this makes the Wall of History both an official and a vernacular retelling. The final location is the Appalachian History Center (AHC) in Bryson City, owned and operated by Lance Holland. AHC is an entirely vernacular history of the Fontana region, which Holland has spent decades cultivating. It showcases primary source documents from TVA, the Fontana Dam project site, interviews, photographs, and more.

Location 1: Fontana Dam Visitor Center

Fig. 5. Explore Bryson City, “Fontana Dam Visitor Center”

Fontana Dam Visitor Center (see fig. 5) is a TVA-owned and operated facility located at Fontana Dam. It is a concrete, one-story building mirroring the design of the dam itself, with plaques standing outside the entrance for visitors to read when the Visitor Center is closed. Although the Visitor Center is open only from May through October, the location receives visitors regularly; it records more than 100,000 visitors each year (“Our Village”). Also outside of the Visitor Center is a flagpole which flies the American flag and, directly beneath it, a TVA flag.

The Fontana Dam Visitor Center focuses on “TVA’s history, the generating facility, and the benefits of TVA’s activities to [people in the region” (“Fontana”). Exhibits displaying maps,

videos, and information about the dam and TVA history are the major focal point of this location (see fig. 6). Given TVA's framing of the museum as a sort of celebration of TVA history, these exhibits mainly paint the organization in a favorable light by focusing on the innovative elements of their projects in the region. Additionally, exhibits within the museum tell the WWII history of Fontana Dam, placing emphasis on the secret nature of the project and its overall importance in the war. Figure 5 shows a central exhibit in the Visitor Center: a brightly decorated, multimodal display focusing on the war effort, information about how dams work, the creation of Fontana Village, and the transportation involved in the construction of the dam.

Fig. 6. Emma Gallagher, "Fontana Dam Visitor Center Exhibit"

Notably, what is interesting about the Fontana Dam Visitor Center is the lack of information about the displacement TVA caused through the Fontana project. This isn't shocking given TVA's description of the information in the center as focusing on the *benefits* of their own

projects. In this official retelling of the history of Fontana Dam, the emotions and lived experiences of the people who called the region home for generations before the dam's construction are neglected entirely. By shaping the rhetorical remembering of Fontana Dam in this way, TVA is using the position of influence their Visitor Center has on hundreds of thousands of people to create a narrative in which they are a benevolent group, responsible only for development in the area and not for the pain so many suffered – and suffer – as a result of their projects and eminent domain in the projects.

TVA's choice to focus on the beneficial parts of the Fontana project and the TVA as a whole serves the needs of TVA rather than the elements of Fontana's history which are considered important by Swain County residents. TVA has been a prominent figure in Appalachia since the 1940s, and public animosity towards them for the projects they have completed in the region has made general public opinion for TVA less than ideal. John Bodnar identifies official histories as pertaining to "the concerns of cultural leaders or authorities" (13). Instead of posting exhibits about the negative impacts of Fontana Dam, TVA utilizes videos, maps, images, and text through colorful, engaging exhibits. The potential rhetorical outcome of this approach, and likely the intended approach of TVA, is that visitors to the dam leave with a positive view of the project, TVA, and development in the region. The issue here is, of course, the lack of information about the communities the dam impacted and neglecting to include information which would contextualize the project in the region more broadly. TVA wants the official story of the Fontana region to be their intervention in the area, which is what their museum aims to accomplish.

The five panels included in the exhibit itself each focus on different aspects of the Fontana project. The information outlined on these panels focus on the dam's importance in

WWII, the building of Fontana Village, how a dam works (note that this panel is at the center of the exhibit), and the contributions of workers on the job site in the dam's construction. The retelling of Fontana Dam's history as outlined in this exhibit focuses on the wartime history of the project as well as how research the hydropower from the dam brought an end to WWII. An important element of the retelling of historical events tends to be epideictic rhetoric, which "develops from the conduct and values of the society that constructs the piece of rhetoric" (Rountree 92). If we look at TVA itself as the 'society' in this instance, we see that the values shaping the rhetoric are patriotism, hard work, and sacrifice; by shaping the history to focus on the benefits TVA brought to the region (and country, since the dam is credited with being a major factor in ending WWII), TVA is serving their own values, which are grounded in a desire to continue to operate within the region.

Current tensions between TVA and Swain County lie within TVA's pattern of dismissing the negative impacts of their projects in the area, as well as choosing to ignore the displacement rhetorics they used against people in the Fontana region. This pattern began with the language in the preamble of the TVA Act of 1933, which positioned the organization as a helpful entity in the Tennessee Valley area, and continues as the displacement of Fontana area residents continues to be glossed over in favor of making TVA look good. In the previous chapter I examined how the language used in TVA's *The Fontana Agreement* describes the communities in the area using paternalistic, condescending descriptions, which are characteristic of rhetorics used against the displaced as outlined by Katrina Powell. Despite the rhetoric TVA used to talk about the people from the area being characterized by disrespect and dismissiveness of their value, TVA's Visitor Center characterizes their role in the region as benevolent. The information provided at the Fontana Visitor Center at Fontana Dam is not bad, per se; it just fails to reflect the portions of the

history which many people in Swain County continue to memorialize today. This discrepancy is especially clear through examination of two other sites of rhetorical remembering in Swain County.

Location 2: Wall of History

The Swain County Wall of History (see fig. 7) is located on gigantic marble slabs in front of the new Swain County Courthouse in downtown Bryson City, NC. On this wall, the history of Swain County from its establishment in 1871 to the 2010s is chronicled, as are the names of all veterans from Swain County. The information displayed here includes the names of people involved in establishing the county, as well as information about early businesses and organizations in the area. Included, too, are photographs of important structures in the county, such as the original Swain County Courthouse, as they were built.

Fig. 7. Morgan Winstead, “Swain County Wall of History”

The wall was designed by the Swain County Historical and Genealogical Society and the Swain County Heritage Board. The Swain County Historical and Genealogical Society consists of members who are residents of Swain County (though they do try to collect and preserve data from surrounding counties). They describe their purpose as a way “to aid in the preservation of Family Bible Records, Military Records, Cemetery Records, and other genealogical and

historical records" ("Historical and Genealogical Society"). The Swain County Heritage Board is involved in the Swain County Heritage Museum, which is located in the center of Bryson City and showcases exhibits related to Swain County history and culture. Both of these organizations are primarily run by citizen members, which is an important consideration in the examination of the Wall of History.

The Wall of History is interesting to analyze because it is an official site of public memory, but the information included on the wall was voted upon by members of the community to ensure that no element of the Fontana region's history was forgotten. Epideictic rhetoric is apparent here, as the information on the wall has been directly contributed by the community. From looking at this wall, we are able to see the information people in Swain County have deemed important enough to go on it, which displays the values people in the area have in preserving the history of their county. The history of displacement in the region, for instance, is displayed frequently on the wall. The first slab of the wall contains a map of Swain County, where the cities Bryson City and Cherokee are marked with stars. The acknowledgment of Cherokee serves as a tribute to the tribes which once occupied the land; the second slab contains a timeline of important moments in Swain County's history, and the first date noted in the timeline acknowledges the fact that Cherokees settled in the land prior to European arrival.

It is interesting that the first event mentioned in the timeline on the Wall of History relates to the original people who settled the land because it ties into the pattern of displacement seen in Appalachia. In the introduction and first chapter of this thesis I discussed how displacement for the purposes of resource extraction and land ownership in the western North Carolina region began with the forced removal of the Cherokee people by the federal government and continued as Appalachian stereotypes circulated and impacted perceptions of the

region. Although the Trail of Tears and other specifics about Cherokee removal are not outlined in detail on the wall, the acknowledgment of who occupied the land before Swain County was established demonstrates that the people involved in the retellings of the county's history prioritize the acknowledgment of the displaced, regardless of what year it happened.

The value people in Swain County have of acknowledging displacement is, of course, memorialized in a section about the Fontana project. This section of the wall is located in the center of the monument The amount of detail included in the outline of the Fontana region's history is astounding. The first panel of this part of the wall includes a summary of the Fontana project, recording information like the size of the dam, the number of facilities included in its operation, and the role the dam played in atomic bomb development for WWII. It also acknowledges the work of the dam employees with the following inscription: "Some 5,000 people worked around the clock in 3 shifts to complete the dam in record time." Directly beneath this inscription, a sentence describing the impact of the project reads: "Over 3,000 citizens had to move from their homes because of the building of Fontana Dam." The contrast of tone in these two lines makes the positioning of this information extra powerful. The rhetorical expectation is that readers would begin looking at the wall with a sense of amazement as they learned about the people forced to leave the area upon its completion. The history of the displaced in the region doesn't end with that sentence; directly after learning how many people were displaced, the monument goes on to detail what exactly was lost because of the project.

The section outlining the history of the Fontana project displays the names of all communities lost to the project, as well as the last names of all the families displaced from their homes. Photographs of structures from these communities that were destroyed to further the project are on the wall as well, which gives visitors a visual idea of what life was like in the area

before the project. The Wall of History preserves the communities which citizens of Swain County (whether they are members of either of the organizations involved in its building or not) feel that official retellings ignore. The second panel on the wall includes the names of the communities, entities, and active copper mines lost to the Fontana project, as well as photographs of a chapel/school and a general store from the area. Rather than simply reducing the displaced to a number, their history is made more powerful by being given names and visuals to connect the reader to the places lost. Also included in this panel are the names of 26 cemeteries which remain in an area not accessible by vehicle, connecting the history of the project to the present concerns of people in Swain County. As I have mentioned previously, the inaccessible cemeteries Lakeview Drive was supposed to service are central to the public memory of the Road to Nowhere. The North Shore Cemetery Association is a ritualistic manifestation of public memory in this case, and including the names of all the cemeteries on the wall brings in a level of material support in the memorialization of the region.

The third panel of the Wall of History's Fontana portion displays photos of the Calhoun House at Hazel Creek and the Hall Cabin on Hazel Creek, which are two structures that still remain in the region. Between the two photos are a list of facts about both properties, including Hall Cabin's status as the most remote historic structure in the GSMNP. The final two panels of the wall list all last names, sorted alphabetically, of the families displaced by the Fontana project as well as two photographs. The first photograph is of a chimney and is captioned, "All that remains of a homesite." This stark imagery connects the names on the wall to the homes they lost. The second photograph, which is on the fifth and final panel of the Fontana section of the wall, captures an undated decoration day organized by the North Shore Cemetery Association.

In five panels, the Wall of History commemorates the comprehensive history of the region while taking great care to humanize the people who were forced to leave their homes for the project to be completed. Through the vernacular rememberings of people in Swain County, an official site was able to be established and put on display in the public sphere. Cynthia Miecznkowski Sheard's description of epideictic rhetoric is supported by this place. According to Sheard, "epideictic discourse today operates in contexts civic, professional, or occupational… that invite individuals to evaluate the communities or institutions to which they belong [and] their own roles within them" (771). The Wall of History is an example of epideictic discourse's role in retelling events of the past because the history being told on the wall is a reflection of the history Swain County officials and residents value.

The beginning of the wall's Fontana section gives the reader the basic information about the project they need to be able to understand the following panels, and the transition between the first panel and the next focuses on the number of families displaced by the Fontana project. After detailing the specifics about the communities destroyed by the project, the wall ends the section by naming every family displaced from the region as a direct result of Fontana Dam being built; these names are placed alongside a photograph displaying efforts of people in community to maintain the cemeteries which could have been long forgotten without citizen intervention, which shows how much people in Swain County value the preservation of the region's history. The wall is a way for people in the county, whether they are visitors or locals, to engage with history. By placing the wall outside of such a building associated with justice, the wall is also relying upon the symbolic support of the location to communicate the importance of the history it details.

Location 3: Appalachian History Center (AHC)

The final site of rhetorical remembering I am examining in this chapter is Lance Holland's Appalachian History Center. Holland has become a leading authority in Fontana history through the years, and his archives contain everything from original maps detailing communities in the Fontana region to books about the area which are now out of print. I was lucky enough to be shown this archive by Holland himself, where he offered several insights into his methods and efforts to memorialize the region. The AHC consists of a desk, several shelves, and filing systems (see fig. 8). Holland takes great care to keep any materials he has been given in good condition, so visitors are able to go into the AHC and ask to view specific materials of interest under his supervision. Without Holland, the information cannot be accessed by visitors. His tours are certainly helpful to people who want to learn more about the area, but it would be very useful to display some of this information in exhibits to make the information more accessible.

In the boxes to the left of Holland's desk are boxes of primary source documents related to TVA, Fontana Village, and former Fontana communities. One of the documents he showed me during my tour was an original draft of the first section of Tennessee Valley Authority's *The Fontana Project,* which he obtained when a family member of one of the TVA higher-ups was cleaning out his home. Also included in the archive are full-sized original construction plans for Fontana Dam.

Fig. 8: Morgan Winstead, “Appalachian Heritage Center”

In this archive, it is the visitor’s responsibility to ask Holland to show them the materials, and Holland entirely controls the way the information in the archive is shared. John Bodnar’s definition of vernacular history is certainly supported by the system of Holland’s archive, which contains an array of information concerning Fontana-related history. Travis Rountree notes that vernacular histories “ask us to participate,” and the responsibility of the visitor to sift through materials in the archive directly supports this argument (11). While it is certainly a wonderful thing to have access to such a wealth of information, it can also be problematic for people who are unaware of the region’s history simply because sorting through it can be overwhelming. Even if one were to find an item of interest in the archive, without historical context it could be difficult to understand.

Since Holland shows people the materials in the archives, retellings of the region’s history are reliant upon what he decides to share about it. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is important to note if we examine it through the context of how history is retold. Holland’s

retellings of Fontana-related history, though informative and detailed, still functions as a site of public memory where certain rememberings of the Fontana region are prioritized above others. As Travis Rountree writes about museums, "each version" of an event's display in a museum "reveals what the curator or collector of the museum deems valuable" in telling the event's history (92). In Holland's archive there are no exhibits; instead, primary documents related to the Fontana project are stashed in drawers and boxes. While this system is great for the preservation of the documents, it makes it difficult for visitors to view the materials related to the area's history.

Conclusion

Each of the rememberings I examined in this chapter demonstrate the value of official and vernacular rememberings in the retelling of a historical event. Depending on how the events are framed and displayed, people leave the sites of these rememberings with different lessons and emotions in mind. The history displayed by TVA intends to generate feelings of hope for visitors by detailing information related to the betterment of an underdeveloped region and the U.S. victory in WWII, as well as to evoke positive emotions in visitors in regards to TVA. The Swain County Wall of history's depiction of the Fontana project's history focuses primarily on the displaced communities in the area, intending for visitors to leave the wall with an awareness of the dispossessed. While the wall does acknowledge the impressive aspects of the dam, emphasis is placed more on the displaced to reflect the present-day concerns of people in Swain County in relation to the Road to Nowhere. Lance Holland's archive contains an incredible number of documents related to the project, and visitors to the AHC are entirely dependent upon Holland's help in understanding the history. Regardless of how different each retelling is, one thing remains certain: the way these histories are retold are rhetorical. In the final chapter of this study, I

discuss the implications of these retellings in the larger scope of Appalachian studies and rhetorical memory studies, as well as the potential for future research in similar western North Carolina communities.

CONCLUSION

When analyzing public memory, we should take care to examine the ways power dynamics are involved in the re-telling of Appalachian history. Over 75 years after the Fontana project began, residents of Swain County still feel the impact of the stereotypes and resource extraction industries had in the displacement of dozens of communities in the region. The Road to Nowhere's presence in the region certainly contributes to modern retellings of the area's history; had the road been completed, those displaced from the area would feel as though their removal was not a trick, and the people in Swain County would not have been forced to spend decades negotiating a solution to the road with the federal government, the same people responsible for the displacement of so many communities. Fontana's history is a prime example of the continued exploitation of communities in Appalachia, but it far from the only area in western North Carolina to have been a target of displacement for the purposes of resource extraction.

At the end of my visit to the Appalachian History Center, Lance Holland asked me: "Have you heard of Needmore?" He gestured to a stack of free maps of Bryson City and western North Carolina, inviting me to take one. With the map in front of him, Holland drew an "X" symbol on an area outside of Franklin, NC. "This is Needmore, and it could have been what Fontana is."

Needmore is a tract of land located outside of present-day Franklin, NC. Fort Butler was one of the forts built as a location Cherokee peoples would be held at until they were separated into their detachments. It was located along the Hiwassee River in present-day Murphy, NC. From Fort Butler, one of the Cherokee detachments was led along a path which runs through Franklin. In this area were communities much like those in the Fontana region, which sprouted

up as white settlers searched for land to live on. This area was given the name 'Needmore' because, as a resident described, "…[people there] were always saying they needed more of this and more of that. Every time the mail boy came by on his horse, somebody would say the folks need more of so and so until one day he hauled off and said, 'You ought to name this place 'need more.'" (Ellison "Memories of the Lost Village of Needmore"). When residents finally convinced the government to allow them to open a post office, the town decided to name the town Needmore. Residents of Needmore built stores, churches, and homes along the Little Tennessee River. A quarry situated on the west bank of the river was a major source of revenue and resources for people in the area, producing materials used in the construction of hearths, patios, and chimneys. Also located in the community were grist mills and farmsteads, which supported the people in the area. In 1912, the Nantahala Power Company bought out the owners of Needmore, proposing the building of a dam that would flood out the community. As a result, many of the people in Needmore relocated in the hopes of establishing new lives before their community would be destroyed. Ultimately, the funds to build a dam to flood the tract were not sufficient, and when the Great Depression hit, the possibility of this dam was virtually quashed. Then, during WWII, attention was placed on the construction of Fontana Dam in order to reach an end in the war. Needmore was eventually transferred from Nantahala Power to Duke Power, another prominent resource extraction company in western North Carolina. As Duke Power began examining the potential for hydroelectric power in the area, though, public attention turned to the significance of the Needmore tract in Cherokee history.

The North Carolina Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) submitted a letter of intent to Duke Power, outlining their desire to purchase Needmore for just over $19 million ("Needmore Tract Appears Safe from Development"). TNC had an interest in preserving the

landscape of the Needmore tract because of its historical significance and the wildlife living in the area. Since the original efforts to conserve the Needmore Tract, an organization in Franklin called Mainspring Conservation Trust has purchased eight property additions to the land, which means this area now encompasses more than 5,000 acres and 30 miles of river frontage in Swain and Macon counties ("Needmore Tract"). Currently, the tract is protected by the state of North Carolina, preserving the history of the land without the potential for resource extraction looming on the horizon. Needmore's story is relevant to Fontana's story because it mirrors the three patterns of stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement in Fontana history, but the most obvious difference between the two areas is that Needmore ended up being conserved rather than destroyed.

Displacement rhetorics are characterized by one group deciding they know best over another, and because of these rhetorics the communities surrounding Fontana Dam were destroyed despite the protests of those who called the area home. Then, after their removal, the federal government and TVA continued to decide they knew better than the residents of Swain County when it came to finishing the Road to Nowhere. The costs to finish it would be too high; the environmental impacts would be too strong, and it wasn't worth spending money on modern engineering techniques to combat them; the communities the road would provide access to were rural, and therefore unworthy of an expensive road. The people in the Fontana region advocated for themselves with little to no support from external parties, especially since their removal was viewed as patriotic in WWII America.

Needmore was a community very similar to those surrounding Fontana, but the intervention of TNC meant the area had advocates to negotiate with Duke Power on their behalf. Because of the efforts of TNC, Needmore was preserved rather than being drowned, thus

preserving the natural resources and material history of the area. The retellings of Needmore's history are markedly different from those in Fontana, mainly because Fontana communities were ultimately destroyed and Needmore was saved from this fate. Although the retellings of these areas are different, the patterns of stereotyping, resource extraction, and displacement are present in both histories, as they are in so many histories of Appalachian communities. Fontana provides valuable lessons on the impact of these factors within the region, as well as how targeted communities have been able to reclaim their voices in the retelling of their histories. All we can continue to do is listen and learn from these areas; after so many centuries of being disregarded and forgotten, that is the very least of what they deserve.

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