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Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes

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Appalachia has long been stereotyped as a region of feuds, moonshine stills, mine wars, environmental destruction, joblessness, and hopelessness. Robert Schenkkan's 1992 Pulitzer-Prize winning play The Kentucky Cycle once again adopted these stereotypes, recasting the American myth as a story of repeated failure and poverty--the failure of the American spirit and the poverty of the American soul. Dismayed by national critics' lack of attention to the negative depictions of mountain people in the play, a group of Appalachian scholars rallied against the stereotypical representations of the region's people. In Back Talk from Appalachia, these writers talk back to the American mainstream, confronting head-on those who view their home region one-dimensionally. The essays, written by historians, literary scholars, sociologists, creative writers, and activists, provide a variety of responses. Some examine the sources of Appalachian mythology in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature. Others reveal personal experiences and examples of grassroots activism that confound and contradict accepted images of ""hillbillies."" The volume ends with a series of critiques aimed directly at The Kentucky Cycle and similar contemporary works that highlight the sociological, political, and cultural assumptions about Appalachia fueling today's false stereotypes.

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