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Book Review - Movie-Made Appalachia: History, Hollywood, and the Highland South

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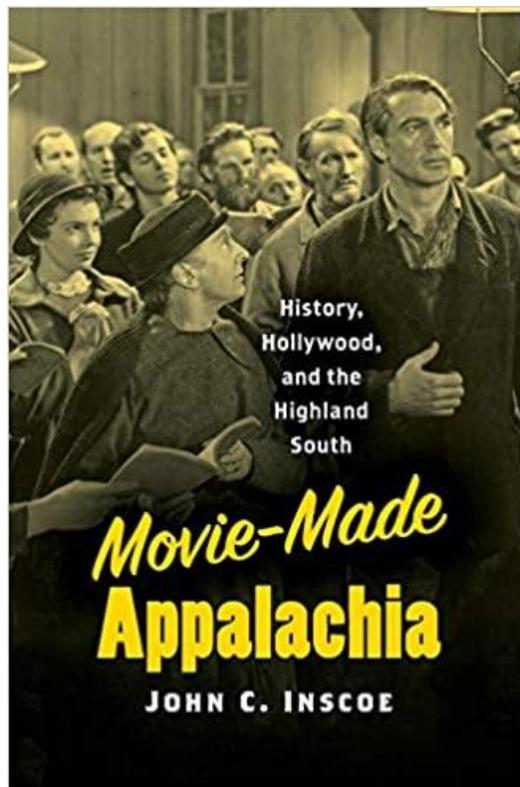
Movie-Made Appalachia: History, Hollywood, and the Highland South by John C. Inscoc
(University of North Carolina Press, 2020: ISBN 9781469660141, \$29.95)

Movie-Made Appalachia does not review Hollywood's often unflattering depiction of Appalachia, but rather explores films where the movie industry looks beyond the stereotypes to highlight more honest portrayals of culture in the highland South (the author's term for the people and culture of rural Appalachia). Each chapter focuses on a particular area of study, including the Civil War, the experiences of women, Appalachia and race, the mining culture, the sense of place, and conflict between families. However, these six topics are not the only themes explored in the more than two dozen films included here. Broader themes bring the reader's attention to moral dilemmas and cultural identities in terms of manhood and femininity, religion, and community versus outsiders.

The films comprise a broad cross section of Hollywood, from the silent era's *Tol'able David* (1921) to modern-day popular movies like *Cold Mountain* (2003). Do not expect to look for a particular film in the index and find a concise treatment of the plot. Instead, the author uses carefully chosen films as a means to explore the many themes that are woven throughout the book. He treats these films and their subject

matter with respect, which is a refreshing change from the often derisive popular commentary about Appalachian culture.

Of particular interest are two films set in Georgia, which are keystones in two separate chapters. *Foxfire* is the story of a mountain woman forced from her land and is highlighted in the chapter "This Land is My Land." The other



film, *I'd Climb the Highest Mountain*, tells of another mountain woman coming to terms with her duty as a wife in "Women on a Mission." The chapter "Afro-Appalachians" is especially poignant considering the dearth of material at the intersection of African American history and Hollywood's depiction of the highland South. The author spends much of the chapter unpacking *The Journey of August King* and its powerful treatment of antislavery sentiment in 19th century Appalachia. The other chapters are equally captivating. "Family Feud" takes the Hatfield and McCoy conflict far beyond the usual farcical

portrayals. "Coal, Conflict, and Community" digs deep into the social and economic character of the mining community. Finally, "The Civil War" focuses on the war as experienced in Appalachia, where the irregular fighting often brought the battle to the dooryard.

This book is an engaging tribute to the role of film in the portrayal of Appalachia. Moving beyond the stereotypes, the author finds those

examples that explore the culture in an honest and forthright manner. Recommended for students of film and Southern history as well as general readers interested in the subject.

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