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Cultures of Appalachia and the Scottish Highlands: Twins or Contraries?

This essay will dive into the cultures of Appalachia and the Scottish Highlands and how they are resemblant of each other. Both regions have much to learn from each other and in some ways, they are mirrors of each other. This essay will mention the Scottish-Irish settlement of the Appalachians, the similarities between the two cultures, and will dive in into the history of the two regions. Appalachian culture is similar to the culture of the Scottish Highlands. This is shown through Appalachia's music, quilting, and moonshining traditions, which have strong ties back to Scottish and Irish cultures.

To examine how Appalachia is similar to the Scottish Highlands, we must first take a look at history. The Appalachians were first settled by Native Americans hundreds to thousands of years prior to the European settlers' arrival. The Cherokee were the most well-known tribe to settle the mountains and they brought all sorts of influences and cultural practices, some of which can still be seen in the Appalachians today. Over time, many tribes such as the Monancan, Saponi, and Tutelo tribes came and settled in the mountains. (The Highland Clans of Scotland)

When the British settled in the Americas, or in this case North America, diverse types of Britons from various parts of the UK (United Kingdom) came to settle the newly mapped lands. The Puritans came to escape religious persecution from the Church of England and ended up settling in New England. The Pilgrims also sailed to New England to escape the Church of England's grip. The Irish and Scottish settled in droves across the American colonies, especially in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Many eventually made their way to the

Appalachian Mountains. The first European settlers under John Oliver, who was Scottish, that came to the mountains were particularly fearful of the Native Americans, having heard stories of Native American raids on settlements. However, the Native Americans helped them to survive the winter, rather than attacking them. They had hoped that by helping the settlers, they would receive guarantees that they would be left alone in the future. This proved all for naught, as Oliver and his group would later drive out the natives years later despite having relied on the *savages* generosity. The Irish and Scottish were known for their adventurism and were therefore among some of the most prominent colonists who led the charge westward, which intensified once the American Colonies gained their Independence from Britain. They were fleeing persecution and restrictive laws and edicts that prevented them from being able to change their circumstances or pursue their goals. Thus, they turned to the American Colonies as a way of hopefully starting a new life.

The displacement of the Native Americans from the Appalachians primarily began once the US achieved its independence. The British had forbidden settlers from moving west past the Appalachians in the hopes that it would reduce the chance of conflict that would inevitably result from colonists' ventures into Native American territory. Now that the US was no longer under the authority of the British Empire, the previous treaties were null and void and the settlers began to move west in the hopes of building a new life for themselves. The Native Americans attempted to resist and form treaties with the federal government, but they would eventually be broken due to a variety of causes, such as gold being found on Native American territory which led to the subsequent forced resettlements and trail of tears. While most of the natives would be forced out, a few hid out in sporadic pockets across the Appalachian Mountains, and some tribes can be found residing there to this day.

The Scottish Highlands and the Appalachians used to be a part of the same mountain range under Pangea. When Pangea separated into different continents, subcontinents, archipelagos, and islands, the mountain range also separated in two and the Appalachians eventually ended up as a part of North America, while the Scottish Highlands were located in the British Isles. This plays a role in both mountain ranges looking similar and having the same landscapes. The similarities between the two mountain ranges also played a role in the Scottish and Irish settling in the mountains as it reminded them of home. Scottish and Irish settlement in the Appalachians and the Mid-Atlantic has a noteworthy influence on the area's history, as evidenced by names such as Emerald Isle Beach or surnames such as McDonald. The Scottish and Irish also played pivotal roles throughout the nation's history.

Of course, the Scottish and Irish brought traditions and core aspects of their culture to the Appalachians and the other cities and areas they settled in. For example, the Scots and Irish brought their distilling methods to the Appalachians. The Scottish, and primarily the Irish are known for their love of liquor and their frequent consumption of it, so it does not come with much surprise that they are figuring out new ways to distill alcohol in their novel environment. This also comes to their detriment, however, as Appalachia is one of the regions most heavily affected by alcoholism. (Appalachian Issues)

Appalachia today is one of the most isolated regions in the nation where people live far apart, with few roads in between. The people view outsiders occasionally with disdain and see them as gentrifiers. They would rather like to observe their traditions and way of life without interference from outsiders or the federal government. The mentality of self-reliance and the desire to live independently stems from Celtic culture. Many Appalachians prefer to live independently

without government meddling and have different interests from the government, like the Scottish Highlanders do from the Parliament.

Now, this essay can direct its focus to the Scottish Highlands. Tartan road states: "The Scottish Highlands were first settled in 12,000 BC with the first humans being hunter-gatherers." (Tartan Road) They lived off the land and many vibrant coastal communities sprang up. Many of them were later destroyed in 6200 BC when a tsunami struck the area. Over time, a series of civilizations came to the Scottish Highlands, such as the Romans under Vespasian leading campaigns into the mountains in 70 AD. Afterwards, the Scots later came from Northern Ireland around 500 AD to colonize the west of Scotland, bringing with them the Gaelic language and the Christian religion. The Vikings briefly conquered the area and after multiple wars, schisms, and strife with England, the two kingdoms finally unified in 1707 into the United Kingdom of Great Britain, which later included Ireland.

However, in reaction to the Jacobite rebellions, the British suppressed Highland culture and made expressions of such culture illegal, such as playing bagpipes which is so prominent in their culture. Throughout the 19th century, large estates sprung up as the rich gradually bought out the land that had been previously used for sheep farming for generations. In fact, the Scottish Highlands are known for their iconic estates, which still make up most of the land ownership. Nowadays, the Highlands are a major tourist attraction like the Appalachians. The population is diverse but is unequally distributed, with highly populated sporadic pockets in the lowlands and specks of civilization in the highlands themselves.

The reason as to why the cultures between the two mountain ranges are so similar is due to the Scottish and Irish settlement of North America. Scots and Irish especially turned to American immigration when they found their lands being bought up by the rich for their mansions and

estates. Since the US had such a strong allure to prospective immigrants for a new life, that was naturally the most sought-after destination. Both mountain ranges are also facing similar challenges, however. Both Appalachia and the Scottish Highlands are facing problems with depopulation, especially as people from both regions move to other parts of their respective nations or even move abroad in search of better opportunities. Both peoples also suffer from a myriad of problems related to corporate greed, natural disasters, and outside meddling. Many corporations come into the mountain ranges to primarily exploit the rich natural resources often found inside the mountains at the cost of the local population. When natural disasters inevitably occur in the mountains, the US and UK elites are reluctant to rush any aid to the mountain communities as they are seen as easily forgettable and ignorable.

Now, we must move on as to the exact similarities between the Appalachians and the Scottish Highlands. It has been stated that both mountain ranges share moonshining traditions. The Scots and Irish had brought their traditions with them and distilled liquor from the resources of the Appalachians. For example, the settlers in the Smokies used locally grown corn in place of malted barley or other grains in the mountains. And like many other Appalachians, the moonshiners also detest government intervention in their activities, especially as the government has tried to raise taxes on moonshiners. Government officials were derisively labeled “revenooers” which related to the government enforcing tax revenue laws as an excuse to arrest the moonshiners for their illegal means of income, especially during the prohibition era of the 1920s.

Appalachia also has a rich history of quilting with heavy influence from the Scottish Highlands. Appalachians combine their quilting traditions with Native American traditions and Scottish traditions. As CSDT.org points out, “The Appalachian version of quilting mixed

Scottish, Irish, and German folk traditions with local Native American, Amish, and Quaker influences. Quilting patterns from these cultures tend to be geometric and often express family history or local events.” This shows that Native Americans influenced the Scots and Irish to make quilts primarily for history or events, as Native Americans were historically known to do. (Appalachian Quilts) In comparison to the Scottish Highlands, quilting was primarily used as a decorative design, but it is very well-hidden compared to quilting traditions elsewhere.

Both cultures can learn quite a bit from each other and can trace their roots back to each other's respective cultures. I personally am of Irish descent, so I may have blood relating all the way towards the Scottish Highlands. This would be a plausible theory considering that waves of Scottish and English settlers came to Ireland considering the English annexation of Ireland in the 1500s. Although I am not involved much with either culture, I have learned to appreciate the beauty of the Appalachians and to respect the local culture and people there. Every time I go to the Appalachians, I think not only about the beauty of the mountains, but also the lives of the people here. I think about how they live very remotely with the occasional road snaking near their houses.

Finally, we can dive into the music of the two cultures and how they are influenced by each other. One key characteristic of the people in the Appalachians is their love for music, especially played by bagpipes like those in Scotland. A source from East Tennessee State University states: “Because the fiddle was ideal for accompanying dances and could be easily carried, Scottish and Irish settlers transported the instrument to Appalachia in the 18th century.” From there, many Scottish dances and tunes became popular in the Appalachians, such as “Mrs. McLeod’s Reel” (which became known as “Hop High Ladies”) and “Lord McDonald’s Reel” which was later called “Leather Britches.” (Olsen) Appalachian Culture does not seem to have much influence on

the Scottish Highlands however, since the history of the two regions and cultures is primarily characterized by Scottish and Irish immigration into the new world. But music from the Highlands and the rest of Scotland aided in forming Appalachia's current music traditions.

They tend to be very independent and often do not want anything to do with the outside world. While this can create a culture around self-reliance, it can easily perpetuate negative stereotypes about how they are uneducated and uncivilized. Scottish Highlanders are also similarly isolated like their counterparts across the Atlantic. And like their counterparts, they also face continued threats to their ways of living due to gentrification and the overuse of their land by outsiders. Overall, both cultures are vibrant and unique, and the Appalachian culture bears similarities with the Scottish Highlands, whether it be through quilting, moonshining, or the exchange of ideas and histories.

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