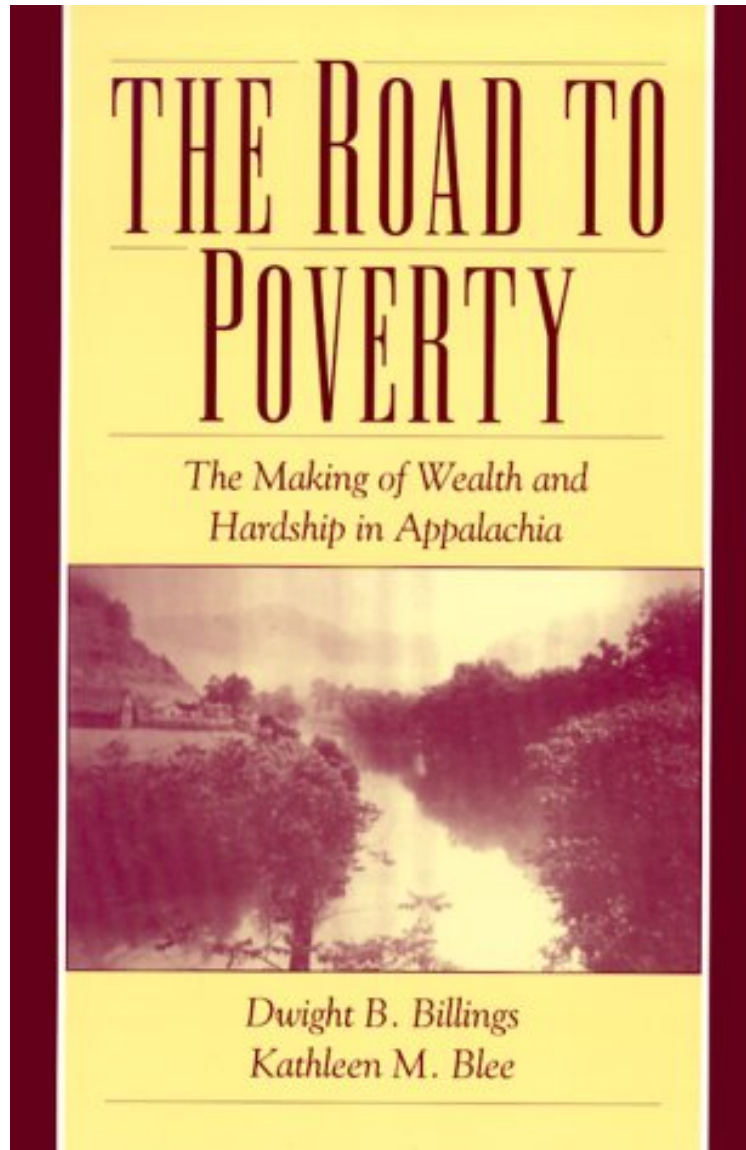


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# The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia

*Dwight B. Billings, Kathleen M. Blee*  
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**Dwight B. Billings, Kathleen M. Blee : The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia:

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Intended for social scientists, historians, and readers interested in social change and social poverty, this book examines the roots of entrenched poverty in Appalachia. It is both a social history of the creation of chronic poverty (and wealth) in Clay County, KY and an explication of how economic markets, cultural strategies, and the state interact to shape local society. By linking a longitudinal study of a single place to broader understandings of the historical development of the capitalist world system, this book contributes to policy discussions of the underlying causes of persistent rural poverty and reasons for the chronic failure of governmental programs to alleviate such poverty. In doing this study the authors have assembled probably the longest running set of longitudinal data currently available on an American rural population as well as the most extensive body of data available for a persistently poor community in the United States.

From Library Journal  
This well-written, convincing historical examination of persistently poor rural communities continues the ground-breaking work done by James Brown in his Beech Creek studies. Using a longitudinal case study, Billings and Blee (*Women of the Klan*) examine the historic sociology of Clay County, KY, its pattern of economic crisis and migration, and poverty's racial and spatial dimensions. They argue that government programs like Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty failed because they targeted poverty's symptoms (like low income) and not its systemic roots. Along the way, they discuss the impact of political factionalism, the breakdown of the extended family, economic exploitation, slavery, the transition to waged work, and elitism while discounting generally accepted culture-of-poverty and dependence theories. Recommended for both academic and larger public libraries.  
A Norman B. Hutcherson, Beale Memorial Lib., Bakersfield, CA  
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From Booklist  
President Clinton recently visited Appalachia to draw attention to the fact that poverty still exists in a prosperous America; and, as Billings and Klee note, Appalachia has often been used as a symbol for rural poverty. Billings helped edit *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century* (1995), and both he and Blee contributed to that work. They argue here that neither of the conventional arguments used to explain the persistence of poverty in Appalachia is adequate. Following up on the classic longitudinal ethnographic studies of Clay County, Kentucky, done by James S. Brown in the 1940s and 1960s, Billings and Blee challenge the notion of Appalachia's "culture of poverty" and that it is a victim of "internal colonialism." One by one they debunk the assumptions on which these notions are based. Only by understanding how Appalachia's poverty evolved, the authors warn, can effective policies be designed to alleviate that poverty.  
David Rouse  
From Kirkus spaper 0-521-65546-3  
With rural poverty remaining a persistent problem in the US, sociologists Billings (Univ. of Kentucky; *Planters and the Making of a "New South,"* not reviewed) and Blee (Univ. of Pittsburgh; *Women of the Klan,* not reviewed) offer an ambitious history of an Appalachian county in order to understand "how places grow poor." Culture-of-poverty theory explains Appalachian economic backwardness as a result of cultural backwardness; "internal colonialism" views Appalachia as a region exploited for its natural resources, especially coal, by outside economic forces. While acknowledging the merits of both approaches and utilizing them, the authors also find both wanting in that Appalachia is presented as a place without a history. Yet how did a culture of poverty develop; what made it possible for Appalachia to become an internal colony? To answer these questions, Billings and Blee develop a remarkably detailed history of an impoverished county in Appalachian Kentucky from 1850 to 1910. Building on the research of James S. Brown and using everything from census records to court documents, the authors show how economics, culture, and politics interacted to create patterns of poverty that persist to this day. Early industrialization based on slave labor allowed for the creation in the county of a powerful elite whose influence was maintained through labyrinthine kinship ties and through the hegemonic control of local politics. Most of the rest of the white population engaged in subsistence farming, which became ever more precarious as population pressure came to bear on a limited amount of land. Here, too, kinship ties developed as means of survival and at times resistance to elite domination. Too often, however, elite dominance kept the poor in a dependent situation. Feuds, for instance, usually thought of as typically backward Appalachian behavior, were actually elite conflicts in which the poor were enlisted to fight. In brief, then, the complex and dynamic interaction of diverse forces prepared Appalachia for chronic poverty long before the present era. Skilled history from which interested readers and policy makers can learn much. (20 bw photos, 3 maps) (For a firsthand account of life in Appalachian Kentucky, see Linda Scott DeRosier, *Creeker*, p. 1367.) -- Copyright 1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.