

# IN THE ARTS

By Pat Aufderheide

IT'S PRETTY CHEAP TO MAKE A VIDEO-cassette copy. But it's still expensive to produce what's on the videocassette, even if you're working in video instead of film. And right there is the rub for any consumers who may still be waiting for diversity to come to them through the wonders-of-technology pipeline.

But as *In These Times* has showcased (see *In These Times*, Dec. 14, 1988), it's possible to turn your home VCR into a window to alternatives, particularly if you can interest your school, university, community group or church in purchasing or renting tapes. Subsidy for production, through such agencies as the national endowments for the arts and humanities, helps lower the cost to some producers, who may pass on their breaks to buyers, and sometimes firms producing social-issue material are willing to discuss rental and even a break on the price for special needs. Check out each of the videos reviewed below, and grouped by issue, for individual prices.

**Regional culture:** Appalshop, a media center located in the small town of Whitesburg, Ky., has been defying the law of cultural homogenization for years. Of course, it's located in Appalachia, which has been defying that law for centuries now. Appalshop, which depends for a third of its funding on grants, has recently adopted a home-video pricing policy for some of its more popular films and videos. Appalshop started as a film workshop, but has branched out into, among other things, a regular TV show, *Headwaters*. The new releases reviewed below are only a sampling of Appalshop's offerings. Others of interest may be *Red Fox Second Hangin'*, a storytelling performance in which three storytellers recount the history of late 19th-century Appalachia through the remarkable adventures of a local healer; and *Lord and Father*, a documentary made by the son of a tobacco farmer about his conflicts with his father over inheriting a business and a way of life the son finds unjust. Write Appalshop, 306 Madison St., Whitesburg, KY 41858 for the catalogue.

*Long Journey Home*, an hour-long film documentary by Elizabeth Barrett, is the second (after *Strangers and Kin*) of an Appalachian history series, told from a sometimes acerbic grass-roots perspective that counters *Beverly Hillbillies* and "Li'l Abner" stereotypes. The film introduces us to Anndrena Belcher, one of the 3 million emigrants from Appalachia over the recent decades of joblessness. Anndrena, who left as a child, moves back and becomes a community organizer for others who want to return. Through Anndrena's story, the film flashes back to a history of Appalachia. It also tracks the Hardin family's return from Baltimore to a rural life that teeters on



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## Home rules and the video alternatives

the edge of paralyzing poverty and balances itself with pride. Without undue romanticism, *Long Journey Home's* personal stories dramatize the contradictions of Appalachia today.

*Harriette Simpson Arnow 1908-1986*, a 35-minute homage by Herb E. Smith, introduces readers of *The Dollmaker* to its author, a funny, stubborn, loving and fiercely professional woman. The core of the film is a series of interviews with Arnow, whose tales of writing, both while running a family in wartime Detroit and in Appalachia on a farm that refused to yield a living, are both poignant and inspiring. Much of Arnow's own life went into her books, but she also emphasizes the imaginative side of her creative work.

*On Our Own Land*, the newest *Headwaters* documentary, is a half-hour program by Anne Johnson. It dramatizes an enduring conflict between the people who live on the land and strip miners who remove it. Strip miners have claimed the right to seize land in order to harvest the coal below it, through the once-widely-signed broadform deed—a legal document that ceded mineral rights. The program is both topical and enduring. It was shown weeks before Kentucky voters last November overwhelmingly passed a constitutional amendment revoking the validity of the deed. At the same time, it illustrates a conflict that won't go away, in which the texture of community is pitted against the drive toward profit at any cost. Scrupulously balanced, it lets coal

operators damn themselves with their own words.

**The homeless:** Homelessness in America (see *In These Times*, Sept. 28, 1988) exposes much more than those who huddle over grates. Two recent works use personal dramas to illuminate social questions.

The hour-long documentary *Promises to Keep* (Durrin Productions, 1748 Kalorama Rd. NW, Washington, DC 20009) profiles the

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problem of homelessness through the attempt by the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV) in Washington, D.C., to establish a shelter in an abandoned building. CCNV leader Mitch Snyder eventually went on a hunger strike to secure the shelter, pushing an unwilling Reagan administration to acknowledge the problem and confront it, at least in one building. Snyder is a spiky personality, and his sharp edges are not ignored in this understated but effective work by veteran documentarist Ginny Durrin (*The Aids Movie*, *Kevin's Story*, *Worker to Worker*). In counterpoint to Snyder's personalist attack on the problem is the federal government's behind-the-scenes bureaucratic manipulation to impede the effort. One Mitch Snyder can't change the housing crisis, the video implies, but inhumane policies create such confrontations.

*Inside Life Outside*, an hour-long video produced by Sachiko Hamada and Scott Sinkler (New Day Films, 853 Broadway, Suite 1210, New York, NY 10003), is a commandingly fas-

cinating record of the producers' two-and-a-half year acquaintance with a homeless group on New York's Lower East Side. It has the bite of a Fassbinder film, the punch of an Almodóvar comedy, and the grit of video verité. Delia and Mike, a homeless couple who lost custody of their five children as they scabbled for survival, constructed shantytown housing on a series of vacant lots. With help from the Center for Constitutional Rights, they sued the mayor and the city, claiming their makeshift housing as a protest against the city's housing policies.

The video plunges the viewer into the improvisational daily life of ingenious, temperamental and compassionate people, living under plastic and surrounded by junk. They work, fight with each other, illegally wire the shacks and open fire hyd-

rants to bathe in full view of the camera. They also watch TV. *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, seen by Delia and Mike as they sip wine from a bottle and worry about their court case, delivers all the audiovisual irony you need (there is no narration).

The camera work is competent, but the editing is superb, allowing a story without easy moral lessons to emerge. The ad-hoc family that grows up within this shantytown is no collection of saints. But you can't help being outraged that such wit, will and intelligence is being poured into bare survival at the bottom of the social heap.

**Criminal justice:** Facets Video (1517 W. Fullerton Ave., Chicago, IL 60614) has recovered and released on video a classic in persuasive documentary made in 1962 by William Friedkin (*The Exorcist*, *To Live and Die in L.A.*). *The People vs. Paul Crump* won Friedkin several awards and launched his career, but has not been seen for a generation. The film chronicles, by re-enactment, a payroll robbery and murder that resulted in the arrest of Paul Crump and four others, and delivers a sympathetic portrait of Paul Crump as he faced a sentence of death, then commuted to life imprisonment. (After long maintaining his innocence, he later confessed to the crime; he is still in prison). The film challenges easy assumptions about the death penalty, and raises chilling questions still relevant today about due process and the quality of the penal system. ■

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Mitch Snyder with Granny in *Promises to Keep*.

**Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia**  
By Altina L. Waller  
University of North Carolina Press  
313 pp., \$12.50

By Rick Wilson

## The Hatfields and McCoys: some feud for thought

**T**HE HATFIELD-MCCOY FEUD IS AN established part of American folklore and popular culture. Mere mention of it conjures up images of bearded mountaineers lawlessly slaughtering rival clans in revenge for an ancient insult or simply for the sheer joy of killing. The feudist mythos remains a part of the century-old stereotype of Appalachian people. Altina Waller's *Feud* attempts a deeper understanding of the famous skirmishes between the West Virginia Hatfields and the Kentucky McCoys by examining the region's social history in the context of its industrialization and colonization by outside capitalist interests.

The feud took place in the valley of the Tug Fork River that separates West Virginia and Kentucky. The same area would later be the site of an episode in the mine wars portrayed in John Sayles' film *Matewan*. The real feud does not exactly live up to the epic proportions of the myth, however: it lasted only 12 years and claimed only 12 lives. The unprecedented feud shocked the entire mountain community.

The leading antagonists were Old Ranel (Randolph) McCoy and the colorful Devil Anse (Anderson) Hatfield. During the Civil War Hatfield was the leader of the Confederate guerrilla "Logan Wildcats" and was known as the best marksman and horseman in the area. He earned his "Devil" nickname by singlehandedly fighting a mountain lion during his youth, after which his mother remarked that he "wasn't afraid of the devil himself." Curiously, many Tug Valley residents, although they did not own slaves, sided with the Confederacy for reasons of local autonomy.

**No easy answers:** According to Waller, the usual explanations of the feud do not hold up to close examination. Some have suggested it originated during the war, but even Old Ranel McCoy fought with Devil Anse in the Logan Wildcats. Excessive devotion to family is another common explanation, but records indicate there were Hatfields on the McCoy side and vice versa. Another theory is that the region was characterized by a general lawlessness.

In fact, the country courthouse was a central institution on both sides of the river and both families attempted to resolve the dispute through legal means both before and after the outbreaks of violence. Tug Valley residents spent more time in litigation than do most modern-day Americans, although law at the time was interpreted in terms of commu-



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nity consensus and tradition. Waller insists that Tug Valley culture was an egalitarian one based on "social stability, localism and aggressive independence from both American and Southern culture," and that residents considered themselves to be "different from and perhaps even in active opposition to" the mainstream.

So what provoked this outburst in such a stable community? First of all, egalitarian culture was based on land ownership (even today, although West Virginia is one of the poorest states, it has one of the highest rates of home ownership). But due to steep terrain, tillable land was scarce and became even scarcer as holdings were traditionally divided equally among the children, which proved problematic in a subsis-

tence-farming economy. A growing population contributed to the scarcity of fish and game, as did hunting limits instituted by state authorities. Additional strains were caused by government attempts to tax the production of homemade whiskey. And local autonomy and traditional and personal ties between residents gradually eroded.

Devil Anse Hatfield was a perfect example of a man caught between the two worlds. On the one hand, he violated community norms by trying to be a capitalist with a vengeance in the timber business; on the other, he was often exploited and cheated by capitalists and creditors who took advantage of his illiteracy. The times they were a-changin'.

The feud itself occurred in two dis-

tinct phases. It began in 1878 when Old Ranel McCoy accused Floyd Hatfield (Anse's cousin) of stealing a hog. A jury composed of six Hatfields and six McCoys cleared Floyd, with a McCoy casting the deciding vote. Two years later, Bill Staton, a witness in the dispute, was killed by two McCoys. A West Virginia jury acquitted the Kentucky McCoys, even though some of their own kin testified against them. Once again, the battle lines were not clearly drawn. At this point Devil Anse went to great lengths to end the strife.

**The best man:** The most serious incident occurred in Kentucky during the 1882 elections, which, in mountain communities, were social occasions complete with eating, drinking, flirting and swaggering. Three McCoys attempted to pick a fight with Bad Lias (Elias) Hatfield, and when Anse's brother Ellison attempted to break it up by shouting, "I'm the best goddamned man on earth," he was shot and stabbed over two dozen times by the McCoys. Devil Anse had enough. He led a posse that intercepted the McCoys and took them back to West Virginia. The death vigil had begun. For Anse, the prop-

osition was simple: if Ellison lived, so would the McCoys; if he died, so would they. When Ellison died, his killers were taken back across the Tug, tied to a pawpaw bush and executed. Strangely enough, following the executions the feud virtually ended for the next five years. Devil Anse sought to end it, while Old Ranel McCoy sought redress through legal channels. While local residents may have feared and resented Anse, they also seemed to feel that the unfortunate McCoys had "asked for it."

During the interim, Devil Anse suffered additional setbacks. He repeatedly appeared in court and was forced to sell large tracts of land in order to pay debts. Modernizers in the region allied themselves with outside coal, timber and railroad interests and dreamed of "reforming" the mountain communities. It was thought that development would transform the "retarded frontier" mentality of Appalachia's "contemporary ancestors" by turning them into good middle-class citizens and happy wage earners. Major outside capitalist interests began displacing native proto-capitalists by acquiring huge tracts of land and mineral rights through means both fair and foul. For the modernizers, particularly those on the Kentucky side, Devil Anse became a symbol of what needed to be domesticated or exterminated in the mountains.

Waller argues that in the later stages of the feud the Hatfields represented the old traditions of localism and community autonomy, while the McCoys became the unwitting allies of the new forces of capitalist development. The smoke of the battles cleared, and Old Ranel lived out his days operating a ferry, while Devil Anse, weary of strife, moved to Logan. In his old wage he underwent a religious conversion from his membership in "the devil's church—the church of the world" to the traditional Baptist creed. His old world was lost forever, while his descendants accommodated themselves to the new order, often on the side of the new industrialists. One notable exception was an orphan boy raised by a Hatfield family near Matewan. His name was Sid Hatfield, the union miners' hero of the Matewan Massacre who shot it out with company thugs in downtown Matewan and later died treacherously at their hands. Last year the United Mine Workers of America honored his memory by placing a monument on his grave.

Meanwhile, the Tug rolls on and Mother Jones' words still ring true: "There is never peace in West Virginia because there is never justice." ■

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