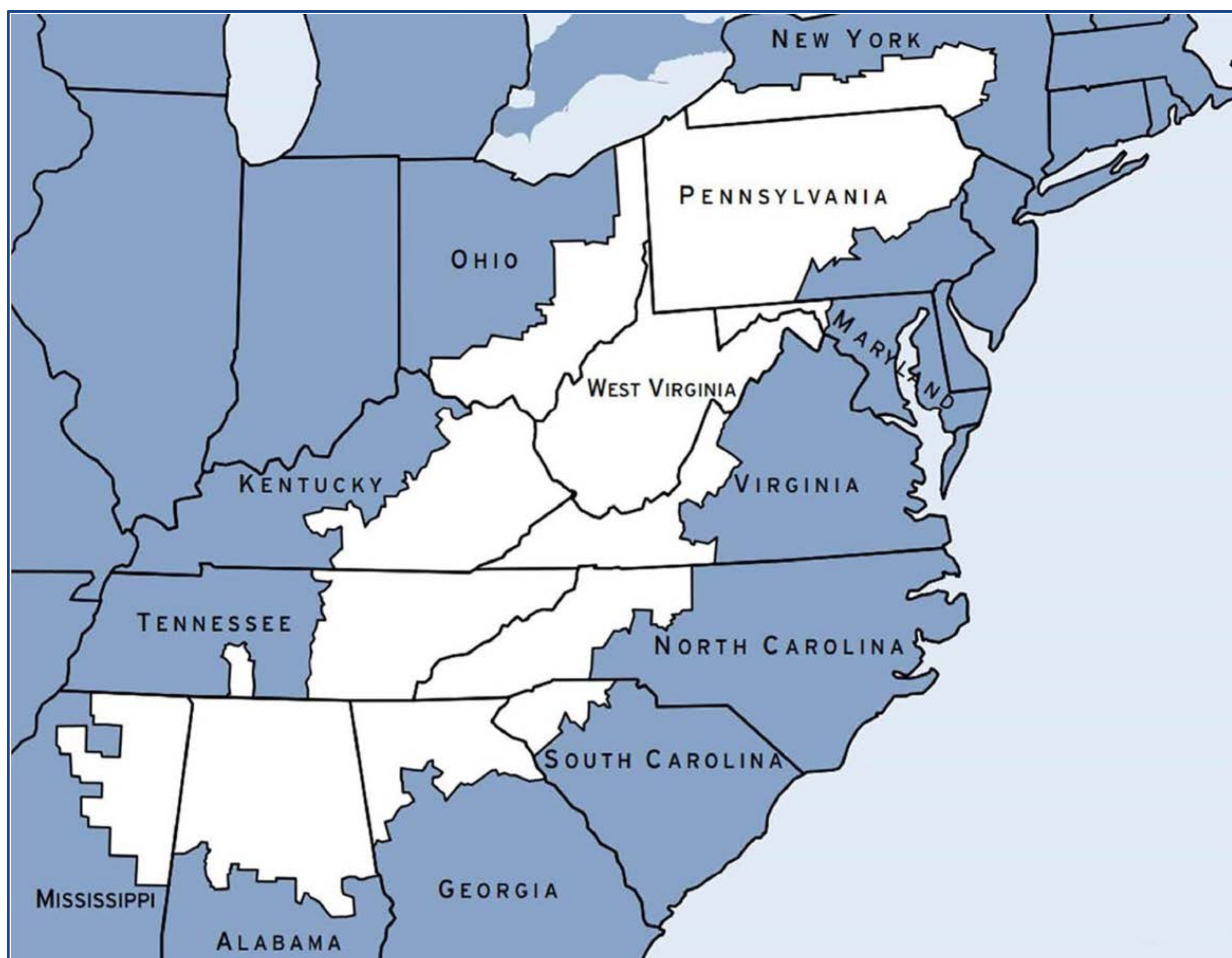


A PORTRAIT IN SNAPSHOTS

Capturing a Diverse Region



Outsiders have long sought to define Appalachia. As a result, historian Ronald D. Eller noted, the history of the region “is crucially incomplete, inadequate, and misleading.” In popular media, the press, and even academic scholarship, Appalachia often appears as a distorted caricature of itself. Taking a case study approach, each panel of this exhibit explores the history and culture of Appalachia from a different approach, offering a nuanced portrait of the region that challenges reductive stereotypes and simplistic narratives.

MOUNTAIN MUSIC

Old-Time and Bluegrass in Appalachia



Warner Bros.' *Tiny Toon Adventures: How I Spent My Vacation* (1992) shows a banjo-playing possum with patched pants to depict rural Appalachian culture.



A group of musicians play together at the Appalachian String Band Festival in Clifftop, West Virginia. Old-Time music is primarily participatory, rather than presentational.

In the dead of the night in the still and the quiet I slip away like a bird in flight back to those hills, the place that I call home. This poignant chorus, written by West Virginia's own Hazel Dickens, belongs to one of many bluegrass songs that have been adopted by proud Appalachian people as an unofficial anthem. Musical tradition has rightfully been associated with Appalachian culture since the early days of colonial settlement in these hills. Unfortunately, Appalachia's native Bluegrass and Old-Time musical styles are sometimes depicted as unsophisticated or goofy by media from outside the region. Many of these reductive stereotypes come from 19th-century racist minstrel shows that used traditional instruments like the banjo, which was brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans, as comedic prop.

If you look beyond the cartoon bunny rabbit plucking his tongue like a washtub bass and the dozy-looking possum playing banjo on a ramshackle porch in the woods, Old-Time and Bluegrass music are both as dynamic, diverse, and contemporary as the people who live in Appalachia. Some local artists assert their claim to their musical heritage by proudly presenting themselves as "hillbillies" and leaning into media stereotypes, and some bring elements of many other genres of music to their playing in order to express the diversity of their own musical background. One Morgantown fiddler put it particularly well: there is no need for Appalachian people to *reclaim* their musical heritage, because it has never and could never be taken away.

APPALACHIAN MEDICINE

Familial Folk Remedies and New Advancements

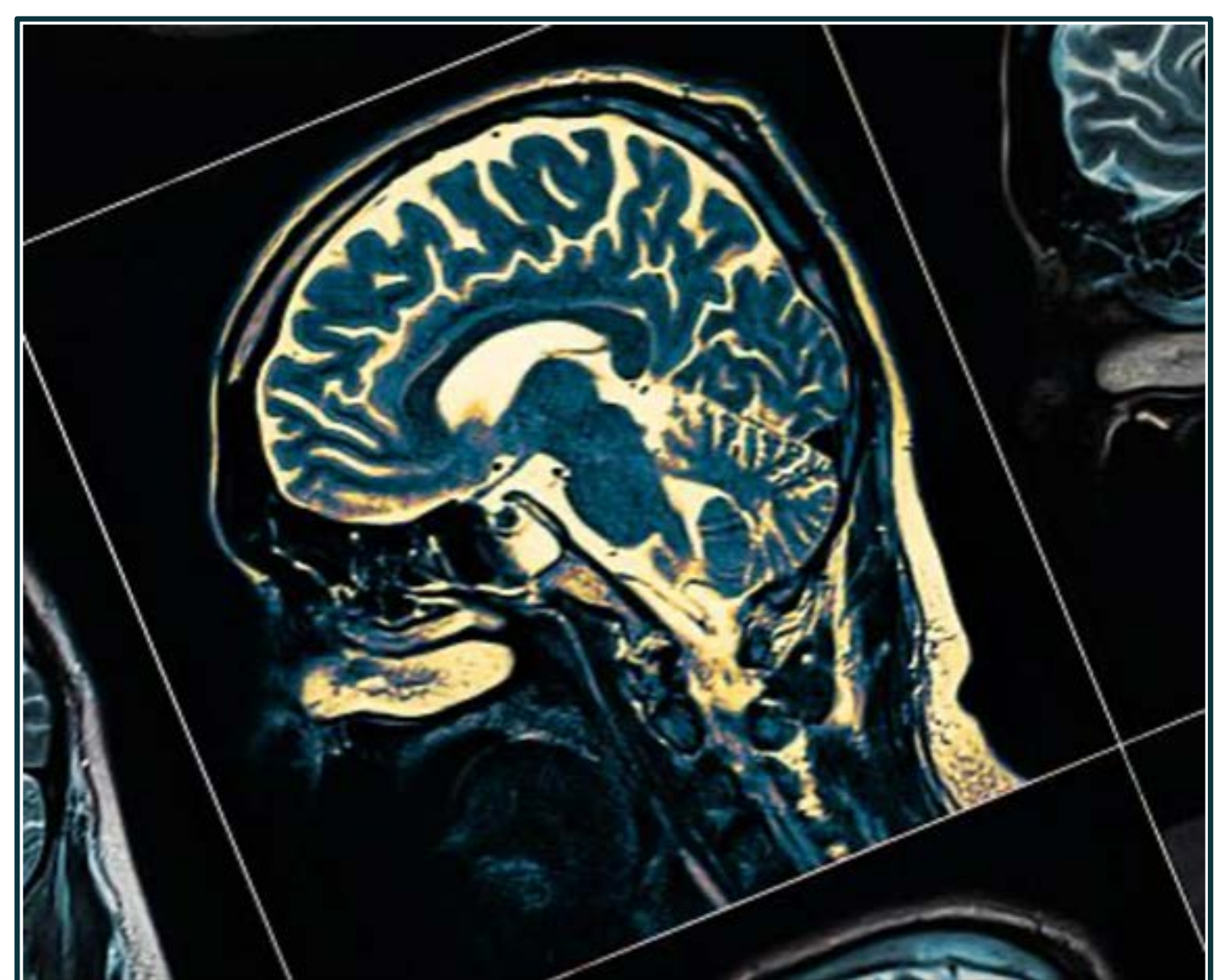


Containing Vitamins A and C, elderberries can be made into syrups (seen above), teas, and supplements, all of which have been used to treat cold and flu symptoms in the mountains.

Appalachia has been dubbed the land of the mountain man, a figure content to continue with tradition and live off of the land. The stereotype persists; Appalachians are stubborn in their backcountry ways. Supposedly isolated from the influence of modern medicine, it is believed that the region either refuses or is incapable of progressing in the medical field—both are misperceptions.

Folk remedies have a long history; Native Americans relied on the land for medicinal treatments. Ginger was used to soothe a stomach ache and elderberries relieved flu symptoms. Isolated mountain communities often didn't have access to doctors, thus "Granny Healers" emerged as caretakers following in the footsteps of indigenous healers. Folk remedies continue to be useful for Appalachian families, but the lack of access to medical care in the mountains is still a hurdle faced today.

The supply of primary care physicians is 12% lower than the rest of the country, even though 7 of the 10 leading causes of death in the nation have higher mortality rates in the Appalachian region. Real disparities exist, but the medical field is growing. Alzheimer's is the 6th leading cause of death in the US, but WVU Medicine's groundbreaking research in focused ultrasound treatment is bringing hope to thousands of families.



Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia in the US. Abnormal buildups of proteins (shown in brain scan above) destroy memory, thinking, and behavioral skills.



WORKING WOMEN

Pack Horse Librarians in Eastern Kentucky



Pack Horse Library Carriers, also known as “book women,” mounted on horses outside of the Pack Horse Library in Hindman, Kentucky, before traveling miles to families, individuals, and schools.

“WPA was a big thing for us paupers. That’s what they think of all of us hillbillies, that we’re just poor, poor, poor,” said former library carrier Grace Caudill Lucas. The workforce in Appalachia was not limited to male coal miners. Women also worked to earn money for their struggling families during the Great Depression and mine closures.

One program created by the WPA to create more jobs, specifically for female Americans, was the Pack Horse Library Project during the 1930s and early 1940s. The government provided the salary for each librarian, thus, an income for her family. These librarians delivered reading materials, read to illiterate families and school children, and repaired books. Eleanor Roosevelt supported the program as it improved literacy rates and employed impoverished women.

Librarians established a central library in their county to store donated books, magazines, scrapbooks, cookbooks, and newspapers. Each carrier filled her sack and traversed miles across muddy paths, rivers, and mountains on a horse or mule to reach rural families and provide reading materials. Though the program ended in 1943, bookmobiles continue to spread literacy and reading materials to isolated families and individuals in Appalachia today.



The WPA-operated libraries, such as the McKee Public Library (shown above), contained a limited supply of reading materials. Maggie Mae Smith, supervisor for the Whitley County branch wrote, “Bring me a book to read’ is the cry of every child as he runs to meet the librarian with whom he has become acquainted. Not a certain book, but any kind of book, the child has read none of them.”