



Pungent but problematic: Media and food culture

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The class-based framing of ramps or wild leeks



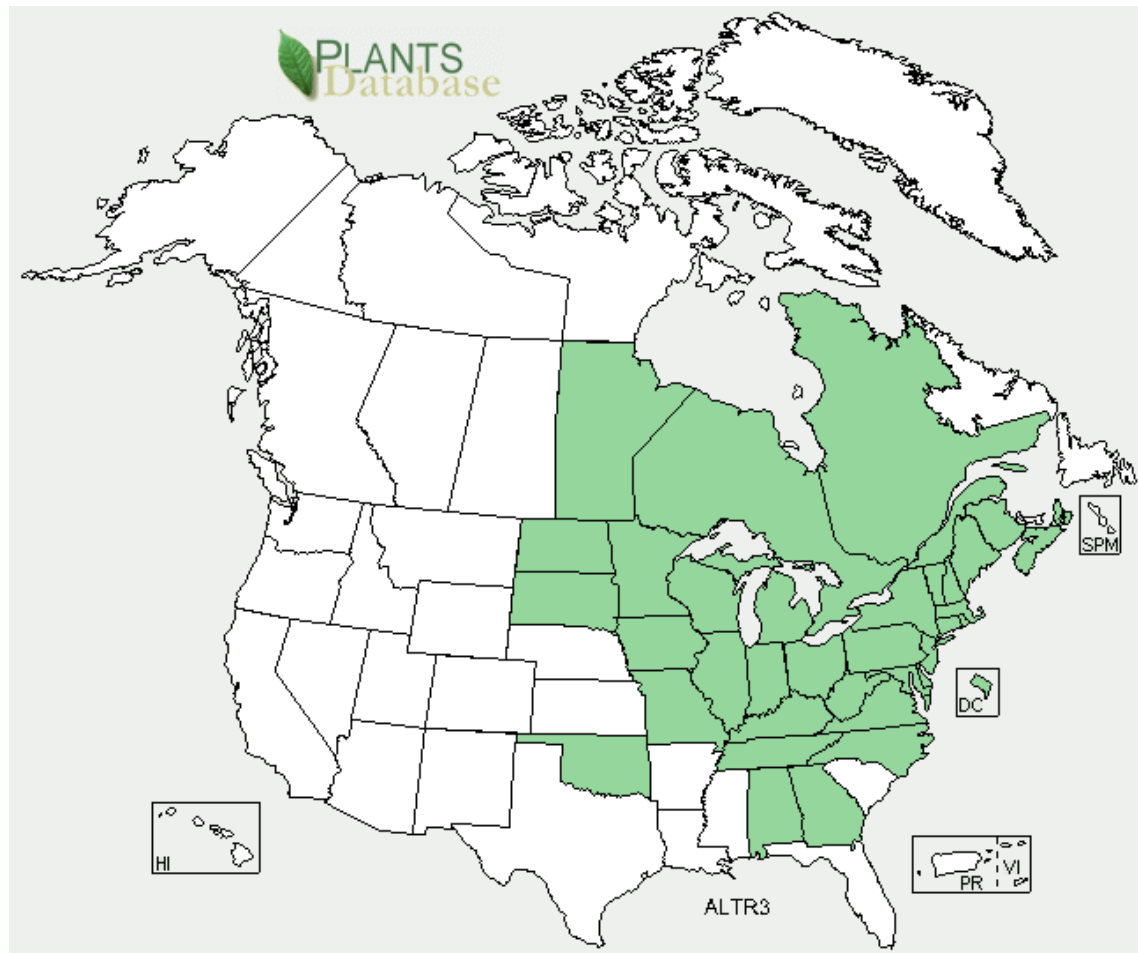
<http://wild-harvest.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/A-Ramp-in-the-Hand.jpg>

Why do I study media and social class?

- My family
- My life
- Provide a counter-narrative to stereotypical portrayals
- As an act of social justice



Ramps or wild leeks: *Allium tricoccum*



<http://wildfoodshomegarden.com/Ramps.html>

Ramps or wild leeks: *Allium tricoccum*



https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc1999008.afc1999008_crf_lec07709/

Ramps or wild leeks



Images from: <http://www.ptbolocalfoods.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/wild-leeks.jpg>

Ramps or wild leeks



Images from: <http://wiseacre-gardens.com/wordpress/wild-leek-harvest/>

Ramps and look alike



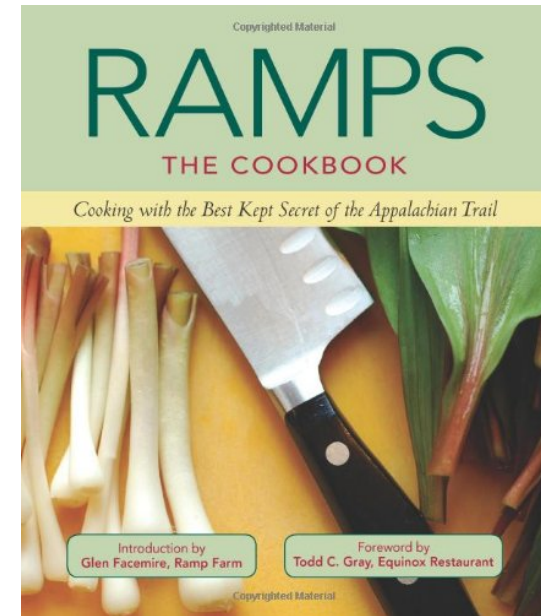
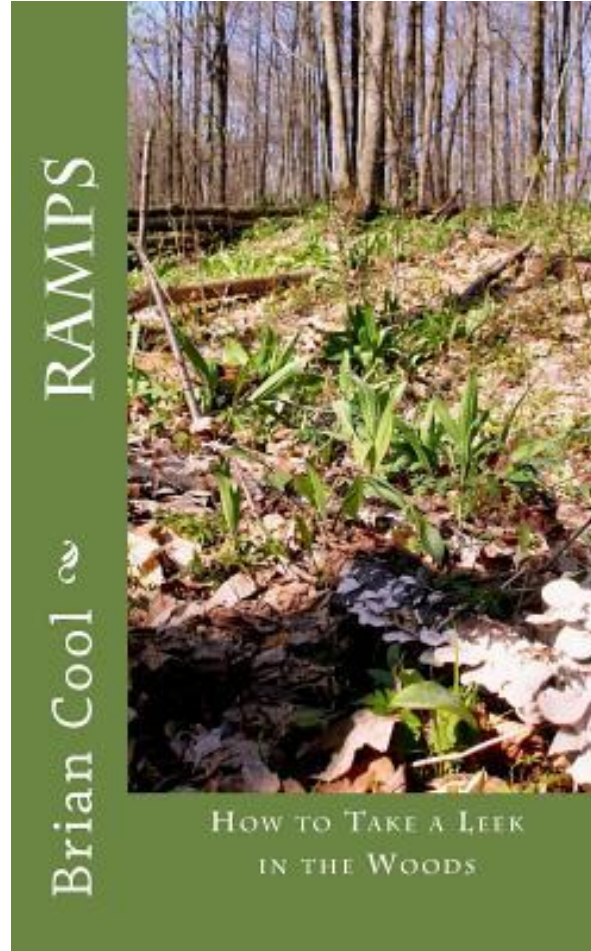
Images from: <http://leslieland.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/10-ramps-and-look-alikes-p4250022-2.jpg>

Ramps and culture

- “By eating ramps in May, all the year after physicians may play” (Boback, 2011, p. 953).
- High in Vitamin C
- Can help lower blood pressure



Books on ramps



1991, 2009

2013

2012

Ramps and Appalachia

- Rite of spring for West Virginians
- Ramps suppers bring locals together
- Celebration of biodiversity and community life
- Mountains as a “commons” (Hufford, 1998)

https://cdn.loc.gov/master/afc/afc1999008/afc1999008_crf_mha184006.wav



Ramps and Appalachia



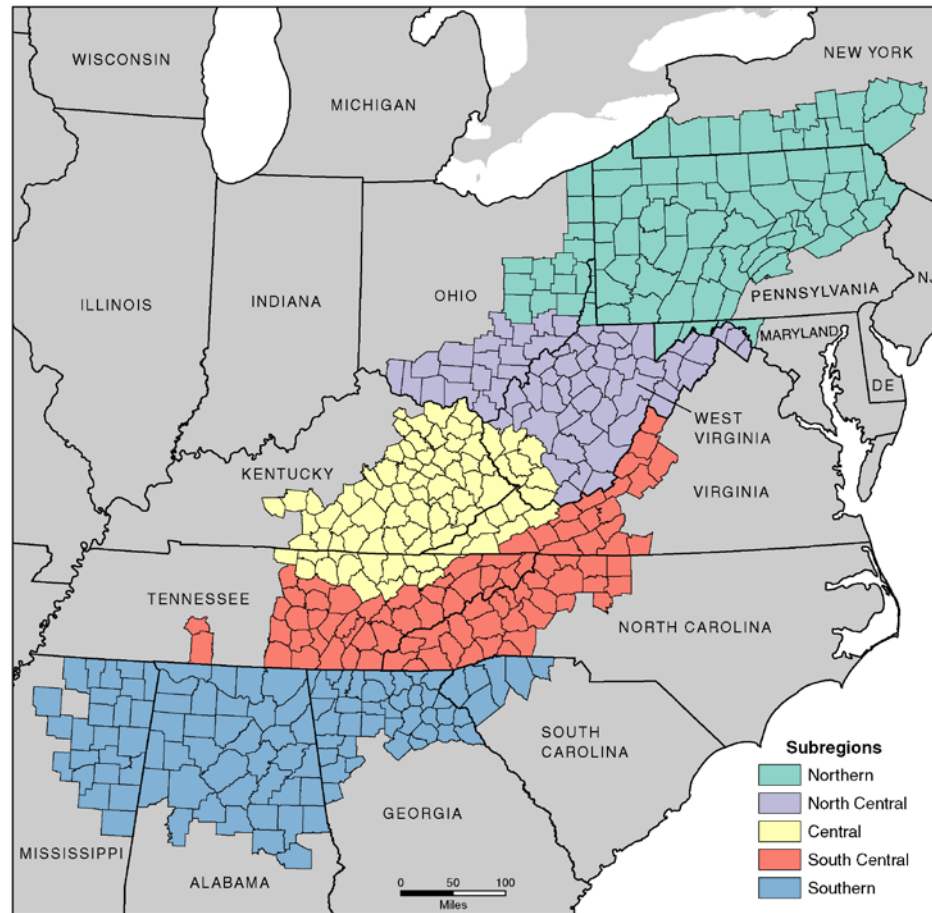
https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc1999008.afc1999008_crf_lec21104/

Ramps and Appalachia

- Changing face of ramps
 - Used to be associated with poverty and Appalachia
 - Now highly desirable to the most popular chefs throughout the country
 - Martha Stewart, *Better Homes and Gardens*
 - Ramps connect people to their food, community, and history (Rivers, Oliver, and Resler, 2014)

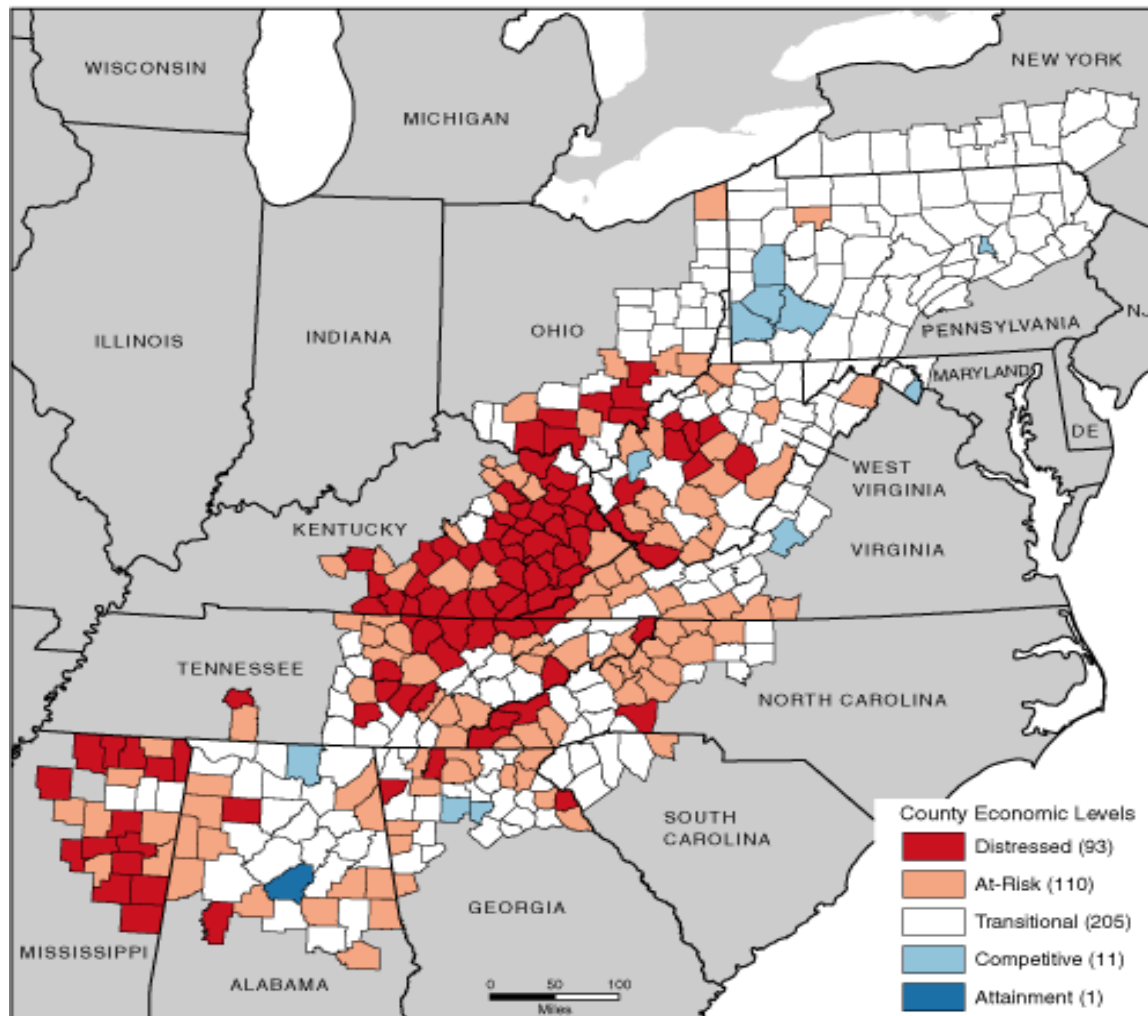


Appalachia



Map by: Appalachian Regional Commission, November 2009.

Appalachia



Created by the Appalachian Regional Commission, March 2015

Data Sources:

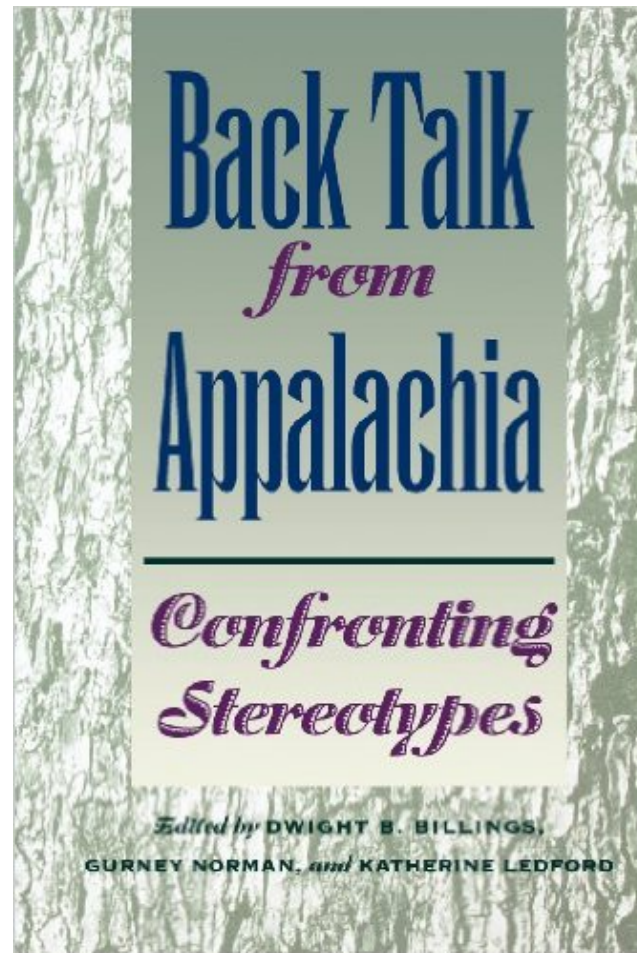
Unemployment data: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, LAUS, 2011–2013

Income data: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, REIS, 2013

Poverty data: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009–2013

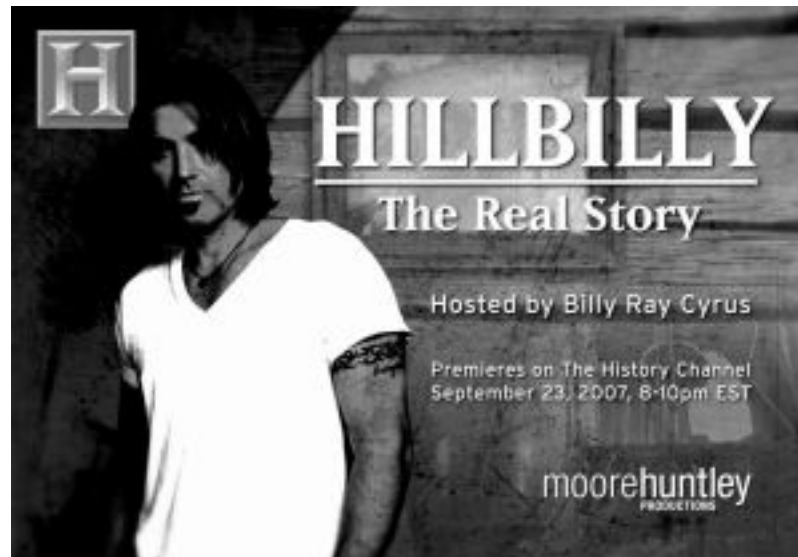
Effective October 1, 2015
through September 30, 2016

Appalachia- previous research



Appalachia- previous research

- “Hillbillies, feuds, moonshine stills, mine wars, environmental destruction, joblessness, hopelessness” (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999, p. ix).



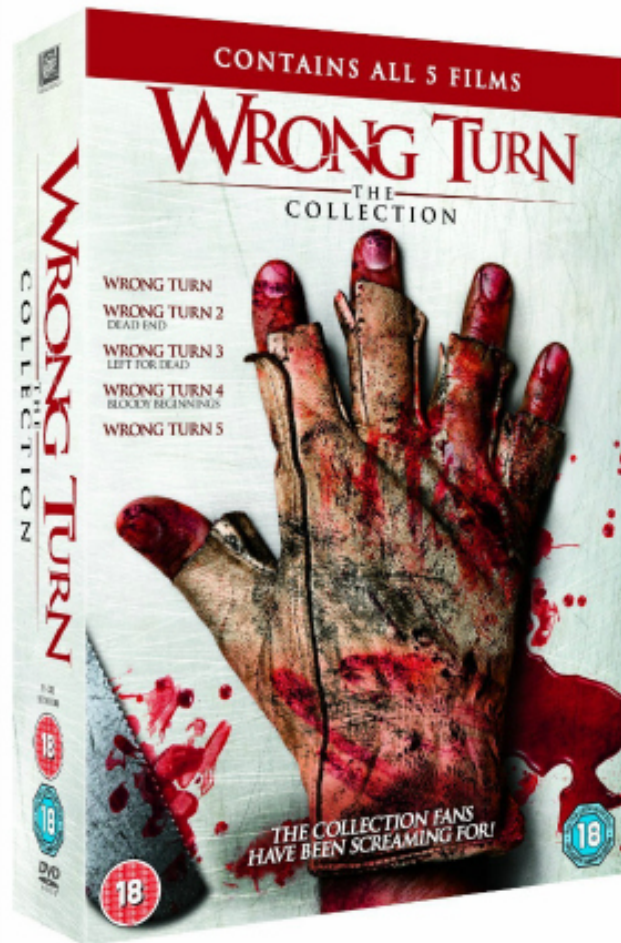
Appalachia and popular culture



Appalachia and popular culture



Appalachia and popular culture



Appalachia- previous research

- Began long ago: 1728 work of William Byrd
 - Men= lazy, stupid
 - Women= too physical, often do the work of men (Mason, 2005)



Appalachia- previous research

- Fictional portrayals often studied:
 - Billings, Norman, & Ledford (1999)
 - 1873 Will Wallace Harney- *A strange land and a peculiar people* (Appalachians chew tobacco and speak very differently)



Appalachia- previous research

Many other travelogues followed by other writers

– 1897- John Fox, Jr.– *The Kentuckians*

- Kentucky legislator with a mountain background and a lawless family (his mother smokes a pipe while his brother sits in jail)



Appalachia- previous research

1908- *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*

- Love story between a mountain girl and a flatland man
 - Big Stone Gap (in Va.) setting of lawless feuding



Appalachia- previous research

- As a stereotype of impoverished living, “hillbilly” is akin to “white trash,” a term that “calls our attention to the way that discourses of class and racial difference tend to bleed into one another ” (Newitz and Wray 1997, 169).

Appalachia- previous research

- Scholarly research has focused less on nonfiction or news articles about the people of Appalachia with a few exceptions:
 - Harry, 2004
 - Werner, 2007
- Research question: How are ramps framed in articles in *The New York Times* and *The Charleston Gazette*?

Method

- Phase 1- Content analysis
 - The *New York Times* 1980 to 2014
 - Wild leeks and ramps
 - 12 articles for final analysis
 - The *Charleston WV Gazette* 1980 to 2014
 - Wild leeks and ramps
 - 26 articles for final analysis
- Phase 2- Textual analysis

Method

- Coded for mentions of:
 - Geographic locations
 - Time of year
 - Smell
 - Foraging
 - Tradition
 - Sustainability

Findings- Geographic location

Newspaper	Appalachia	West Virginia	Canada	North Carolina	New York
<i>The New York Times</i>	5 or 42%	6 or 50%	2 or 17%	0	2 or 17%
<i>The Charleston Gazette</i>	16 or 62%	26 or 100%	2 or 8%	2 or 8%	1 or 4%

Findings- Time of Year

Newspaper	March	April	May	Other
<i>The New York Times</i>	1 or 8%	8 or 67%	1 or 8%	2 in June or 16%
<i>The Charleston Gazette</i>	2 or 8%	19 or 73%	3 or 12%	2 in February or 8%

Findings- Smell

Newspaper	Pungent	Sent home from school	Not addressed
<i>The New York Times</i>	10 or 83%	1 or 8%	1 article about gardening; 1 article about dining on the upper east side of Manhattan
<i>The Charleston Gazette</i>	14 or 54%	3 or 12%	various

Findings-

Foraging, Tradition, Sustainability

Newspaper	Foraging	Tradition	Sustainability
<i>The New York Times</i>	7 or 58%	10 or 83%	4 or 33%
<i>The Charleston Gazette</i>	16 or 62%	22 or 84%	4 or 15%

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

- Framing differs based on where ramps are consumed or purchased
 - In New York, positive/ sophisticated:
 - Ramps as a garnish
 - » June 2002: “Standing in place for those mothballed jarred onions, you will find a group of slender, slightly pink, cheek-puckering pickled ramps perched on the lip of your glass.... Pungent with a sweet and peppery kick, they add the right tang to the classic cocktail.” (a Gibson)

Findings- Textual analysis

The New York Times:

- In West Virginia, indelicate/uncouth:
 - 1986 article
 - quoted a West Virginian: “Ramps go with changing the oil or your underwear.”
 - Mentioned how children were sent home from school for eating ramps
 - Compared to other wild spring foods in the article: “morels in Michigan, shad in Georgia, sorrel in New York, fiddlehead ferns in Massachusetts, and soft-shell crabs in Maryland.”

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

- R. W. Apple, Jr.’ s 2003 article from Richwood, WV
 - Landscape: “the redbud trees were already wearing their gaudy magenta cloaks”
 - “Richwood, a hard-bitten little town”
 - “Ramps announce the arrival of spring as boldly and brassily as front-row trombones herald the arrival of a marching band”
- Landscape and plants as extensions of the people-

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

- “... eating lots of raw ramps would give any man or woman an industrial-strength case of halitosis, beyond the power of Listerine to cure.”
- “... not much more evil smelling than a ripe Limburger or Maroilles.”

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

- A NY chef prepares them in a way that they do not cause the diner undue breath worries
 - Could Apple see the culinary value of ramps due to his sophistication? Could he know how to eat ramps without offending due to his sophistication?
- Then travels to the fanciest resort in WV: The Greenbrier
 - “succulent hot-smoked trout with asparagus, perched on a hill of ramp-studded grits”

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

- Contrasted with the meal in Richwood:
 - “for \$10, each diner got a plastic foam box with a tangle of gray-green cooked ramps, a hunk of cornbread, several strips of bacon, a slab of country ham, a mound of baked beans (decanted from the tin and fortified with ham and bacon drippings), spicy potato wedges, and a piece of cake.”
 - The cooking process: “a ladle of bacon grease went in first, then 60 to 70 pounds of ramps.... Each batch cooked, tightly covered, for 50 minutes over low heat.”
- Apple aligns himself with the head chef at The Greenbrier and invites readers to do the same-

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

- From the Irish head chef at the Greenbrier in WV:
 - “They’re well worth eating, from a culinary perspective, with a unique flavor, even if raw ramps can make the kitchen smell like a bus in Rome on a hot summer afternoon.”
- Again, the transference of the negative attributes of ramps to Appalachian people-
 - WV need to: learn to cook ramps so they don’t smell, use a more refined manner of cooking, stop overharvesting ramps so they will be available to chefs

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

– 2006 article by Rich Beattie:

- Article was about ephemeral dishes in the US
 - NY: maple syrup
 - NC: herring
 - WV: ramps
 - » Even though ramps cause bad breath, “that won’ t stop residents from tiny Richwood, WV... They’ ll cook up 2,000 pounds of ramps in bacon grease and serve them with ham, fried potatoes, and homemade cornbread.”

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

- 2006 article by Alice Feiring

- “Southerners cured scurvy with them, built festivals around them and foraged them so thoroughly they nearly disappeared.”

- 2004 ban on commercial harvesting of ramps in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in NC and TN

- » Also banned in the Canadian province of Quebec (not mentioned)

- Overharvesting is something southerners do, not northerners-

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

- 2010 article by Indrani Sen

- Negative view of WV via a conversation with a botanist for the Nature Conservancy, Ashton Berdine:
 - “Mr. Berdine has seen areas where every single ramp has been scraped up, he said, as if by ‘wild hogs in the forest.’ Earlier this month, he caught a glimpse of one of those hogs. ‘I pulled up behind a truck at a stoplight... and I saw bags and bags of ramps piled high in the truck bed.’”

-Likening of people to hogs, especially in WV, echoes the exact stereotypes of 300 years ago. Ledford (2009) found a travel article that stated some Appalachians lived like ‘pigs’ in the 1700s.

Findings- Textual analysis

New York Times

— Sen, 2010

-Overharvesting is only a problem in the south, not the north. Gives examples of proper harvesting in upstate NY.-

Ramps in NY= positive, upper class

Ramps in WV= gluttony, ignorance, bacon grease (unless prepared by Irish head chef)

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

– Themes emerged:

- All articles set in WV
 - Provided an insider's view of the region and food
- Collecting ramps as a traditional rite of spring shared with family and community
- Comical stories about the odor of ramps
- The preparation of ramps which varied from plain meals to gourmet
- Health benefits of ramps
- Sustainability concerns

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

- Traditional rite of spring
 - Families would gather to harvest and prepare the ramps
 - A husband and wife team “spent a week in April digging for ramps and fishing for trout in the Richwood area for the past 10 years.”
 - “They grow in abundance up and down the river there, and to drive up the river at evening time is an experience.”
 - “Getting our ramps requires digging on our hands and knees. I use a dandelion weeder and another single-blade tool with an angled handle that my husband crafted.”

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

- Traditional rite of spring (cont' d)
 - “We have our own family ramp feed two or three times in the spring.”
 - Ramp festivals as important fundraisers for local fire departments and parent-teacher organizations.
 - The *Charleston Gazette* announces the festivals throughout the spring season.

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

- Comical nature of the odor of ramps and people who ate them
 - “Some are proud of the smell, and wear it like a badge of honor two or three days after a hefty ramp meal.”
 - Stories about being banished from the house:
 - » “The first time I consumed ramps, I was still living with my parents. Home from college for the weekend, I ate a mess of ramps raw and washed them down with several cold ones. For once in my post adolescent years, my mother allowed me to sleep in (she actually locked me in my room) while she proceeded to fumigate the premises.... After de-lousing me, she sent me packing, back to torture my classmates at WVU.”

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

- Articles did not sugarcoat the odor of ramps
 - “A cross between Limburger cheese and ripe tennis shoes”
 - “They’re pretty stinky if you’ve never eaten them before... But once you get used to them, you’ll love them.”
 - “We have learned to cook them outside on the grill, and it will keep the house odor-free.”

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

– Shared rebellion

- Eating ramps to get sent home from school
 - Insiders: A sense of togetherness
 - Outsiders: The smell is something to avoid

– Process of eating or preparing ramps

- Festivals or older relatives preparing ramps
- Plain preparations and gourmet preparations
 - There is a distinction
 - » “the delicately blanched ramps in his gnocchi in a creamy ramp sauce bear little resemblance to ramp festival fare.”

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

- Clear class distinctions are evidenced in the ways ramps are prepared and shared.
 - Takes place within WV, not between WV and NY
 - CG demonstrates a much more diverse and less simplistic cross-section of WV
- Health benefits
 - Spring tonic
 - Cure the winter doldrums
 - High in selenium, flavonoids, and Vitamin C
 - Can help treat hypertension and cholesterol

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

– Sustainability

- The increase in demand for ramps has some experts worried.
 - Ramps grow wild but can be cultivated
 - Ramps are part of WV heritage and should be preserved
 - » Holds both outsiders and insiders accountable

Findings- Textual analysis

Charleston Gazette

- Much more nuanced collection of ideas and viewpoints about ramps

Conclusion

- Ramps were historically framed as unique to Appalachia.
- Recently, framing shifted.
 - Martha Stewart
 - *Better Homes and Gardens*
 - To wild food prized by chefs.

Conclusion

Ramps in *New York Times*:

- Positive in NY or any place separated from WV and/or Appalachia
- Negative in WV or Appalachia

Ramps in *Charleston Gazette*:

- Negative and positive details shared
- Tone was very different
 - Ramps joined people in WV together

Conclusion

Ramps are the same wherever they are grown:

- NY
- WV
- Quebec
- Michigan
- NC

Ramps operate politically to either separate people or join people together.

Questions or comments?

- Are there any foods you can think of that were once enjoyed by working class people and are now prized by upper class people?
 - In Montana?
 - In other states/ regions?

References

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To learn more....

- King of Stink:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnO1WqJhJi0>
- Wild Edibles: <http://www.wildedible.com/wild-food-guide/ramps>

Thank you!