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Ron Rash's *Serena: A Novel* (2008): Dramatizing the Industrial Logging of the Appalachian Forest, and the Continuing Debate Between Laissez Faire Capitalists and Proponents of Government

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Ron Rash's *Serena: A Novel* (2008): Dramatizing the Industrial
Logging of the Appalachian Forest, and the Continuing Debate
Between *Laissez Faire* Capitalists and Proponents of
Government

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

By
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The Honors College
English Honors-in-Discipline Honors Program
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I. Introduction

I am a product of the Appalachian Mountains. My family roots find their way into the sides of Virginia's mountains ten miles from the Kentucky border, where my ancestors carved coal from below the surface, where the sun couldn't even find them, and my grandfather hauled the black mineral down the mountain in his huge dump truck. My father continues the legacy of coal dependence for income by working at Eastman Chemical Company, a factory that burns coal constantly to make plastics. Because of coal and other uses of natural resources, my family and innumerable other families in the United States have been able to survive and thrive in the world's largest \$16.72 trillion economy (estimated 2013, CIA World Factbook). But, in this process, we are destroying the world that supports life itself. By continuing to use non-renewable resources and supporting unsustainable methods used to harvest natural resources, we are destroying part of what makes us American: the wild.

Being an Eagle Scout and living in Gray, Tennessee, 100 miles east of Knoxville, and close to the Appalachian Trail, Great Smoky Mountain National Park, and the Blue Ridge Parkway, all of which are within an hour and a half drive, gave me limitless opportunities to be in nature. I have spent many days and nights outdoors, sweating in the summer sun while hiking, and watching the beautiful sun set. These experiences have indwelt me with a passion and a love for the outdoors that no amount of money could take away. When I see a forest, I don't see trees and measure them in board feet; when I see a mountain, I don't see a place that might contain coal or iron ore. I see a miracle that supports life and is beautiful and

valuable simply because it exists and it's ours to share. I recognize the importance of using natural resources and the importance of a strong economy, but I also see the value of leaving natural places intact. There is a constant struggle between economy and letting natural resources be.

An historical novel such as *Serena: A Novel* by Ron Rash can help Americans learn about the history of our government institutions, and the people who struggled to establish them, and can thus help us reflect on our values and our relationship to nature.

II. Overview of this Thesis

In this thesis, I plan to discuss the importance of development and conservation, each in its own right, and how the tensions between the two have been balanced in the United States since the late 19th century. I will develop a reading of Ron Rash's 2008 novel, *Serena*, to discuss the role of government in this dilemma. I will show how the novel frames the dilemma as requiring a balance of capitalism and government regulation, and the use of parks and forests to protect natural resources and natural wonders for the good of all people.

In the novel, Rash writes about a timber baron, George Pemberton, and his wife, Serena Pemberton, who have come to the deciduous hardwood forests of Southern Appalachia, in the late 1920's, at the tail end of America's Gilded Age, to harvest the trees by clear-cutting the virgin forests, a process that is ecologically disastrous, for their own personal profits. While the Pembertons clear-cut the forests, representatives of the relatively new National Park Service are trying to

purchase land in order to protect it for use in the soon-to-be established Great Smoky National Park. Rash's novel dramatizes how capitalism without government involvement rapes the land of its natural resources in a way that cannot be sustained, how the individual worker becomes lost in a sea of casualties, and how parks (and wilderness in general) are seen as vital aspects of the American identity. The conflicts dramatized in this book show the increasing role of government in the Progressive Era and engage current debates about the economy and the role of government.

III. Summary of the Action of *Serena: A Novel*

In the first pages of *Serena*, Ron Rash immediately puts two classes of people at odds at a small railroad station in Waynesville, North Carolina in the year of 1929. Abe Harmon, a poor farmer with a taste for whiskey, challenges George Pemberton, a timber baron that has just arrived with his new bride, Serena, to a knife fight. Harmon rightfully accuses Pemberton of impregnating his daughter, Rachel, and Pemberton accepts the challenge, easily killing the staggering old man. With Rachel hovering over her father and his gutted intestines, Serena shows mercy on the young pregnant woman and gives Rachel the knife that her father used to fight Pemberton, the Harmon family's only possession of value. Serena advises Rachel to sell the knife for goods and to stay away from Serena's family.

Sheriff McDowell is then introduced. Sheriff McDowell sees it as his duty to protect the commoners from exploitation to the best of his abilities within the confines of the law. He certainly appears to know that his fight to protect the locals

from the captains of industry has almost no hope, but he still attempts to do what little he can. This mentality is shown in his first scene. After Pemberton kills Harmon in self-defense, Sheriff McDowell requires Pemberton to pay a fine for disturbing the peace. While Pemberton technically was trying to protect himself, the Sheriff knows that Pemberton is in the wrong but tries to get some sort of justice anyway, even if that is just a moment's annoyance for Pemberton.

After Pemberton pays a ten-dollar fine to Sheriff McDowell, Pemberton and Serena drive out from Waynesville towards the timber camp so that Pemberton can show Serena their acres of forest for logging. Serena mentions that the government is trying to purchase the neighboring property for a new park, and Pemberton predicts that if the other property sells, the government will be coming for his next, and if the government gets his land, it will be because he has already cut all of the timber that he could get.

After arriving at the camp, Serena and Pemberton discuss the ins and outs of everyday life, including the wages of the workers. Pemberton tells Serena that the workers currently earn two dollars a day, but one of the partners, Buchanan, wants to pay 2.10 a day. Wilke, the third partner in Boston Lumber Company, Serena, and Pemberton agree that two dollars is plenty because the stock market crash has provided plenty of cheap labor and that the government land grabs of other lumber tracts will provide more workers too. It is also mentioned that the men work six, eleven hour shifts a week.

The next day Pemberton introduces his new wife to the whole camp. Many of the workers think she is a spectacle, and question her ability because she is a

woman, and one crewman whispers that she is the Whore of Babylon because she wears pants. This ridicule eventually leads to a challenge between a foreman, Bilded, and Serena. Both Serena and Bilded write down the number of board feet that could be procured from an ash tree standing near them, and whoever is closest to the mark will receive two weeks pay, the worker will receive a bonus if he wins, and if he loses, he has to work two weeks for free. After the tree is cut down and sawed into boards, it is discovered that Bilded has lost; Serena has the closest estimate. Campbell, the overseer of the lumber company informs Serena and Pemberton of the outcome, and Serena orders Bilded to be fired after he works his two free weeks. Campbell tries to dissuade this decision, but Serena will not change her mind.

Campbell shows his important role in this scene for the first time. He is shown as a quiet man who knows his place, but uses what little influence he does have to make life easier for all of the workers, but he finds success to be rare and hard to come by. The novel describes him as cautious and always paying attention to his surroundings. That has helped him survive longer than most people in a cruel work environment, but even someone as attentive as he lost a finger during his time as a cutter in the mountains.

Serena asserts herself as a major component of Pemberton's business extremely early. She discusses the acquisition of new land with a different business partner, a copper miner named Harris. She also plants the idea of going to Brazil after North Carolina to continue their business. She makes all of these suggestions and plans on her first workday at the camp.

Horace Kephart is introduced at a discussion of the business partners and Dr. Cheney, the camp physician later that day. Kephart is described as, "being behind this national park nonsense" (Rash 33). He is, as Serena retorts, "A librarian and an author yet he'd stop us from harvesting the very thing books are made of" (Rash 35). Kephart's moral character is called into question many times throughout the novel. Various people say that he is trying to be the next John Muir, but with a speckled past. It does appear that Kephart deserves his fair share of criticism. The novel mentions that he has left a family of a wife and five children in Saint Louis in order to move to the mountains, and that he drinks far too much. It is revealed that the Sheriff and Kephart have become close and trusted friends.

In alternating chapters, Rachel, a sixteen year old, is shown with her newborn child, Jacob. Jacob's biological relation to Pemberton is obvious; they have the exact same eyes and hair color. Rachel is now parentless. Her father is dead and her mother left the family when she was five years old; the only person that she has left is an old neighbor, Widow Jenkins. Rachel leaves Jacob with Widow Jenkins so that she can sell her horse and cow to scrape by. Jenkins says, "You having to sell that horse and cow just to get by, and him that's the cause of it richer than a king. It's a hard place this world can be. No wonder a baby cries coming into it. Tears from the very start" (41). This is an important scene that Rash clearly uses to highlight the victims of inequality.

Eventually, Rachel gets her job back in the kitchen at the Pemberton's timber camp. Campbell is able to convince Pemberton that the camp needs a strong worker like Rachel, and Campbell implies that Pemberton at least owes her a job. After

discussing the matter with Serena, Pemberton gives Rachel her job back under the stipulations that she does not expect special treatment or extra pay, and that she never handles Pemberton's or Serena's food.

A few months later, a delegation of the park's representatives and the timber barons meet to discuss selling their lands. After the parks people state that the park is for the common man, Serena states that two thousand farmers have been run off their farms, and she is curious how that is helping anybody. Secretary of Interior Albright retorts that it is for the common good of the people, and running the farmers off of the land is a necessary evil that has to occur. Albright makes the mistake of mentioning a land tract that he is hoping to purchase, and Serena decides to out bid him for the land.

After the meeting, Pemberton and Serena notice that Pemberton's partners, Buchanan and Wilkie are wavering, so the Pembertons decide to kill Buchanan during a hunting trip, and Buchanan is taken care of in short order during a "hunting accident." After the body is loaded onto the train to go to the coroner, Pemberton and Wilkie have a small conversation, and Wilkie was essentially threatens to sell his share of the Boston Lumber Company. To celebrate their achievements of the day and their sole ownership of their company, Pemberton and Serena decide to have a baby.

Galloway, a cutter, is introduced as the replacement of the fired foreman, Bilded. He is experienced in the lumber business and is a child of the mountain, and he is a convicted killer. Years ago, he killed two men over a card game, and he served five years in prison. Now, he lives with his mother and takes care of her, but,

after working as a foreman for a short time, he becomes incapacitated when an inexperienced cutter chops off his hand with an ax. Knowing that there is no use for a one-handed man at a timber camp, he knows that he is out of a job, but Serena has other plans. She hires Galloway to be her personal assistant and henchman. He proves to be both loyal and effective in both of those roles.

Galloway's mother is also an important character in the novel. Although she is blind to the physical world, she can see into the future. This provides Galloway with knowledge of future events that will happen to him, and she can provide him the location and future of the people around him.

Eight months into her pregnancy, Serena wakes up in the middle of the night. She has intense pain in her stomach, and Dr. Cheney says that she only has gas and that it is nothing to worry about. After a short time passes, Pemberton wakes up to see Serena's hand covered in blood from her womb. Pemberton immediately rushes out to the train at the lumberyard with Serena and speeds to the nearest town where an ambulance will meet them. At the hospital, the doctor asks Pemberton what Serena's blood type is. He does not actually know, but he says they share the same type. The doctor starts a transfusion and tells the nurse to pump blood from Pemberton and into Serena every thirty seconds because any faster would cause the vein to collapse. Throwing precaution to the wind, Pemberton wrenches the pump from the nurse's hand and pumps the blood every fifteen seconds until he passes out.

Serena is saved, but the baby is lost. The incident has left Serena barren, and, when pressed by Pemberton, the doctor tells him that the baby, a boy, could have

been saved if Serena had been at the hospital sooner. When Serena wakes, Pemberton tells her the bad news, and she says, "Your blood merged with mine. That's all we ever hoped for anyway" (210). Doctor Cheney is soon found dead, and it is revealed that Galloway found him and killed him very slowly.

Once she is well enough to return to the camp, Serena starts planning for Brazil. Campbell decides that he has had enough of the business and takes off. At the objection of Pemberton, Serena decides to send Galloway to kill Campbell because Campbell knows too much information about the scandalous activities of the Boston Lumber Company. At this point, it is obvious that Serena has complete control of the camp, the Boston Lumbar Company, and even Pemberton.

The Pembertons and their new partner, Harris, are trying to decide between two tracts of land to buy for their next operations. After visiting two sets of tracts, the Pembertons decide that they like the first one better, but Harris likes the second one much better. He presses them into purchasing the second one very quickly because it is believed that the park authorities are trying to purchase the land for some reason. Serena and Pemberton are suspicious of Harris because he seems too enthusiastic about the second land tract, and months later, after the transaction is complete; Harris admits that he found rubies in the creek on their first day of exploration not even a quarter mile upstream from where they parked. Serena then informs him that he has been outwitted by the parks service because the parks people undoubtedly planted those rubies for Harris to find. Serena orders Harris killed, and Galloway follows his master's orders quickly.

After Harris is killed, Serena really begins to eliminate people who she believes threatens her, including her husband's child. Serena decides to kill Rachel and the son herself, but when she is unable to find them, Widow Jenkins becomes the first victim that Serena kills herself. Campbell is then confirmed dead in Nashville, Tennessee.

The next day, Pemberton finds his hunting knife with blood on it, and the Sheriff accuses Serena of murdering the widow. Pemberton threatens to find a replacement for the Sheriff, and Serena admits to Pemberton that she personally killed Widow Jenkins, and she also tells Pemberton that she feels closer to him now because they had both killed.

In order to protect Rachel and Jacob, the Sheriff hides them at Kephert's house. While Kephert has been slandered for leaving his family and enjoying alcohol, his soft side is shown when he personally takes care of Jacob and is nursing fox kits whose mother was killed.

It is revealed that Joel Vaughn called the Sheriff to let him know that Serena was coming the night before when the widow was killed. Joel escaped the camp for now, leaving a fake suicide note behind, and the Sheriff, Rachel, and Jacob arrive in Kingsport, Tennessee, where the Sheriff hopes that Rachel and Jacob will be safe.

Sheriff McDowell is relieved from his duties, and Pemberton puts a new sheriff, Bowden, into place. At a meeting with McDowell and a detective, Coldfield, who is investigating the death of Campbell, Pemberton gives McDowell three hundred dollars to give Rachel and Jacob, and he insists on not knowing where they

are being taken. It is evident that Pemberton has begun to feel estranged from Serena, and that he is starting to realize that she is insane.

Galloway finally figures out where Rachel and Jacob are with the help of his mother, and he arrives in Kingsport, but Rachel is able to escape from Galloway's clutches at the last moment and forms a plan to move out west. She catches a freight train to Knoxville and then travels by passenger train from Chattanooga to Seattle. Her first ticket seller in Kingsport told Galloway where they were going, even after a bribe, so Rachel offered five dollars to the depot master in Knoxville. She then gives a speech only a mother that is fearing for the life of her child could give, and the depot master promises to keep her secret safe without payment.

Back in North Carolina, former-Sheriff McDowell tries to kill Serena and Pemberton by catching their living quarters on fire. The fire makes the waning Pemberton more resolute in his love and aspirations with Serena. He believes that they have to stick together no matter what, and that it is them versus the world.

As the novel concludes, Rachel makes it safely to Seattle, where she starts a new life safe from the Pembertons and Galloway. One day, she thinks that she sees Joel Vaughn walking down the street, but she isn't sure. The man disappears in a crowd before she can reach him.

On one of the Boston Lumber Company's tracts of land, the last tree is cut and the workers observe the destruction that has occurred. They notice there is not anything left at all; it's a complete wasteland. Even the water that used to run clean and taste sweet is brown and tastes like mud.

Serena throws Pemberton a birthday party, and she has an unusual choice for the main entertainment. Serena invites Galloway's mother to predict people's future. For one lady, she predicts that her daughter will marry well, but the lady will not be alive to attend the wedding. Pemberton, whom is extremely drunk, is convinced by Serena to ask the seer how he will die. He is told that not one thing could kill a man like Pemberton; Serena takes note of this prophecy.

IV. Highlighting Social Class Struggle and Role of Government in Rash's Works

The competition between the role of government, class struggle, and environmental protection is a mainstay in Rash's work. Rash is able to dramatize this struggle in such a way that the that links the environment with lower social classes and pits them against the upper class, and the government can go either way.

In one scene in *Serena*, Pemberton sees a young boy hopping from log to log as the logs float down a river, to make sure the timber does not get jammed. Pemberton watches the boy and notices that he is not wearing shoes that allow him to grip to the logs. Pemberton asks the foreman why the boy isn't shod, and the foreman says the boy has been using his pay to visit his sweetheart in a nearby city instead of buying the specialized shoes. In the midst of the conversation, the boy slips and falls into a gap between the logs, and the gap closes. The boy is stuck under the maze of logs and drowns. This is a rare scene where Pemberton actually sees a fatality occur. The boy is not just a statistic on a piece of paper because Pemberton sees him die.

Pemberton is deeply upset by this occurrence, and tells the foreman that anyone who works the logs in the river must use his first paycheck on shoes, no exception. But why doesn't Pemberton buy the special shoes for his employees? With his immense wealth, it would be effortless for him to provide these for his company, but it can be assumed that he does not want to lose profits. This parallels with modern times, while some companies are having record profits, benefits for workers are slipping each year (Dickler).

Serena is a confidant woman that knows more about the timber business than many of the men at the work camp. She is shrewd and knows how to get things done through sheer force alone and does not entertain fools or time wasters. She is cold hearted in her decisions, and she believes in efficiency, even at the expense of others, but she also revels in revenge, which is about the only time she seems emotional in the novel. She also does not have any family other than Pemberton. Her mother, father, and all of her siblings died from an influenza epidemic. It is also mentioned that Serena has terrible dreams and is haunted by certain parts of her past. She has absolute disdain for the past, won't talk about her father, and she burned down her family's home as a child or young adult.

Pemberton seems to be a morally confused character. Many times, he seems heartless and uncaring, but other times, there is a compassion that is shown. He is a tough, strong man that is highly educated, although he dropped out of Harvard, and also extremely athletic. He is not afraid to get his hands dirty, and is often described as dressing like the workers and working with them, especially when the Boston Lumber Company first began. Although he worked with the men, it did not help him

connect with many of the workers, and he still tried to get the most out of his workers with as little pay as possible.

The fight between Pemberton and Harmon is representative of a majority of the novel, the Gilded Age, and possibly current times. The upper class, Serena and Pemberton, help the lower class just a little bit, in this case by giving Rachel her father's knife and advice, when so much more could be given, especially considering what is good and moral since the child was Pemberton's and Pemberton just killed her father. In the novel, the lower class does not stand a chance to protect themselves from exploitation by the upper class.

Rattlesnakes are one of the many nuisances that the workers must deal with on a daily basis. At one point, the owners of the Boston Lumber Company are discussing this problem, but they do not talk about the safety of the workers in a way that shows that they care about the actual safety of their workers. Instead, they talk about how taking care of a man that just got bitten reduces productivity, and the fear of rattlesnakes makes the men work slower. Safety is not a concern, productivity and profits are.

Another conflict in the novel is between the government and the Pembertons during the attempt to make the Smoky Mountain National Park. The government, led by Horace Albright, the second Director of the National Park Service, is attempting to purchase large areas of land to create the park, and this goes against the mission of the timber barons, which is to use the land for profit as quickly as possible. Eventually, in the novel and real life, the federal government wins the battle, and today, we have the Great Smoky National Park as a result.

In another novel, *Saints at the River* (2004), Rash again writes a story with a conflict with three forces: the environment, government, and socioeconomic status. Brennon, a rich man from out of town, has lost his daughter to the depths of a waterfall, and he will stop at nothing to retrieve his daughter from the tumultuous waters where her body is trapped. While Brennon wants to temporarily dam the legally protected river, Luke, an environmental activist, is concerned about setting a precedent to break the law at the expense of the environment for what seems to be a good cause. Luke, who sees the river as sacred, which is not dependent on a legal status, tried to protect the river long before it received legal protection (but he does use the legal status as a defense); he cares about the river for what it is, wild, free, and as a part of the commons. He believes that the river is a special place that deserves to be left alone, not damaged with drilling and temporary damming because he believes that after the law is broken once, then the law will be broken over and over again until the river is destroyed through development. The conflict is once again, big money versus the environment versus the well being of the surrounding population, and in this novel, Brennon wins the backing of the government, and the wild river and a local diver are sacrificed while trying to reclaim the body.

V. What Makes the Great Smoky National Park and Surrounding Areas Unique

The Southern Appalachian Mountains have been at the center of the history of the continent of North America, even before the founding of the United States of America. Native Americans once lived in the mountains and prospered here, famous

battles of the Revolutionary War occurred, and the mountains house the most botanically diverse temperate forest on the planet (National Park Service, Nature & Science). Thankfully, this history is now preserved in parks.

In Kingsport, Tennessee, Native American history is enshrined in the name of “Warriors’ Path State Park,” a place where Iroquois warriors would travel to attack Cherokee tribes (Tennessee State Parks, Warriors’ Path State Park). Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area covers the area where the famous Overmountain Men mustered to attack the British after their long trek to King’s Mountain, (Tennessee State Parks, Sycamore Shoals) and Roan Mountain State Park and the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy protect the world’s largest natural rhododendron garden (Forest Service, Roan Mountain). In addition, the Cherokee National Forest and Pisgah National Forest provide for government ownership and management of over 1,150,00 acres along the high Southern Appalachian ridges (Forest Service, Cherokee National Forest and Pisgah National Forest).

Before all of these parks were formed, the trend for government protection and ownership in the Eastern United States was set by the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The long path to the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was a difficult challenge for reformers that envisioned a new America and a new role for the government in everyday life, but today, it is almost unfathomable to imagine an America without a system to protect its most precious treasures, but American citizens and politicians still question the role of government in society, including parks.

Today, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the most popular National Park in the United States of America. The Smokies easily win the crown; with over nine million tourists a year, the park is twice as popular as the next most popular park, Grand Canyon National Park, according to National Geographic. The fact that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is so popular should not be a surprise, the Smokies and surrounding area is a cross section of America and everything a tourist could want. Driving on US 441, a tourist visiting the region sees the bright lights and distilleries of Gatlinburg, or a casino if driving from Cherokee, North Carolina, but at the very center of it all is a refuge where black bears can be seen hanging from trees, scenic vistas are separated by feet, not miles, and over 800 miles of hiking trail can be found, including the famous Appalachian Trail and the trail's highest peak, Clingman's Dome, which has been capped by an observation tower with a paved trail so anyone can access it.

VI. Gilded Age

The Gilded Age had many rewards, but it also had many costs. The rewards are a desirable, incredible level of economic growth, industrialization, and widespread employment, but these rewards cost thousands of lives because of unsafe and exploitative labor practices. Also, the poverty levels seem unnecessary if only the robber barons and other wealthy people would pay their employees more. Other things aiding this industrialization were the end of the Civil War and the Indian Removal Act gave businessmen the opportunity to use the South's natural resources. The United States prospered because of Capitalism and the desire of everyone to make money.

The Gilded Age is often considered to have occurred from the 1870's to the early 1890 though its central conditions extended through the late 1920's when Rash's novel is set (America's Library). During this time, the United States went through massive industrialization, especially in the south. Railroads sprung up everywhere, mines were opened, and mountains were scalped of their trees. This was made possible because cheap labor and technological advances. The labor force was underpaid to the point of poverty, and it was unprotected in the workplace. Workers were seen as replaceable if they did not want to do a job or died.

However, having a job that did not pay well and put a worker's life at risk was better than no job. While the jobs were almost unbearable and dangerous, they increased income and put food on the table for the poor. Another sign of a strong economy and open jobs is immigration. From 1881-1890, the decade of the Gilded Age, over 5,000,000 immigrants came to the United States looking for a fresh start to life (Harvard, "Key Dates and Landmarks in the United States Immigration History").

These huge corporations were an important source of employment for the citizens of the south. While their jobs did not pay well, the people were at least employed, and the timber industry was one of the largest employers in the southern Appalachian Mountains. In Monroe County Tennessee, for example, Tellico River Lumber Company employed nearly 5 percent of the county in 1910 (Davis 178).

Machinery allowed the country's factories to become much more efficient. This efficiency became more important as the country become more urban and the population began specializing in careers. Machinery also had a negative side though. Because unskilled laborers could operate machines, skilled laborers were

suddenly out of jobs or underpaid. Profit margins increased because labor became even cheaper. A problem that some people predict will continue in the near future (Thompson 2014).

Eventually, the system started to crack. People began to be upset about the long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and the comparatively little pay. Labor unions began to form in order to protect the rights of the workers. In order to appease the workers, some things were changed, and the government stepped in to protect the lower class. This time period of government regulation is known as the Progressive Era, which ushered in a larger middle class. During the Progressive Era, the United States government enacted a series of laws to promote free enterprise and competition by eliminating trusts and beginning to regulate business for the benefit of the middle class, whether that be eight hour work day or preventing child labor.

Park systems were a part of this government intervention. While Yellowstone National Park was founded in 1872 from federally owned lands, and many park systems and conservation were created and supported in the first two decades of the 1900's (Burns, Part 1). This included a large buy up of land from private ownership all over the country, including in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, which was the first time that the government purchased land from private owners for a new park (Burns, Part 4).

This interfered with business practices because forests were either entirely protected from the loggers, or the areas were managed in a way that prevented the clear cutting of forests, a common, yet irresponsible business practice.

VII. The Industrial Logging of the Great Appalachian Forest and the Formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Becoming the most popular park in America was no small feat, and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park has a troubling past. While the beautiful mountains are full of trees and wildlife now, the park had to be resurrected, not from ash, but from saw teeth and tree stump. In 1934, the formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park by the United States Congress signaled a developing change in American identity. Other than the farmers that fell victim to the land buy up, the common man was protected, according to some, and natural areas were saved not for their future timber yields, but for the beauty and holiness that they contained.

Immediately after the removal of Cherokee Indians during the Trail of Tears in 1838 and 1839, white settlers increasingly began to live in the Appalachian Mountains (PBS, Trail of Tears). Eventually after the settlers, big business and timber barons began clearing the old growth forests for timber during the beginning of the Gilded Age.

Technological advances were extremely important for the development of the southern Appalachian Mountains. Because of the remoteness of the area, it was nearly impossible for businesses to make profits, but with the proliferation of railroads in the area, timber sales suddenly became profitable. In fact, railroads and timber companies were so intertwined that, "scholars rightly refer to this period (1880-1920) in southern Appalachian history as the era of industrial railroad logging" (Davis 165).

Another important technology was the portable steam powered sawmill. The sawmill allowed for increased productivity when splitting logs into timber, and this completely changed the region. Lumber became more affordable for building houses and other products, and more lumber could be produced in a day, so supply and demand both increased. This led to an even quicker cutting of the forests in Appalachia (Davis 181).

After the vast harvesting of the forests began to show its unsustainability, the government stepped in to regulate the trade, but the beginning of the Forest Service did not intend to stop the timber industry or preserve the forests for generations to come for its beauty. Instead, the Forest Service and its first leader, Gifford Pinchot, wished to promote “‘economic forestry’ over ‘scenic preservation’” (Davis 175).

Two men in particular had a differed with Pinchot’s opinion, and they discovered the beauty and the magic of the forested mountains, and they began to fight for its protection when they saw that it was being destroyed. Horace Kephart and George Masa were not the typical settlers. Kephart moved to the Appalachian Mountains in 1904 after being a librarian, husband, and father for years in St. Louis. After failing to enjoy life, he began to look for something else, and he found what he was looking for in the Appalachian Mountains (WCU, Horace Kephart: Timeline).

Masa was a Japanese immigrant who enjoyed photography. After moving to America in 1901 to study mining, he found himself in Asheville, North Carolina working as a bellhop in 1915 (PBS, Horace Kephart and George Masa). His love for photography and the outdoors led him to cross paths with Kephart, and together,

they began the fight to protect the forests through the creation of a new national park.

Another person that was instrumental to the creation of the park system was Horace Albright. Horace Albright was the assistant of Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, and together, they helped create the National Park Service from scratch. After Mather's retirement, Albright became the director of the service (Burns, Part 3). Albright was personally responsible for the acquisition of funds from John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

In 1926, the United States Congress authorized the park, but no funds were appropriated for the acquisition of land. Up to this point, the United States government did not need to purchase land from individual property owners for parks because the land had always been out West and under government authority or given through donations. To make up for this lack of funds, average citizens began to collect money with the goal of reaching \$10 million. However, the citizens could not get enough money. They raised \$5 million through pledges, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. offered to give \$1 million, but Rockefeller had a change of heart and eventually offered \$4 million more. Unfortunately, once the Great Depression hit, people could not afford to give the donations that they pledged to, so the park dream was about to go under, until President Franklin D. Roosevelt stepped in. Under his guidance, the federal government donated \$2 million to the park fund to make up for the pledges that could not be met, a first for the American government.

Many people opposed the protection of 522,319 acres of mountain and forest, poor and rich alike. The timber barons are the most obvious opponents to

this movement. Once the timber companies learned that their profit margins could be shrinking from the new park, they immediately started to cut trees down faster and more dangerously. Hundreds of acres would sometimes be clear cut in a day. These irresponsible harvesting practices destroyed forests that were hundreds of years old(PBS, Great Smoky Mountains National Park).

The commoners that lived on the land were also hurt during the creation of the park. Some families lived in the mountains for generations; their lives and their ancestors were up in the mountains and, because of the creation of the park, they had to relocate and leave their buried loved ones in park. For example, 125 families lived in Cades Cove alone, one small part of the park (Shuman 2009.)

Even the commoners that kept their land during the huge buy ups by the industrial loggers and the American company were negatively impacted. Although some subsistence farmers kept a majority of their land, most farmers had to sell some of their acreage in order to make ends meet. This made it difficult for them to survive and raise their food. Donald Davis quotes Gifford Pinchot discussing the 100,00 acre purchase by George Vanderbilt: “[The farmers] regarded this country as their country, their common. And it was not surprising, for they needed everything usable in it – pasture, fish, game – to supplement the very meager living they were able to scratch from the soil” (179).

VIII. *Laissez Faire* Capitalism and the Role of the Government in America

Americans have always been wary of large government. From chants of “no taxation without representation” and the anti-Federalists at the Constitutional

Convention to the disdain of socialism in the 1950's and the questionable activities of the National Security Agency today, Americans believe that an overactive government easily infringes on personal freedoms. While I agree with many of those arguments, I also believe that government can help organize society in a way that is beneficial for everyone. The parks at the Federal and State level in the United States are a perfect example.

Many people in the United States believe in an economic idea called "*Laissez-faire* capitalism." *Laissez faire* capitalism calls for the separation of the economy from government controls and regulation. Many people believe this separation is important because the government can prevent business from innovating and becoming more efficient while propping up inferior goods and businesses. These inefficient business practices would otherwise hamper the economy and slow growth.

Laissez faire capitalism sounds efficient, but history proves that the system possesses faults with the treatment of the work force, environment, and unsafe business practices. During the Gilded Age, America experienced large economic growth, but at a high cost. Thousands of people died for the profits of the mega rich as the poor scraped by in terrible living and working conditions. The business plans brought even more havoc on the environment as the Appalachian Mountains lost their forests to timber barons, railways streaked across the country, and dams flooded beauty scenery and rare environments.

According to PBS, during the Gilded Age, " While the rich wore diamonds, many wore rags. In 1890, 11 million of the nation's 12 million families earned less

than \$1200 per year; of this group, the average annual income was \$380, well below the poverty line. Rural Americans and new immigrants crowded into urban areas” (Gilded Age).

Teddy Roosevelt thought that this was unacceptable. After becoming president, Roosevelt began to make huge changes in the United States economy. One of his first actions was the creation of the Forest Service to manage forests from corrupt greed. Eric Rutkow says, “[Roosevelt and Pinchot] each felt that [the Forest Service] was an engine of reform, a tool to curb the excesses of corporations and expand equality” (161). This reformist mentality continued with Teddy’s cousin, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Elected in heart of the Great Depression, FDR ran on a campaign promising a government led recovery; a level of intervention unheard of in America, and the conservation effort received a big boost by his election. In *The Wild East* by Margaret Brown, she a letter penned by Roosevelt saying, “America [was] (sic) ashamed of the heedless exploitation of natural resources in the past’ and asserted that ‘from now on conservation and wise use shall inform every act and policy of the government’” (121). The New Deal and its list of working programs provided a wide range of job opportunities for the people of the southern Appalachian mountains, such as the “Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and an astonishing team of NPS landscape architects” (Brown, 121).

The preservation movement in its purest sense believes that nature is best completely left alone. It claims that the intrinsic value of the land as it is, and it is far

more valuable than the natural resources that could be harvested from it or profits that can be accumulated for the benefit of the owner. For example, in Ken Burns' documentary, he mentions that Niagara Falls was covered up with hotels and people were charged exuberant prices to see the falls. Although almost everyone would agree that the falls would be much more beautiful to see without hotels in sight, there are people who would wish to sit on their balcony and watch the falls all day, so in a capitalistic economy, those hotels would be built for the benefit of the few that could afford the expensive hotels and the people who owned them at the sacrifice for those that cannot. Imagine a hotel on top of Clingmans Dome instead of an observation tower. Thankfully, the government now helps preserve such great wonders for everyone

IX. Government Intervention in the Last Decade

The financial crisis of 2008 exposes another weakness of *Laissez-faire* capitalism and may have started a new role of government in this era. Big banks and their high-risk decisions put the entire world at risk when the lack of government regulation failed to control the desire for more profits. Then, in clear violation of *Laissez-faire* capitalism, the government stepped in with a stimulus package in order to prop up banks and businesses that the government deemed too large to fail. This was a large change of modern United States economic policy that switched to a minimal government approach heralded by the proponents of Austrian Economics after Ronald Reagan changed the government policy away from the Keynesian, government led economy. This economic catastrophe is proof that

limited government regulation is a good thing that can help protect everyone (PBS, *Commanding Heights*).

Another interesting phenomenon that should the important of government regulation, especially of the National Park Service was shown, ironically, when the government shut down. After the government shut down for sixteen day in October 2013, it was reported that the National Parks lost \$414 million dollars worth of revenue, and according to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, many communities now know how important the parks are to the local economy (Peralta). In fact, state governments quickly realized how vital the park system is to their states immediately after the shut down occurred, and the governors of Utah, South Dakota, Arizona, and Colorado each asked Washington for permission to fund the parks while the federal government worked on its own problems (Daly).

While too much government is unnecessary and can limit the freedoms of individuals, some government regulation is necessary to protect the common man from exploitation, protect the environment and commons for everybody, and provide regulations that support stability. In the 20th century, the need for a limited but powerful government was realized when Theodore Roosevelt saw the struggle of the working class to simply survive and the destruction of the natural world that America was lucky to have. While capitalism and the search for higher profit margins has made America the strongest economy in the world, we have also realized that there is more to life than money, and the physical manifestation of that is our now protected lands and parks, but the struggle is not over. These harsh economic times has made people reevaluate the regulations and question whether

less government involvement can boost the economy, but we must remember that some forms of regulation are important and saving natural resources for the future or finding another way of using land may be a good investment instead of destroying it forever.

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