Saving the Smokies: Land Rights in the Middle and Mountain South

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Abstract
From the Trail of Tears to the forced evictions that turned Cades Cove into a ghost town, Appalachia’s residents have long been betrayed by their governments. Currently, mountaintop removal – the destruction of hundreds of mountain peaks for coal – mirrors past abuses, and has sparked a new cycle of catastrophic health effects and land loss. This legacy of human rights abuses is far from Appalachia’s only option, however. In examining both the past and current socioeconomic structures that enable environmentally destructive practices like mountaintop removal, it is possible to chart a path forward. And, by adopting a system similar to Chico Mendes’ extractive reserves model, state governments in Central Appalachia can foster both economic growth and environmental renewal. In my senior honors thesis, I will explore not only the historic roots of Appalachia’s current environmental challenges, but also the legal options available to best lobby for change. This thesis includes a historical overview of the land rights struggles of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, the Cherokee Nation, and other communities across the middle and mountain South, as well as a series of policy proposals to more sustainably manage land and combat climate change.

Comments
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The land that is now called The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was the homeland to the Cherokee Indians. European settlers began to arrive and settle in the area beginning in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Unfortunately, and much to the shame of today’s US citizens, Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830 that removed the Indians from the area to Oklahoma. Most of the Cherokee moved, but some remained, hidden in the lands now called The Great Smoky Mountains National Park. As a result of these trials and their popularity, Mount LeConte is the most travelled mountain in The Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Oconaluftee Valley, Mountain Farm Museum in Oconaluftee Valley. Mountain peaks, verdant forests and cascading waterfalls set the stage for adventure in the Smokies – here’s what you need to know to plan your first trip. Hiking aside, there are many ways to experience the Great Smoky Mountains. When you need a break from walking, you can let a trusty steed do the work. Horseback riding stables are located in Cades Cove, Sugarlands and Smokemont. The park also has some matchless scenic drives, including ridgeline roads where you can gaze out at the seemingly endless expanse of undulating peaks. You can visit the well-preserved log cabins, grist mills and one-room school houses built by early settlers to the area.