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Culture on the Line: Labor and Hegemony in Eastern Appalachia

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ABSTRACT

In Moorefield, West Virginia, the Pilgrim's Pride plant has consolidated the existing poultry industry to a formidable, vertically integrated, industrial complex. Employing many foreign-born refugee workers alongside regional and local workers with little options, the plant has crafted a high degree of local hegemony. Asking how industry maintains hegemony in company towns, in this study I explored the ways in which Pilgrim's Pride has built this hegemony and the cracks that emerge from it. Using informant interviews, archival sources, direct observation, and Facebook data, I looked into the intricacies of the processes at work. Ultimately, I argue that this control was built through the socio-cultural hegemony on the outside of the factory, via the re-construction of race and industry consolidation, and labor discipline and de-skilling on the inside. While specific in case study, this is the story of an Appalachia very much in the 21st Century.