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Mentor's Introduction

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mentor's introduction

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Christine Morris's dissertation, "Roots, Branches, Blossoms, and Briars: Cultural Colonialism of the Mountain Culture and Arts in West Virginia," is a study of power and control in the arts. Christine asks a central question: *Who owns the arts in West Virginia? Do the arts belong to the people of West Virginia's Mountain Culture, those for whom traditional art forms are part of a living culture, a whole way of life? Or do the arts belong to the people and institutions that currently market the arts as tourist attractions, displaying them at state-controlled festivals in West Virginia and selling them at tourist shops along the interstate highways?*

Using cultural colonialism as a theoretical framework for her analysis, Christine examines the extent to which "insiders" (native West Virginians) or "outsiders" (people from outside the culture) presently control the cultural and economic survival of traditional forms of music, dance, and other arts in West Virginia. In addition to published materials, she draws on extensive interviews with insiders and outsiders, both the cultural artists and the arts administrators who are struggling for ownership of the arts. Her analysis of the conflicts between insiders' and outsiders' interests is significant for many reasons, not the least of which is that her interviews with the Mountain Cultural artists give them a voice in the struggle, in some cases for the first time.

Christine's research grows out of her own experience as a Mountain Cultural artist. Speaking from the position of an informed insider, her work combines scholarly analysis with personal commitment to art, art education, and social change. Her dissertation makes a genuine contribution to our knowledge in art education, one that goes beyond the boundaries of established disciplines to address issues in the world at large.