

Response and Consequence: The Asheville Flood of 1916

Anthony DePaul SADLER¹

This paper provides an overview of a larger project concerning the environmental, social, and economic ramifications of the Great Flood of 1916 in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The proceedings served as an introduction to a Master's Thesis on the subject as well as a historiographical essay on the environmental history of southern waterways and disasters. The disastrous flood of 1916 was no "act of God." The actions of a few powerful white men and women added to the severity of the disaster. The socio-economic priorities of city leaders shifted. Tourism received the full support of Asheville's government leaders as river-based industries declined. As a result, hundreds of laborers, both black and white, lost their jobs, homes, and places in society. Forced by circumstance, they joined nation-wide migrations to the West and North. This story is about class, race, and the rise of industrial capitalism in America. It also adds to historiography a detailed analysis of the natural disasters that shaped regional socio-economies.

Key words: *natural disaster, flood, Asheville, industry, environment, Progressive Era*

¹Anthony Sadler is a Master's Candidate in History at Appalachian State University and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Georgia, sadlerad@appstate.edu