problematic nature of his data and, as a result, the tentative nature of his conclusions, but it also reminds us how wonderfully imaginative medieval historians can be. His argument that credit in the medieval English village may not have been as oppressive as current historiography suggests is clearly influenced by the geography of his sources, but it does allow for the possibility that credit may have been as much about investment as exigency in fourteenth-century England.

Judith Spicksley
University of Hull

doi:10.1017/S0956793309990197
Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009. xv + 326 pp. $29.95. 9780813125237.

American writers have 'discovered' Appalachia on numerous occasions, typically at crucial moments when modernising urbanites want a counterpoint to their model of progress. From the savage-like frontiersman of the eighteenth century to the twentieth-century 'welfare cheat', southern highlanders have required some sort of moral uplift, personal motivation or human capital development, depending upon the reigning theory of poverty at the time. Consequently, well-meaning reformers have intermittently sought to mould a new culture from what they saw as the pliable material of the Appalachian people. No effort so galvanised America's desire to transform the upcountry South as Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. Absorbing more than a century's worth of stereotypes about Appalachians, Johnson's War on Poverty hoped to redeem the United States by healing one of its most persistent sores. Reformers and policy makers ultimately failed, according to Ronald Eller, not because of the inadequacies of mountain people, but rather because they treated Appalachians like clients, tried to apply urban programmes in rural areas, and refused to tackle the underlying problems of structural inequality.

Building on his now classic earlier work, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers* (1982), Eller briefly recounts the region's industrial era as a period of colonial-like exploitation. Although the sweep is broad, the primary emphasis is on resource extraction, especially coal, in central Appalachia, which dispossessed landholders, triggered a mass exodus and left a pattern of economic growth resulting in 'rich land - poor people'. After 1945, the boom and, predominantly, bust cycles of coal largely determined the welfare of the central core of the region, as the nation turned to oil and natural gas for its energy and industry turned to mechanisation, which meant that even the boom times benefited fewer and fewer Appalachians. By the time presidential hopeful John F. Kennedy campaigned in West Virginia in 1960, Appalachia was ripe for rediscovery.

Over the ensuing decades poverty warriors, armed with development theories, culture of poverty ideas, and service delivery models, descended on the region. From the outset, however, they faced entrenched local power structures, bureaucratic infighting, and rural citizens who resented being told what they needed. Meanwhile, programmes stressing development did little to equitably distribute benefits, either geographically or socially. Meanwhile, activists who spoke of empowering Appalachians to confront inequality faced hostile policy makers. Far too soon, partisan squabbling, war in Vietnam, and economic recession made the war on poverty a luxury that was too costly to continue.

Despite disappointments, Eller notes that gains were made, although often at the fringes of Appalachia. Poverty rates declined, per capita income increased and education and health care approached the national norms, but not in the coalfields at the region's central core. And probing questions about quality of life, the impact of development on the environment, and persistent inequality remained not just unanswered but not even asked. Eller has been deeply involved in these policy issues for the past thirty years; he has researched and written about this rural industrial region with passion, personal insight and a hope that is often lacking in work on Appalachia. Equally important, he insists that Appalachia is not a region apart, but rather that its dilemma is, in fact, increasingly America's dilemma.

Ken Fones-Wolf
West Virginia University

doi:10.1017/S0956793309990203

Elizabeth Griffiths and Mark Overton, *Farming to Halves: The Hidden History of Sharefarming in England from Medieval to Modern Times*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 263 pp. £52. 9780230202238.

The classical system of sharefarming by which a landowner provided both fixed and working capital for his tenants' farming operations in return for a proportion (normally half) of the crops, was widespread in France and Italy until well into the twentieth century. The French *métayage* arrangements, whereby inputs and outputs were shared by landowner and peasant, had the particular virtue of spreading some of the risks and uncertainties of farming between the parties. It was argued, however, that *métayage* blurred the distinction between landowner and peasantry, with English writers like Arthur Young strenuously arguing that the arrangement was a potent disincentive to agrarian improvement, and later Marxist analysts seeing it as a cause, if not a consequence, of rural poverty. Until recently British historians of agriculture, while they might have been aware of its existence, have accorded little consequence to sharefarming in the context of the broad vista of agricultural development. Within the socially divisive eternal rural triangle of landlord-tenant-labourer there was little room for 'farming by halves', as English farmers surged triumphantly from strength to strength, from the seventeenth century to present times.

But, as Griffiths and Overton show, nothing could be further from the truth. Burrowing their way through a wide range of primary and secondary sources, assiduously analysing the pages of diaries and farm and estate accounts, and interviewing farmers and landowners, they reveal that, from medieval times, sharefarming, in one guise or another, has played a vital role in rural life. Through output sharing, corn rents, live and dead stock leasing, contract arrangements and a bewildering variety of other practices, 'farming by halves' allowed for strategies to share costs and benefits and to minimise risks, more especially when economic circumstances were uncertain. Capital intensive farming under the classic landlord/tenant system may have predominated in England, but, as the authors