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Labor or Leisure?:
Industrial Homework and the Redefinition of Craftsmanship

"Madam: Efforts to bring about the elimination of industrial home work have revealed that many people do not distinguish leisure-time production within the home for family use or for personal sale from full-time production in the home for commercial enterprises." Thus Mary Anderson, director of the Women's Bureau, summarized for Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins the bureau's research among the nation's homeworkers. This investigation led the Women's Bureau to conclude that the mountain family tufting spreads in north Georgia and the Kentucky grandmother caning chairs had much in common with the immigrant Portuguese householder pulling machine-woven lace in the kitchen or the Texas family embroidering and sewing baby dresses in its one-room home. These Americans shared neither cultures nor skills, but all were toilers for profit-seeking industries that hired the poor and the isolated to undertake handwork at home for meager piece rates. [1]

Southern mountain craftswomen—like their sisters elsewhere in rural homes and urban tenements—needed to be understood, the Department of Labor study argued, as industrial homeworkers rather than as the tradition-bound descendants of Anglo-American pioneers who handcrafted useful objects for pleasure or for use in traditional mountain homes. By illuminating the conditions under which mountain craft producers worked, the Women's Bureau presented craftwork in industrial terms and identified mountain craftswomen as laborers in need of the same legal protections as factory

workers. As industrial workers, these craft producers held a definable and familiar position in the capitalist order.

But this perspective advanced by the Women's Bureau challenged certain dearly held notions about the folk, craft, and the place of southern mountain craft production in American society and culture. The bureau's picture replaced folk artisans in romantic mountain hollows with rural industrial workers in crowded cabins-turned-workshops, and its data revealed that mountain craftswomen were well acquainted with those familiar hallmarks of industrialism—mass production, sweated labor, and alienation of producers from their work. Armed with evidence gathered from mountain craft industries and producers during its 1933–34 investigation, the Women's Bureau challenged influential organizations such as the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild to reconsider their notions of craft production and the potential of handicraft labor as a source of income for all mountain women. In part, the bureau framed its challenge in terms of a debate: a major dispute between the guild and the Women's Bureau centered on their conflicting definitions of craft production as artistic endeavor, pursued at leisure, or as labor; these disparate views, in turn, reflected the fundamental tension between the guild's cultural and social agendas and the Department of Labor's economic one. The same conflict shaped the two groups' opposing notions of the identities of mountain craft producers, the role of local craft traditions, and the relationship between craftwork and homework and the domestic sphere.

Like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and other federal agencies, the Women's Bureau believed that reorganizing craftwork in the southern mountains under a hierarchical structure typical of industrial capitalism would protect craft producers from the evils they faced as homeworkers. The Bureau offered its own plan for a reorganized craft industry in which power would be concentrated at the top, isolated from the workers. Under this plan, mountain craft producers, presumably protected by legislation, would continue to manufacture their handmade goods, but market experts and bureaucrats would direct the design, production, and sales of the merchandise.

Debates over definitions and suggestions for reorganization were not the Women's Bureau's only strategies, however. Unlike other

participants in the struggle to reshape the identity and roles of America's folk, the bureau had access to unique tools for institutionalizing its understanding of the meaning of crafts and the place of their producers in industrial society. New regulations and labor legislation also forced the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild to address the bureau's data and conclusions. Although the myth of mountain craftsmanship and folk artisanry persists even today, the Women's Bureau's investigation of homework in rural homes helped to redirect the discussions about Southern Appalachian craft production.

Any examination of the debate between the Women's Bureau and the guild over the meaning and place of craft production in American society must consider the political context of that conflict. The authority to shape the nature of the discourse that unfolded belonged to the Women's Bureau, which—armed with government sanction and access to material and practical resources—was able to gather and publish considerable data to support its position on the oppressive conditions under which mountain homeworkers pursued their crafts. As a result, the guild was forced into a defensive position from which it could only respond to the bureau's evidence and interpretations.

Given the Women's Bureau's history and status within the federal government and its relationship with labor and women's organizations, its face-off with the guild might appear surprising. Supporters hoped that the bureau, established in 1920 "to investigate and improve the condition of working women," would ensure the health of future generations of American mothers and American homes. Like other outgrowths of Progressivism, the Women's Bureau was to reform through education—to research and teach the public about the needs of women workers rather than to organize them. Throughout its early decades, the bureau drew most of its support from moderate women's reform organizations such as the Women's Trade Union League, the YWCA, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, who were likewise concerned about protecting women workers, the guardians of the sanctified home. The Women's Bureau at once asserted and sought to prove that women worked to meet the needs of their households and must thus receive equal and fair protection as laborers under the law, but it also upheld

the domestic roles assigned to women as keepers and protectors of the home and family. Accepting cultural notions of women's special role, the bureau consistently lobbied for protective legislation for women wage earners even while strenuously advocating equal pay for equal work. [2]

Politically speaking, the Women's Bureau had little power. Consistently underfunded and understaffed, the bureau had few resources to accomplish its task—promoting the interests of women wage earners. Bureau staff members conducted investigations of factories and entire industries, interviewed workers, organized conferences, compiled statistics, and wrote reports that were published in annual bulletins. Based on all this gathered knowledge, they offered advice to other government agencies and lobbied for protective legislation and wage-and-hour laws. Both the causes undertaken by the Women's Bureau and the style in which it went about promoting them, however, won no friends in labor, business, or the federal government; as a result, the bureau was treated with hostility or apathy, and it continued to find itself on the margins of power. Within the federal bureaucracy, issues of women's labor had been ghettoized in the Women's Bureau and were largely ignored by other agencies. It was not until after the appointment of Frances Perkins as secretary of labor in 1933 that the Women's Bureau enjoyed any interest and support within the Department of Labor itself. The bureau's support network remained centered among women's organizations focused on social reform—indeed, it was from such organizations that the typical Women's Bureau agent came.[3]

It is thus ironic that the Women's Bureau found itself pitted against the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, an organization with strong ties to the same support networks. At the heart of the conflict between the bureau and the guild, however, was not a dispute about the proper roles of women in the home and as wage earners or about the need for protective legislation, but rather a fundamental debate centered on the meaning of craft production and the identities of craftspeople in the Appalachian South. A primary factor in the dispute was the distinction between craftwork as a form of labor, performed primarily for a cash income, and as a form of expressive culture that fulfilled social and emotional needs. Indeed, the guild had incorporated this basic conflict into its own

internal programs. Armed with its statistical data and its access to regulatory agencies, however, the Women's Bureau was able to force the guild and Southern Highlanders, Inc., to explore and define themselves in relation to industry and to articulate the distinctions between craft and industrial work. By making such distinctions, the Women's Bureau and the guild revealed their common origins in a culture dominated by industrial capitalism; both understood labor and leisure as exclusive categories. [4]

Indeed, Bertha Nienburg, author of the Women's Bureau's study on southern mountain handicrafts, insisted that crafts created as leisure activity must be considered quite apart from handicrafts produced as a means of economic survival, and that mountain families practiced craftwork for the latter. Nienburg reminded the guild that only one of the six hundred mountain families the bureau visited "had any conception of crafts except as a possible means of earning." Olive Dame Campbell of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, by contrast, could not reconcile her understanding of handicrafts as an outlet for creative expression with the dictates of efficient production for maximum economic benefit. Economic priorities led to mechanization, which, she felt, threatened the meaning and quality of craftwork. What would become of the "constructive use of leisure time," Campbell asked, "when we have these machines going"? The very notion of mechanized mass production was antithetical to the guild's notion of handicrafts, for, as Campbell explained further, the guild had always thought of crafts "not as candlewick bedspreads by the thousand or embroidered handkerchiefs by the millions, but as leisure time . . . [that] helps the individual to enjoyment of his life and development of his own creative powers, a cultural thing." The data collected from mountain craftswomen, however, assured the Women's Bureau that the guild was certainly "confusing leisure with lack of work."[5]

Both the guild and the Women's Bureau failed to consider the possibility that the craftsperson might gain both cultural and economic rewards from his or her work. By setting this debate in the context of its battle against industrial homework, the bureau kept its focus on the issues of economic need and sweated labor. Guild leaders, however, worked to sell their goods as commodities in a competitive market while simultaneously trying to preserve craft-

work as a form of production free from and untainted by the constraints of the very marketplace that they wished to conquer. [6]

These divergent understandings of the meaning of mountain handicrafts carried over into ideas concerning the nature of crafts and the identities of mountain craftspeople. In the guild's ideology, craftspeople could be workers, preservers of the arts of their ancestors, and creative artisans all at the same time. Because the art versus labor debate was embedded in the guild's very philosophy and program, guild members and leaders were able to distinguish between creative or original crafts and those produced expressly for the marketplace. Some leaders believed that the guild dealt too much with "commercial crafts," to the neglect of the "true creative crafts." Allen Eaton argued that "creative expression" was not the only measure of craftsmanship; because craftspeople working for the educational and philanthropic craft centers were expected to follow instructions regarding design, color, and materials, notions of craftsmanship would have to incorporate the ways in which handwork was actually executed. Eaton urged craft leaders to refocus on the craft producers themselves: "The fundamental issue," he insisted, "is how handicrafts are produced rather than how they are sold." He advised guild members to de-emphasize sales and marketing and rededicate themselves to promoting the integrity and welfare of the individual producers.[7]

The Women's Bureau, of course, maintained that the welfare of mountain craftswomen was its first concern. The bureau did distinguish between "traditional" or "colonial" handicrafts and market-oriented handwork because, as Bertha Nienburg explained, these belonged in entirely different spheres. The task of preserving the traditional belonged to museums, not the marketplace, Nienburg argued, suggesting that the TVA establish "a *rural* handicraft museum" to "perpetuate and render forever available the colonial handicraft patterns of the Southern Appalachian Mountains." Nienburg saw the market and the museum as separate domains, obscuring the fact that museums, as institutions that conferred value and set standards of taste, supported and participated in a marketplace committed to middle- and upper-class consumers. The guild and Southern Highlanders made every effort to use museums to sell and enhance the value of their mountain craft products throughout the 1930s.[8]

With "traditional" crafts safely assigned to the purview of the museum, the mountain craftswoman could focus on her role as a "skilled artisan"—at least as long as her "acquired skills" could be applied to marketable products that would yield sufficient income; otherwise the government needed to find other uses for mountain labor. Skills alone, Nienburg argued, were insufficient, for the production of marketable goods required the application of old hand skills to the making of new items. She doubted, however, that the producers could direct themselves in such ventures, for "their knowledge of the civilization in which the product would be used is too limited to make them competent to apply their hand skill, undirected, to the production of useful and beautiful articles." The Department of Labor thus defined the mountain producer solely as a provider of skilled labor. In this view, the mountain craftswoman was merely a monochromatic drone whose potential for satisfaction and creative expression lay only in her labor, divorced from any cultural or community practices. Craft producers, Nienburg advised, could find "as much chance for expression in undertaking work which the market appreciates as they do now following the designs and patterns of their ancestors." [9]

This fundamental disagreement over the meaning of southern mountain crafts and the role of their makers also influenced the guild's and the Women's Bureau's differing perspectives on homework. The Women's Bureau sought to educate the public about the "dangers lurking" in homework in general. Handwork sent out by manufacturers to rural homes represented just one type of industrial homework. The bureau wished to eliminate the use of the home as a workshop wherein the homemaker and her children toiled for the benefit of profit-making manufacturers who took no responsibility for the working conditions and welfare of their employees.[10]

Government reformers were concerned not only with the work environments and wages of homeworkers, but also with the effects of constant homework on domestic life. Introducing industrial work into the home resulted, the Women's Bureau reported, in the "demoralization of home as the family shelter from the stress and strain of the outside world." Women working at home subordinated their domestic responsibilities to the demands of their employers, leading to the deterioration of family social life and the employment

of young children at industrial tasks. The Department of Labor's solution to the problem was to remove craftwork from the mountain home, where conditions, hours, and wages could not be regulated, and relocate it in craft production centers in rural neighborhoods, where women could still carry on their work part-time, but under controlled conditions. [11]

Just as the Women's Bureau was certain that industrial homework threatened to destroy domestic life, revivalists in the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild were equally sure that craft labor was crucial to the preservation of the domestic arts and family customs of generations of mountaineers. Romantic notions portrayed women as tradition bearers whose domestic responsibilities included passing along family and community mores and skills at the family hearth. Allen Eaton saw potential disaster in taking handicrafts "out of the home life of the people." His romantic view of life in the Southern Appalachian mountains as exclusively agrarian and essentially preindustrial prevented Eaton from seeing the ways in which domestic, economic, and cultural life in the region had already shifted and the new place that craft production occupied in this changing order. From the perspective of the Women's Bureau, Eaton and the guild ignored, too, the impact of the sweated production of handicrafts on domestic life.[12]

Such attitudes among the well-intentioned workers at mountain benevolent agencies meant that, before the problem of homework could be eliminated, these social workers must be reeducated to accept the Department of Labor's point of view. The educators, church workers, and social reformers of the semiphilanthropic craft industries encouraged homework as advantageous to mountain women; Department of Labor officials noted that it "came as a shock" to benevolent workers to find that they in fact contributed to a system that exploited the women.[13]

The Women's Bureau fought similar battles with Arthur Morgan of the TVA. Despite Morgan's commitment to the possibilities of technology in the valley, he too assigned to the mountaineers the task of preserving what he understood as vestiges of a preferred preindustrial way of life. Maintaining that one of the greatest losses of modern life was the separation of work and home, Morgan suggested that homework, which allowed children to observe adults

at work, provided a valuable means of passing along the "arts of living" by "imitation and contagion." Labor in the home, according to this view, encouraged the healthy idea of work as "a normal expression of personality and . . . an enjoyable part of a well-balanced life." Indeed, Morgan claimed, such a scenario would counteract the idea, fostered by exploitation, that "work is an evil to be reduced to the smallest possible amount." He hoped to teach such "arts of living" to mountaineers in his model community at Norris, Tennessee. Other TVA officials dismissed the dangers of homework because they conceived of handicraft production not as a substitute for, but as a supplement to, income earned through other vocations. L. L. Campbell, for example, did not support the extensive reorganization of craft production into work centers because he felt that supplementary income could be earned at home, and he simply wanted to help people sell their goods. "If they want to manufacture in their homes," Campbell remarked, "let them." The TVA, he explained, had no interest in whether or not it was better for producers to work in their "log cabins" or in work centers. **14**

By considering handicrafts as a source of supplementary income, TVA officials revealed that they were thinking in terms of a male-dominated work force. If they viewed women as homemakers first and craftworkers second, they could uphold the notion that women's craftwork was something undertaken at home, sandwiched between domestic chores as a secondary source of livelihood. Naturally, the Women's Bureau challenged this notion. Indeed, the bureau charged, women's craftwork often provided a family's single means of support, and some women made alternate arrangements for their domestic chores in order to work full time at handicrafts. Bounded by its conviction that the home was the primary sphere of mountain women, the TVA also showed little interest in providing options for industrial work to women in the valley region. The Women's Bureau urged the TVA to take into account, in its planning for new industries, the large numbers of women in the southern mountains who needed and wanted employment. But bureau officials were convinced that Arthur Morgan's interest in this area was essentially confined to handicrafts. Women on the TVA staff confided to Bertha Nienburg that the authority gave no thought to women's potential contributions to the TVA's social development

work, for example. Division heads at the TVA, they claimed, maintained an attitude of "'Why do we want women anyway?'" [15]

Despite their concerns about the potential for abuse and exploitation when handicrafts were treated as a source of income-producing labor for mountain women, the sheer volume of "woman power" in the mountains, and the skills these women possessed, induced Women's Bureau staff members to consider the possibilities of supporting an organized handicraft industry. The key to both economic success and protection of the laborers lay, bureau officials believed, in reorganizing craft production as a cooperative industry.[16] All of this cooperative's activities would be centralized except the actual production of the crafts; retail and market experts would schedule production according to their knowledge of market trends, and the cooperative would provide a centralized design service. Rural production centers, where women would work under controlled shop conditions, would eliminate opportunities to exploit craftworkers; when a producing center agreed to pay women at the minimum wage rate and could assure adherence to the necessary standards of quality, it would receive orders from the cooperative.[17]

The Women's Bureau's scheme followed a hierarchical structure in which power was concentrated at the top and the industry was thereby protected from the workers themselves. Under this plan, authority over the design, style, and production of mountain handicrafts belonged to the central mechanism of consumer culture—the market. In Nienburg's mind, the retailer was the "virtual dictator," deciding what merchandise could be profitably produced and determining trends in style and prices. Responsibility for a development plan would thus lie with a person who had considerable retail market experience. Control over designs would be wrested from the craftspeople and the local craft leaders and determined instead through consultation with New York retail experts and designers. In 1940 the Women's Bureau hired Hilda Swarthe of New York as a temporary merchandise consultant. Swarthe brought to the position her experience on the editorial staffs of *Vogue* and *Fashion Quarterly*, as a buyer for Macy's, and as the owner of an interior design firm.[18]

Nienburg sought advice about potential areas for the development of handicrafts from individuals firmly entrenched in the

marketplace. They included craft designers and teachers like textile designer Georgiana Harbeson, art connoisseurs, market specialists in household furnishings, and Richard Bach at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Nienburg also interviewed representatives of the National Retail Dry Goods Association, Macy's, Marshall Field, and other organizations and businesses regarding the application of craft skills to particular product lines such as household linens, rugs, bedding, chinaware, furniture, toys, needlework, and infants' and children's clothing. The greatest potential of handcrafted objects, the Women's Bureau learned, lay in their production and marketing as wares of "unusual distinction" that supported higher prices than machine-made or imported goods. The bureau's advisers believed, in particular, that the largest prospective markets were infants' and small children's clothing divisions in finer department stores, where distinctive handmade goods would "appeal to the mother and the grandmother" and effectively showcase "Southern Mountaineer craft skill." [19]

Nonetheless, Nienburg hoped to retain the flavor of indigenous expression. The best designs, she argued, would come from professionals capable of "developing a creative art which would be interpretive of Tennessee life and traditions." Georgiana Harbeson recommended that a resident technical director in the Tennessee Valley work with a New York designer who would periodically visit the mountains to check on style and execution. This relationship, she suggested, resembled that of Parisian designers with provincial manufacturers. In any event, the designers would remain subordinate to the merchandising experts, merely executing their "creative thoughts." The unspoken corollary to such a scheme, of course, was that the southern mountain craftspeople themselves would become virtually invisible; they would provide an anonymous skilled labor force to produce handcrafted goods designed for middle-class consumers—goods severed from their presumed historical and cultural origins.[20]

The centralized nature and membership structure of the proposed cooperative would also rob the craftspeople of any administrative power and control over production.[21] The crafts would be made in a number of small workshops located near the homes of skilled workers. The bureau hoped that existing producing cen-

ters might form a nucleus for these workshops, and that the central organization would recruit its directors from among the teachers of handicrafts in southern mountain schools and colleges. By preventing individual and cooperative producers from selling their goods directly, the cooperative could strictly control prices. Except in the cases of unusually talented individual craftworkers, membership contracts would be negotiated only with heads of production centers, whether they be a cooperative or an organization run by one individual. This hierarchical structure reflected the notion held by officials in the Women's Bureau and other government agencies that craft producers needed protection from their own misguided ideas and preferences. The problem with mountain crafts at present, as Nienburg saw it, was that "they have been developed by craftsmen expressing their own ideas, without regard to possible markets for such goods, with the result that earnings of craftsmen have been pitiably small." [22]

The central organization would be isolated from contact with individual mountain producers, who would communicate only with the production managers of their local producing centers. Thus the administration could avoid dealing with a perceived problem, namely that "there are so many women who have a high regard for their own hand work which is not shared by others; these would become a nuisance if they could contact the central exchange whenever they disliked the local or regional manager's criticism." The Women's Bureau staff believed that "the mass of mountain craftswomen need to work under constant guidance" and that only a few outstanding craftswomen "of recognized ability" should enjoy the same relationship with the regional cooperatives as did the local cooperatives or local production groups.[23]

The full-scale reorganization proposed by the Women's Bureau never happened, of course, although the federal government did sponsor the Southern Highlanders, Inc., crafts cooperative through the TVA. So what was the legacy of the Women's Bureau's study of mountain craft production? Certainly the bureau's research and efforts on behalf of mountain homeworkers, combined with the newly implemented wage-and-hour regulations under the Fair Labor Standards Act, encouraged changes among certain industries, such as candlewick tufting, and specific businesses as they

tried to comply with the laws. Perhaps more significantly, however, the bureau's entry into the debate over the meaning of mountain handicrafts and the identity of the people of the Appalachian South forced the guild and its membership to take a hard look not only at their own definitions of craft, but also at some of the social and cultural realities of life in the region.

Ultimately, however, it was the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and the Wage and Hour Division created within the Department of Labor that determined the fate of craftwork and mountain craftswomen. The new regulations affected the ways in which craft enterprises organized themselves and conducted their business. In some cases, commercial companies closed down rather than comply with the Department of Labor's efforts to apply industrial wage standards to craft producers and homeworkers. As early as 1934, guild leaders were warned by Bertha Nienburg that National Recovery Administration (NRA) codes for fair competition, setting minimum piece rates for specific fields of craftwork, would soon affect homeworkers. In fact, it was the FLSA of 1938—the product of decades-long efforts to establish protective labor laws for women and children—that finally made employers of all workers, even homeworkers, responsible for complying with the mandated wages and hours. Indeed, the act was the culmination of years of struggle to regulate homework, which was essentially seen as women's work. The FLSA actually banned homework in only a small number of industries, although it was intended to regulate such work in others. [24]

The FLSA was administered by the Wage and Hour Division, which was ultimately responsible for policing and restricting homework. In part, this meant identifying the ways in which homework violated wage-and-hour laws; the division accomplished this task by requiring both employers and homeworkers to keep records regarding hours of employment and rates of pay. Employers, of course, tried a variety of methods for circumventing or directly challenging the FLSA on matters pertaining to homework. Some designated their homeworkers as "independent contractors," others created "cooperatives," and eventually some challenged the right of the wage and hour administrator to regulate labor performed in the home. Such strategies resulted in a number of administrative bans on homework and spawned numerous court cases through-

out the 1940s. In a typical case, this one tried before a Kentucky district court in 1942, the Wage and Hour Division brought suit against American Needlecrafts, Inc., for violations of the FLSA. At issue in this case was the status of the Kentucky women who hand-quilted textiles in their homes and their relationship to the company. American Needlecrafts claimed the women were independent contractors, not employees, and thus were not subject to wage-and-hour regulations under the FLSA. The district court ruled in favor of the company, but Metcalfe Walling, administrator of the Wage and Hour Division, challenged this decision in a case that appeared before the state court of appeals a year later. Basing its decision on the meaning of "employ" as defined in the FLSA and the fact that the law explicitly defined homeworkers in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands as employees, the appeals court reversed the lower court's ruling. It was not until 1949, however, that specific homework restrictions and regulations were included in the FLSA by Congress. [25]

In the Appalachian South, the Fair Labor Standards Act did have a major impact on some commercial handicraft industries. For example, it "choked off" candlewick manufacturers in the Dalton, Georgia, area, leaving the thousands of women who had undertaken tufting in their homes without work. Some companies abandoned their use of handwork crafted at home, replacing it with machine work done in the factories. Other employers, knowing that the government interpreted cooperatively organized workers not as employees but as independent contractors exempt from the minimum wage regulations, attempted to get around the wage-and-hour legislation by forming cooperatives. Such was the case with a new "cooperative" formed by a number of Asheville businesses with only profit in mind, prompting the Department of Labor to warn against the formation of cooperatives designed to conceal true employer-employee relationships that required compliance with the thirty-cents-an-hour minimum wage.[26]

Although their constituencies were generally distinct from the commercial firms so threatened by wage-and-hour laws, the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild and Southern Highlanders, Inc., were "alarmed" that strict application of the FLSA would undermine their efforts to improve the economic and social conditions of mountaineers through craftwork. They did not see their concerns and

their constituencies' needs as similar to those of organized labor. In fact, Allen Eaton may well have been the only guild leader who advocated consulting with labor leaders in an effort to amend the wage-and-hour laws. Winogene Redding frankly distrusted organized labor and recommended seeking legal action so that "labor unions cannot get a hold on handicrafts in the country and exploit the situation." She sought to distance guild members and their concerns from the industrial labor interests of, for example, textile workers. [27]

The guild had, in fact, maintained close contact with the Women's Bureau throughout the latter agency's study of mountain craft production and subsequent discussions about the meaning and implications of homework. Bureau personnel attended some guild meetings to present their concerns and their work and to enlist the support of the organization and its members. Despite the inherent difficulty in winning over craft leaders who were devoted to the revival of traditional production methods and designs, the Women's Bureau even suggested that the guild might be persuaded to defend not only standards of workmanship, but also the standardization of wages, hours, and working conditions.[28]

Although guild leaders agreed with the spirit of the bureau's efforts and did offer some cooperation, they disagreed with the bureau's interpretation of mountain craft production and realized the potential threat of regulation to their own goals and programs. In general, the guild believed that it maintained high standards and that it offered more to its members than the wage-and-hour laws. In some respects, the guild operated tentatively behind the scenes, considering various ways to protect itself from the pending regulations as the government considered the application of wage-and-hour laws to handicrafts. In 1941, for instance, guild handweavers indicated their reluctance to forward any more information to the Department of Labor without the advice of an attorney, who, they hoped, might help the guild interpret the new laws. Winogene Redding heard a rumor that Nienburg intended to put crafts out of business in the southern mountains, but she maintained her belief in the bureau's basic good intentions.[29]

Ultimately the guild lobbied for an amendment to the wage-and-hour laws that would protect handicrafts and small rural industries. Louise Pitman suggested that the guild might sponsor a certification

system for granting exemptions to private craft organizations. Of concern to the guild were not only the various philanthropic enterprises supported by its membership, but also those members who ran small private businesses. Such businesses, the guild argued, deserved to be distinguished from the large commercial manufacturers because they offered homework to mountain women in the "same spirit" as educational institutions. They hired people who were unable to find employment in large companies, such as the handicapped, and offered instruction to their workers. In these small businesses, one guild leader claimed, craftwork was not organized on an industrial basis; it lacked the pressure of mass-production enterprises and often gave workers the opportunity to participate in a variety of production processes. [30]

The unique circumstances of rural craft production, as defended by guild representatives in meetings with the Wage and Hour Division, prompted an investigation by the Exemptions Branch. The investigators recommended special rules to govern the "rural rehabilitation handicraft center or project," allowing wages below the industrial minimum to prevent loss of employment and to recognize the social and economic services such centers provided. These regulations were never enacted, but orders came down to postpone inspections of guild and Southern Highlanders producing centers pending further study, thus effectively protecting them from the wage-and-hour regulations for a number of years. During that time, some enterprises increased the efficiency of their workers and began paying minimum wages to "normal, experienced" producers. In 1946 the Wage and Hour Division, in another attempt to apply specific regulations to such organizations, appointed an advisory committee composed of members of the handicraft field to suggest ways in which craft production by "isolated and rural peoples" could be adapted so as conform to the FLSA. The members of this advisory committee included Allen Eaton of the Russell Sage Foundation, Louise Pitman representing Southern Highlanders, Inc., Olive Dame Campbell for the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, and Isabel Ferguson of the Department of Labor. They were joined by other major players from the national craft scene such as René d'Harnoncourt of the Museum of Modern Art (formerly of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board) and Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb

of the American Craftsmen's Educational Council. The committee expressed its support of the goal to meet national minimum wage laws but recommended special consideration, regarding both wages and record-keeping rules, for groups that undertook rehabilitation work. [31]

With such heavy representation from the guild and Southern Highlanders, the committee's recommendation was hardly surprising. It reflected the guild's fundamental objection to comparing industry and its processes, methods, standards, and organization with craft production. Echoing arguments they had earlier made to the Women's Bureau, guild leaders upheld their own conceptions of the meanings and uses of crafts, asserting that industrial work and craft production were entirely distinct. They believed it was inappropriate to apply the wage-and-hour laws, meant for industry, to handicrafts, and they underscored their point by outlining the ways their goals and methods differed from those of industry: the guild sought to help mountain people and returned profits to the community by way of services; the guild prioritized the needs of individual workers over the demands of efficient production; and the guild offered a variety of social and cultural services to its producers.[32]

From the guild's perspective, the content and administration of wage-and-hour laws posed dangers not only to the business of handicrafts in the Appalachian South, but to its very spirit. The sheer volume of record keeping demanded by industrial labor legislation did not fit into the context of rural homework, Louise Pitman explained; it was alien to the rhythm of rural home life, and it demanded that the worker adapt to the rules of industry rather than adapting industrial production to the agrarian life. The guild eventually asked for limitation of the minimum wage to thirty cents an hour and exemption from record-keeping requirements for its homeworkers and pieceworkers.[33]

Allen Eaton, in particular, warned against encumbering rural handicrafts with legal and business limitations that would discourage cooperation between craftspeople and the producing centers, schools, and small businesses. The standardization that applied to urban industry, he asserted, would destroy rural crafts. Although he supported the development of small industries and some use of machines in craft production, Eaton feared that wage legislation would

promote not only increased mechanization but also standardized production that would suppress originality. For Allen Eaton ultimately believed that the notion of handicrafts as "an integral part of Highland life and culture" must provide the foundation for their development. Mountain crafts, he argued, were not just "a means of making a living"; they were also "a way of life." Eaton did not suggest that everyone in the Appalachian South should practice handicrafts, or that the use of machinery was always inappropriate. Rather, he continued to advance the idea that, in rural societies, handicrafts were pursued mostly as a supplement to agricultural labor, and therefore all craft enterprises must adjust to the rhythms of rural life. [34]

Nevertheless, the implementation of labor legislation at last forced the guild to consider handicraft production as a form of labor. It also pushed both the guild and Southern Highlanders to evaluate their relationships with the wide range of craft-producing centers in the mountain region. The possibility of exemptions from the wage-and-hour laws for handicraft agencies prompted them to consider just how their organizations were defined by their memberships.

An application for membership from the Churchill Weavers, a small family industry that used mechanized fly-shuttle looms to produce textiles, forced the guild further into the complexities of self-definition. Although the Churchills belonged to Southern Highlanders, initially they were not members of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild. When the guild leadership began discussing the possibility of admitting the Churchills to the group early in the 1940s, the concerns that were voiced reflected both the guild's commitment to protecting hand production processes and the nature of the guild as an organization with respect to possible exemptions from the wage-and-hour laws.[35]

As Winogene Redding explained it, granting guild membership to the Churchills would require a breach of guild principles of hand craftsmanship and would seriously threaten the livelihood of handweavers. Accepting a "small industry" like Churchill Weavers would place undue competition on these handweavers, forcing them into the use of fly-shuttle looms themselves. Only weavers who used handlooms had heretofore been admitted to the guild; they pro-

duced a limited quantity of goods that did not compete with industry but preserved a "traditional folk art" that would otherwise disappear in the "wonderful inventive genius in the textile world." Indeed, the Fair Labor Standards Act itself, weavers maintained, threatened the status of handweaving by its promotion of the use of the faster fly-shuttle looms. Allen Eaton, however, claimed that such mechanized looms would not be of much use to mountain craftswomen. Few, he said, had the resources to buy them or the skills to keep them in good repair. The looms were difficult to operate, and they restricted the type of goods that could be produced. [36]

But guild leaders also feared that by admitting businesses such as Churchill Weavers, they would essentially be expanding the definition of guild-sponsored handicrafts to include the products of small industries. George Bent, speaking for Berea College, for example, saw the Churchill Weavers as a "purely commercial" organization, and he feared that Berea's affiliation with the Churchills might lead to the inclusion of other industries "even more difficult to handle," leaving the college in "distasteful company." Some members suggested admitting Mr. and Mrs. Churchill not as the heads of a business enterprise but as Individual members, based on their respective mechanical and design accomplishments. This step would offer the Churchills membership but deny them voting privileges, and it would allow the guild to avoid endorsement of the business enterprise itself.[37]

The guild's board finally proposed a solution that might, it felt, preserve and protect the interests of the philanthropic enterprises and small handweaving businesses that dominated the guild. The board suggested inviting membership applications from any individual craftsperson or group of craftspeople within the southern highland area who professed a mainly "educational or cultural aim," or from small private businesses in which the craftworkers had the "opportunity to create and to carry through to completion the entire product in an essentially handicraft set-up, as distinct from a small industry or factory." Although the clause concerning the worker's completion of the entire product reflected the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement's "craftsman ideal," it in fact pertained only to the production phases of a project, for in almost all instances, the leaders of the producing centers still designed the crafts.[38]

The guild's commitment to the "craftsman ideal" and the urge to qualify its relationship to small industry had a political dimension as well. This was recognized by other craft entrepreneurs, who imagined they might find refuge in the guild from wage-and-hour laws. Sarah Karr, of the Karrosa Manufacturing Company in Tennessee, had employed mountain women to make handkerchiefs at home since 1923. Although she acknowledged that she did not operate as a philanthropic enterprise, Karr claimed that she did provide important services to these women, all of whom needed work and who lived too far from commercial centers to find other employment. Karr asked the guild for advice on how to arrange her work to avoid being subject to the wage-and-hour laws and proposed affiliating with the guild. To protect her profits, Karr tried to recharacterize her business by distinguishing, as did the guild, between crafts as art and crafts as labor. "The art is to be lost to our rural women," she asserted, "unless it can come under some other head than that of labor." [39]

Guild leaders, however, feared that granting membership to small industries could jeopardize any possible exemption from the wage-and-hour laws that the Department of Labor might grant for handicraft enterprises. In their minds, the FLSA was intended to regulate industry, as distinct from handicrafts, and this application of the law they could support. Berea College, George Bent declared, was unwilling to take any action that would exempt Churchill Weavers, an industry, from wage-and-hour regulations. In fact, Bent thought the Fair Labor Standards Act provided another reason to suppress the industrial element in Southern Highlanders, as well as an incentive to work for "genuine handicraft" that might not be bound by wage-and-hour regulations. Protecting craft producers and the guild itself from the "disadvantages" of industry required a single organization, he argued—to be formed by merging the guild and Southern Highlanders, Inc. As an independent entity, Southern Highlanders would threaten the special status of craftwork because it served both small industry and individual craftworkers. In Bent's mind, hand production separated the guild and its producers from the marketplace and the industrialized world that needed FLSA regulation.[40]

The Department of Labor, however, challenged the guild's vision of Southern Appalachian crafts as the traditional legacy of earlier

generations of mountain artisans and, thus, a link to the nation's "pioneer" past. Instead, the government urged these benevolent craft leaders to shift their focus to the positions occupied by mountain craft producers as skilled and semiskilled female laborers—most of them mothers—in a modern, industrial society. By defining craftwork and mountain craft producers in industrial and gendered terms, and by demanding that they receive the same protections extended to women factory workers, the Women's Bureau urged a reclassification of handicrafts as labor, not as a form of expressive culture pursued for pleasure or as community tradition. Government investigation revealed the contradictions in the social, cultural, and economic goals espoused by the guild and its philanthropically motivated members, and ultimately it forced them into considering their own programs and mountain producers in the context of industrial society.

By accepting the spirit of the wage-and-hour regulations and reluctantly agreeing to find ways to accommodate them, the guild's leaders acknowledged the economic and social structures within which it worked, but they continued to argue that crafts had a special place outside the boundaries of industrial capitalism. The guild's explanation of craftwork as a leisure activity, however, could not transcend those boundaries. Although the crafts-as-labor/crafts-as-leisure dichotomy formed the basis for conflicts between the guild and the Women's Bureau, both concepts were in fact the products of a "modern," industrialized culture. In an earlier Appalachia, handmade objects had resulted from the practical and spiritual needs of individuals, families, and communities. Although their makers might indeed have derived considerable satisfaction and pleasure from the careful production of these crafts, under such circumstances the practice of domestic arts could hardly be considered a form of recreation or leisure. The strict distinction between work and leisure, as a respite from labor, only acquires meaning in an industrial society wherein the spheres of work and home are widely separated. [41]

The Southern Highland Handicraft Guild and the Women's Bureau shared a common desire to increase the income-earning potential of mountain craftspeople by reorienting their products toward the needs of urban, middle-class consumers. The bureau insisted on

raising the visibility of mountain craftswomen and regulating their wages and working conditions for their own protection as industrial laborers. But the guild and Southern Highlanders fell back on the notion of tradition to sell those same goods. Their connection with tradition situated the Southern Appalachian people and their crafts in another time and place, at once outside of and inextricably bound up within the boundaries of a capitalist, corporate culture.