

Response

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In the first place, I would like to thank the three reviewers for their comments, that have clarified to me some of the meanings and implications of my own work, as well as some of the problems. Steven High is absolutely right that the story I tell is one of settlers, not of native peoples. This is in fact what I had in mind: for one thing, because that part of Kentucky was in fact not inhabited by Native Americans but only used as a hunting ground, before the settlers came; but most of all because between them and the white settlers there is a drastic breach – the history of the settlers is not a continuation of Native history but a whole other history. On the other hand, the point that white settlers were not the first human beings to set foot in Harlan County is absolutely valid and is implicit in other moments of the text. Point taken.

Janis Thissen raises very important and plausible questions about my relationship with the religious communities I describe. Of course they saw that I was not one of them – but on the other hand, after they heard me speak, they kept inviting me to their churches and asking me to testify every time. I stayed with Lydia Surgener and her family several times, too. To me, these exchanges represent these communities' ability to deal with otherness, even when it seemed problematic – a very far cry from their image as dogmatic, sectarian, and hostile to difference. The way I perceived my exchange with Brother Miller about the Roman Catholic Church was that he was puzzled at the fact that, though a “Roman,” I wasn't a Catholic, and I was not an anti-Christ anyway: exactly the experience of all those who are raised with a prejudice about some group of people, and then meet one of that group and realize they're human (I'm reminded also of the lady who asked me, “you're from across the waters, but you isn't a Russian, are you?”). Likewise, in Rev. Thee Carter's answer about whether he believes in the literal interpretation of the Bible – which, in fact, he does – I see less a defensive attitude than his willingness to engage with me on the intellectual and cultural plane. Of course I do not know how the piano player at the Macedonia Baptist Church felt about Mrs. Brown's attempts to convert him (except that he resisted it) – but while the scene was going on I had in mind Richard Wright's description of the implicit violence in similar episodes, in *Black Boy*. That a number of members of the congregation were embarrassed was confirmed by those who later assured me that “you do not often see such things in a Baptist Church.” In other words, these are stories about othernesses “smelling” each other, trying to find out what the other is like, and dealing with their (our) pre-conceived expectations. And I thank the reviewer for helping me probe deeper into their meaning.