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**Where Appalachia Went Right:
White Masculinities, Nature, and Pro-Coal Politics in an
Era of Climate Change**

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May 15, 2014



Institute for the
Study of
Societal Issues

Where Appalachia Went Right

White Masculinities, Nature, and Pro-Coal Politics in an Era of Climate Change

Gabe Schwartzman

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Undergraduate Thesis

Advisor - Professor Jake Kosek

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Introduction

During the summer of 2012, I spent many hot days conducting on-site interviews at the strip mall in Logan County, West Virginia – a place whose municipal signs warmly welcome drivers to “Coal Country.” The strip mall, including a Walmart Super-Center and a cinema, is located on a former surface mine site. Outside the Burger King, I approached two men wearing the tell-tail fluorescent coal mining safety stripes – the modern miners’ uniform. “You’re one of them environmentalists aren’t you?” The two men used the more polite term, ‘environmentalist,’ opposed to the more common ‘treehugger.’ It was a hard, and loaded, question for me to answer. I told them I was “for jobs,” and that I was interested in hearing both sides: Pro-Coal and environmentalist. They obliged.

The men worked as surface miners for Alpha Natural Resources, the largest coal company in the region, which bought the infamously unsafe, union busting, Massey Energy, in 2010. These men spoke highly of Alpha, and of their jobs, and especially of the practice of surface mining – what environmentalists call mountaintop removal (and here I call mountaintop mining). These miners also told me that if President Barack Obama were re-elected it would be the end of coal, meaning devastation for the region.

As we stood and talked for an hour the men became a little more open. “Look, we’re good Christian men. We provide for our families. We provide for our community. We keep places like this Burger King going.” The younger one chimed in, “I’ve seen this man in Church lay down a hundred dollar bill. On the table. And say ‘here, it’s yours.’” The older came back, “Do you think I have a savings account? No. I spend everything I earn, every month, or my wife does. We support this community”(Logan 7/18/12). Even so, one explained that his contract was up in two months, and that he did not know what he was going to do, but he probably would try for something outside the coal industry.

As the July sun sunk behind the mountains the miners and I parted, them going to their families

as I, in a borrowed truck, headed back to the small town of Blair, down the road and over Blair Mountain from the county seat of Logan County.

During the summer of 2012 I lived in Blair, spending most my time I was not at the strip mall or Logan Courthouse in that little disappearing town. Blair came into existence as a coal mining town somewhere around 1905, part of the process that transformed Central Appalachia into a coalfield between 1890 and 1920. I had first come to Blair two years prior to spend a summer as an archeological research assistant - Blair is the site of the largest armed insurrection in the United States, next to the US Civil War, and part of the West Virginia mine wars, when unionization brought blood to the coalfields of southern West Virginia between 1913 and 1921. The area therefore boasted one of the largest contingents of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) from the 1930s until the 1990s. Blair was always a small town, but since the 1940's and 50's mechanization has displaced hundreds of thousands of workers from the Central Appalachian mines. The latest form of mechanization has been mountaintop mining, a mining practice that now surrounds Blair, physically and politically. Through the process Blair's population has dwindled: once several thousand in the 1940s, 700 in 1979, and today, between 40 and 80.¹

However, despite decreased employment in the mines, and increased impacts from mountaintop mining, many people in Blair are reluctant to say that they oppose the industry, and even less oppose the mining of coal outright. Even so, Blair stands out as a bastion of opposition to mountaintop mining, particularly in the “pro-coal” hotbed of Logan County, as many people have critiques of that particular type of mining and vocally denounce the modern coal companies, as RJ does. “Cause, West Virginia is coal. But not mountaintop coal in my book”(Blair 7/15/12).

People in Blair find themselves in a delicate position, in the middle of a conflict between two camps: one filled with neighbors and out-of-region activists opposed to mountaintop mining, and the

1 Burgess, “Blair, West Virginia.”

other with a recently mobilized pro-coal constituency. Many people in the surrounding towns and in the region at large take part in pro-coal political mobilizations. Logan County is one of the epicenters of support for the coal industry, actively opposed to environmental regulation. After four years, a vast majority of people in the region, from my experience, identify as pro-coal, even in Blair. In this work I ask how people in Blair, Logan County, and the Central Appalachian coalfields, have come to vocalize their support for the coal industry in such a public and political fashion.

To me, it is counter-intuitive, perhaps unlikely, that people would be active supporters of an industry that disassembles the mountains they live between, and one that some residents and scholars credit with keeping their region economically depressed.² Furthermore, through collecting 20 oral histories with residents and former residents in Blair I found that many people had long family histories of union activity and resistance to the coal industry.

I arrived in southern West Virginia in 2009 as an activist trying to stop mountaintop mining, and the miners and families that so passionately counter-protested my presence did not make sense to me. In this work I try to make sense of those peoples' position, and perhaps, therefore, look back on my own position. I have, in the years since 2009, found that many people in the coalfields see the coal industry as a way to provide for their families and live what they see as the good life – to have a house, cars, trucks, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). In the last 30 years the coal industry has represented itself, and residents have come to see the industry, as the only way to access that way of life. Popular and powerful conceptions of poverty and the environment in the United States have pushed coalfield residents towards supporting the coal industry, seeing no better option. Important in understanding this transition is a simultaneous shift: from majority support for Democratic presidential candidates to Republican presidential candidates in the last decade.

This work approaches explaining this cultural, political and economic positioning first from

2 Billings and Blee, *The Road to Poverty*.

large, regional-scale histories that individuals in the coalfields are situated in. Then I look at the politics of coal, examining how individuals in Logan County and Blair talk about coal, electoral politics, mountaintop mining, and environmentalism. I end looking at physical practices of land use and consumption of goods, and conceptions of nature, particularly in emergent practices in the coalfields, using such practices as indicative of new ideologies and identities. To begin, what is mountaintop mining?

Mountaintops in Coal Country

Logan is located in southwestern West Virginia, and has been producing coal in some capacity since the 1860s.³ Logan, and the surrounding counties down into Kentucky and Virginia, constitutes a coalfield. Mountaintop mining is changing the coalfields landscape, literally creating hundreds of acres of new ecological land formations on former surface mine sites. An estimated 11.5% of the region's forests have been “degraded” as a result of mountaintop removal, an area larger than Delaware.⁴ Furthermore, the process appears to have adverse health effects for communities nearby, and has driven people out of communities, whether because the coal company bought their land or because people, like Tamzy, a 90 year old who was raised in and lived in Blair, would not suffer the stress.⁵ “I'd be up in Blair right now if it wasn't for the blasting in there, tearing everything up”(Hewitts 8/5/12). Tamzy, however nice, was very reluctant to do an oral history. My research partner and I had met her at a family reunion in Blair, where her entire extended family had lived and now is spread around the region. Without knowing exactly what we were after, she was very defensive about mining. She left Blair because of the surface mining, but made sure to hammer home her support for coal: “I'm for the coal miners, I'm not for none of this stuff that's goin' on now” (Hewitts 8/5/12). Tamzy has reconciled

3 “West Virginia Historic Coal and Coke Production.”

4 “Mining the Mountains”.

5 Hendryx, “Personal and Family Health in Rural Areas of Kentucky With and Without Mountaintop Coal Mining.”

mountaintop mining with her support for the coal industry.

The first time I witnessed mountaintop mining I was helping with a protest in 2009, perched on a ridge, freezing in the cold fall night. I watched the bright dots move around the landscape, nearly a mile away still able to hear the beeps and rumbles, a dull roar. As the sun rose, large machine bodies filled in around the lights, dust bringing haze around the shimmering opening in the mountain. The machines had cut a ledge into the ridge, and presently appeared to be working on one cliff – a high-wall, as it is termed. As the day went on and the bulldozers moved piles of rocks, the dragline, which dwarfed all the other machines with its huge crane and house-sized shovel, moved piles of blacks and browns, billowing clouds of dust with every drop it made. The end-loaders picked up the piles and put them in the trucks, which then moved them off down off the ledge, one leaving the sightline only to see another one appear, the small army of vehicles moving methodically, over and over again. On top of one of the high walls I could see a series of what appeared from a distance to be oversized gopher holes, with a pile of dirt outside of each, all lined up in several rows. A truck with what I learned later was a hose pulled up to these holes. About an hour later I heard a siren, and the mine site seemed to pause, everything stopped moving, and then a blast shoot the entire ridge. The cliff lifted, and then fell in a cloud of dust. As the dust settled, I could see black shining through the browns and grays.

I met Barry in the summer of 2012. He was the neighbor to the museum and community center my research partner and I were working out of. He is a retired coal miner, and life-long resident of Blair, except the few years he served in the Air Force. His house and property were immaculately kept, well put together, the lawn mowed weekly, and in the evenings he would often return from taking his ATV out for a ride in the hills or up to his father's place, and we would chat. "They're mining five different directions on top of the mountains around here" (Blair 7/11/12).

Blair exemplifies the thousands of communities around surface mines in Central Appalachia – yet it is important to note that other coalfield communities, like the city of Logan, are not directly under mine sites. All of Blair's water is likely contaminated (no one has yet to do a conclusive survey and the

government tests for bacteria only), well water in peoples' taps come from groundwater, dug shallow after blasting broke deep aquifers. Surface water penetrates wells, bringing selenium, manganese, and other heavy metals off the mine sites.

RJ moved to Blair when a surface mine opened up behind his childhood home a few miles down the road. He moved to Blair, working on the surface mine above his home, soon realizing that the mines would impact Blair too. He became a vocal opponent to mountaintop mining in retirement. "They shouldn't do this to nobody's community." Sitting in an air-conditioned room, both of us drenched in sweat from the July heat, RJ sat down and gave me his life story, making sure to convey his criticism of mountaintop mining and its supporters. "They're gonna wake up and not have clean drinking water. What bothers me is not having water in West Virginia"(Blair 7/15/12).

Through the 1990's Arch Coal Company offered to buy most people's homes, and many 'sold-out,' as Tamzy did. "When there is blasting back in the holler where you live, and coal dust a-flyin, and you can't keep nothing clean, well you might as well get out"(Hewitts 8/6/12). Tamzy left a three two brothers and a sister in town who did not sell. For a decade they were subject to constant dust, rocks rolling down onto properties, constant heavy machinery sounds and lights, while trucks overloaded with coal barreled down the two lane main-street. While the dust has stopped as much of the mining has moved from the ridge directly above Blair, the effects linger, with colorful discharges into creeks and orange stains coming from tap water.

However, many individuals and institutions in the coalfields frame mountaintop mining as "mountaintop development." This discourse plays into centuries old narratives that the mountains and their peoples are backwards – held back in time - because of the isolated mountains they live in.⁶ Various people I interviewed told me that mountaintop mining creates more flat land for economic development. Others in the coalfields, a minority, do not see mountaintop mining so positively.

However, most people I encountered, even those who opposed mountaintop mining identified with coal

6 Campbell and Sharp, *English folk songs from the southern Appalachians*.

on a personal level and expressed a belief that the coal industry was and will be a necessary part of development and progress in the coalfields.

“I was always a union coal miner, my dad was a union coal miner. There was three generations of us coal miners you know, and I'm for coal 100%, but this mountaintop mining... I think that's a dreadful way to mine coal.” With our sweat-drenched t-shirts turning cold from the air conditioner RJ told me about the thick piles of dust that would cover his roof and fill up his windowsills in the early 2000s. Even still, he does not see any other way outside of coal. “Coal can probably be made clean you know, I don't know. Cause I would hate to see all those jobs go down the road you know”(Blair 7/18/12).

Blair as Time and Space

Bill and Jean's people have lived around Blair for many generations. The couple now runs the last church in Blair, where there once were at least six. After visiting the Church of God a few Sundays, and helping out around the property, they invited us over one morning to talk about Blair. On a June morning, in the living room Bill built around half a century ago, they started talking about their roots back to the British Isles. “I guess Ferdinand had a property up there [*pointed up Kelley hollow*] that was called... called Abner's territory.” I asked Jean if her grandfather mined coal. “My grandpa did. I don't know about grandpa Abner, they were farmers I figure. Grandpa Ferdinand was, that was great-grandpa, and great-great-grandpa was William Edward. So I don't know what those two grandpas done unless they were... They were probably farmers and saw loggers up in that mountain, that holler...”(Blair 6/15/12). Bill and Jean pray for jobs, which means mining jobs, however wicked they find mountaintop mining or the coal industry.

“My granddaddy came to this country in nineteen and five. He was a union coal miner and came to be a foreman eventually at a few mines up Spruce River, right here”(Blair 7/15/12). RJ's grandfather came as an Eastern European immigrant to a land that was in transition, in the midst of

turning an agricultural landscape into one dotted with coal company owned towns and filled with a wage laboring coal mining population. That transition has come to define the landscape as a coalfield.

The physical mountains in this region do not differ from those of the Northern and Southern areas. The main defining feature of Central Appalachia - from West Virginia to Tennessee as the federally coordinated Appalachian Regional Commission defined it during the War on Poverty, - is that the majority of coal mining occurs in this part of the Appalachian mountains, namely because of the large coal reserves. Another feature that defines the Central Appalachian landscape is the highest rates of poverty in the mountainous area.⁷

On a hot, muggy, summer afternoon, an eighty-year-old retired coal miner recounted where every swimming hole had been in the town of Blair, West Virginia. “We used to jump off that train trestle down into the water... that hole was real deep. Lost one of my boys in that hole up Kelly *holler*.¹ Drowned”(6/11/12). During the summer of 2012 despite a record heat wave, I saw no one swimming in the river, nor did there seem to be any deep holes. In the oral histories I conducted in Blair, most people told stories of past swimming holes. I heard mostly of a golden past, one filled with baseball, kids playing, and churches. I heard about 'beer-joints,' and fighting, and courting. When I asked people what happened, generally people responded with “People left.” The water holes? “Gone”(6/11/12 Blair).

The water holes, although I was never given a straight answer, have been filled in – sediment from mountaintop mining – and the creeks have been dismantled. Convincing a people with a long history of ties to this land that it is progress to remove a large area of a mountain in order to mine a coal seam and then leave a rocky, grassy, 'reclaimed', expanse requires a certain, and very telling, meaning in the landscape.

The histories of the people of Appalachia, many of who, like Jean, have claims to upwards of eight generations of people living on their land, have shaped people's political positions. Many people rely on forests for supplements to incomes, selling forest products or collecting resources: firewood for

⁷ Ibidem.

winter heating, hunting for meat, herbs for medicine. Almost everyone I talked to told me stories of using the woods, the hills, as a backyard – Delmar left Blair to go to college and never moved back: “The hills was our backyard. I mean we spent every weekend in them, playing, building cabins, swimming, camping. We’d leave in the morning and come back the next day”(Blair 8/2/12).

Furthermore, most men own ATVs, which they rely on to access the hills, both a form of entertainment as well as access to the hills – essentially a commons. This connection and identity with the land are part of why people’s support for the coal industry is surprising to me, which points to the importance of constructions of nature for this story, as perhaps, are the recent politics of the region.⁸

Politically, West Virginians voted, very consistently, for the Democratic Party, in local and national elections from 1932 until 2000.⁹ Since then the state has swung hard Right on presidential elections and a shift Right appears brewing in the state legislature and perhaps Senator race. Structural changes in the political economic system of Appalachian coal mining since 1980 have been at play in the changing politics, including an increased amounts of mountaintop coal mining, as opposed to underground mines, and the end of strong union politics. However, a cultural repositioning has also occurred, in the context of the rise of a Left-wing climate change establishment in the Democratic Party, and in relation to new market doctrines that have become ingrained in coalfield lifestyles since the 1980s.

Literature Review

When I arrived in the coalfields I came with the idea that the coal company was keeping people oppressed, and in some fashion I was there to join the liberation struggle. I have since revised that notion – through years of study, reading and reflection I hold that the coal company is in a hegemonic relationship with the coalfield residents, however that relationship of power is much more complex

8 Cronon, “The Trouble With Wilderness.”

9 “David Leap’s Atlas of Presidential Elections.”

than I initially imagined. This work asks how the coal industry constructs consent to control the local politics and economy.

This work does not explain why mountaintop mining occurs. That is a different set of questions, ones that I find Rebecca Scott's, *Removing Mountains* to have tackled quite well.¹⁰ Rebecca Scott engages with the fraught identities and conflicts over mountaintop mining in the communities of southern West Virginia, dealing with the subjectivities, especially in the national interaction, which created the modern coalfields. Scott's engagement with the “cultural interactions of race, gender, and nature in the Appalachian coalfields,” brings a discussion of the creation of identity.¹¹ Her work continues to give me insight, especially informing this work’s understanding of the ATV and the conception of mining as “real work,” - masculine, family-waged, work.

Scott also engages with the notions of the Appalachian body as sacrificable, citing Valerie Kuletz. Crucial to the landscape of Central Appalachia is the idea of *sacrifice zones* - spaces that fit into a national imaginary as areas that are sacrificable for the greater good (see Kuletz's work on Southwest deserts and nuclear tests).¹² Appalachia fits well within this framework, a complex and nuanced process, and one that requires Appalachians’ own imaginative work, seeing themselves as sacrificial – sacrificing themselves and their nature - for nation and progress.¹³

This sacrifice is explained in the narrative that I often heard, from gas station attendants to miners to county officials: “coal keeps the lights on.” A post on a pro-coal Facebook group tags a photo of early 20th century miners “Heroes of ages past”(Citizens for Coal 1/13/12). America needs coal and, as per the bumper sticker, “If you don't like coal, don't use electricity.” Such a conception of their nature and body requires, as Scott has argued, a process of subject making that puts people in the place of seeing themselves as subjects of poverty underdevelopment, and their wild and undeveloped lands as

10 Scott, *Removing Mountains*.

11 Scott, *Removing Mountains*: 20

12 Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert*.

13 Barnes, “Ecoadventures in the American West.”

part of that condition. For generations coalfield peoples have known that they are seen as ‘hillbillies’ and ‘white-trash’ from outside the region. As Scott argues, “this marked whiteness is problematic,” Appalachia seen as a place apart, and “disidentification hides the essential role of the place in the national and global system.”¹⁴

In the summer of 2012, Leroy, a man who lives in Blair, and I were looking for construction supplies. In the local construction supply store Leroy was haggling: “Well, I hope that Obama don't win. I mean, I never voted for him”(Logan 7/14/12). Earlier that day Leroy had said that he was one of the only persons in Blair who would admit that he voted for Obama, although certainly most were Democrats. Leroy never worked in the mines, and has served as a nationally outspoken voice against mountaintop mining, although he generally keeps his head down near home. We got the discount on the construction supplies. In 2012, 63 percent of West Virginias voted for Mitt Romney while 52 percent of the state is registered Democrat, 29 percent Republican.¹⁵

Many authors, mostly from the Left such as Thomas Frank - *What's the Matter With Kansas*, - have recently been trying to figure out why poor, working class, white Americans are swayed by the politics of the Republican Party. The general consensus seems to be that big money and corporations are lying to poor and uneducated *Americans*,ⁱⁱ and they believe the lies. The argument goes that these lies have become more compelling over the last several decades, as neoliberal economic doctrines become naturalized and while hot-button issues, like abortion, prayer in school, and women's rights are used to entice the religious.¹⁶

When I ask friends and colleagues about this work's question, most respond – “well its about jobs, yea?” On one level, I do find that this is very much about people wanting jobs to live well. However, saying that if these people were in a different financial situation they might think differently

14 Scott, *Removing Mountains*: 34

15 “David Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections.”

16 Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*.

is an oversimplification, and furthermore, perhaps gives too much credit to employers' power over these workers. I examine what 'being about jobs' means - why these peoples' jobs, why now? I find Geoff Mann's analysis of Thomas Frank, Barbara Fields, and Stuart Hall very insightful:

At best, these analyses tacitly posit that if not for its ideological or material victimization by capital, the working class would "naturally" be left or socialist or at least anti-capitalist. Yet this is a purely speculative proposition. History is full of radical workers, but arguably no more than it is full of reactionary workers, too. And in either case, whether working-class conservatism is justifiable or not, few if any of its "left" analysts would accept the political supremacy of reactionary workers on the grounds that its class-basis rendered it legitimate.¹⁷

Mann presents this conundrum and leaves it unanswered. I agree with Mann, that as a Leftist and an activist for social justice, I will not come to a position where I find supporting mountaintop mining permissible, however understandable these peoples' position in support of it is. I was an activist against mountaintop mining and am now analyzing those people who were on the other side of the fence from me at protests. However, I find that those experiences have given me a perspective on the environmental conflict that I doubt I would have otherwise gotten, and have compelled me to really understand pro-coal identity.

I see pro-coal positions as situated knowledges, as per Donna Haraway - that we know what we know from the position where we stand, and that others have their own situation. For example, I need to know the situation of the coal miner in Central Appalachia to understand his decision to vote for the Republicans. Similarly, I have formulated opinions and stance on mining from my situation, and I need to know that when I talk about the politics of the coalfields, because I imbue meaning in these realities, and the miner imbues his own meaning. Yet, there are still realities we all contend with differently, such as higher death rates around mountaintop mining communities.¹⁸ That difference is what I propose to understand. It is not about how to get people to see *one* reality, but instead understand why people in the coalfields and I see the same reality differently. "Feminist objectivity is about limited location and

17 Mann, "Who's Afraid of Democracy?"

18 Hendryx, "Personal and Family Health in Rural Areas of Kentucky With and Without Mountaintop Coal Mining".

situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting the subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.”¹⁹ Donna Haraway is pointing to a way forward with Mann’s predicament: there is no *right* way for workers to behave, so let us understand their situation and perhaps that will shed light on my own situation, and perhaps shed light on bridging the gap in understanding and dealing with poverty and issues of environmental injustice.

Therefore, I approach the question of poor working class white voters differently from Mr. Frank and cohort: yes, the coal industry controls the economy, people need jobs, and therefore at this point people find their interests for economic security tied up in those of the coal industry. But, I understand people as acting in their perceived best interest, - making sense to themselves - dissecting interests as not simply about benefits and costs, but as culturally informed and ideologically constituted.²⁰ Therefore, in understanding pro-coal ideology, I look to identities in the coalfields, and their relationships with political economic systems – subjectivities around the local political economy and the masculine, family-waged, coal miner. I look at subjectivities of a whiteness that Appalachian difference marks, troubles, and I look to consumerism and class based value systems, and sacrifice for the nation's progress and development to see the articulation of a pro-coal ideology. Ideologies do not simply dupe people. We are all ideologically constituted. People make rational decisions about the options that they have, options which capital in the coalfields has made very limited. Furthermore, those decisions are culturally mediated through the processes of race, class, gender, and religion, all around the position of conservatism in the United States today in relation to people in the coalfields.

To understand these processes I use Stuart Hall's approach to articulation and Michel Foucault’s notion of subjectivities. Hall brilliantly writes on Thatcherism in the British 1970s:

“Class is not the only determinant of social interest (e.g. gender, race). More important, interests are themselves constructed, *constituted*, in and through the ideological process. What is more, social collectivities have more than one set of interests and interests can be and frequently are

19 Haraway, “Situated Knowledge.”

20 Hall, “Toad in the Garden.”

contradictory, even mutually exclusive.”²¹

Interests are mediated through symbolic and materially important cultural signifiers – out of ideology. Ideology, as per Terry Eagleton, ought to be understood as involving beliefs: “the medium in which men and women fight out their social and political battles at the level of signs, meanings and representations.”²² At root in a pro-coal ideology are the dynamics of the coalfield's political economic relationship to the nation, and the resonating identities therein - Appalachian difference.

Therefore, I point to subjectivities in the coalfields as the explanatory factor in the electoral transition and in the alignment of coalfield residents with the industry. Masculinities around coal mining and a troubled identity around whiteness - fear of the designation 'white trash,' and welfare rolls - place the modern coal company, as the purveyor of monetary success, as the ally of the Appalachian coalfield subject. Those aspects of Appalachian difference have been part of a long relationship of 'othering' from the 'unmarked' white American, out of a certain colonial relationship, and one that speaks to the way that different cultural groups are dealt with in the United States.

One of the only people I met in Blair who was still an avid Democrat stepped into the barbershop directly after me. In his “UMWA for Obama” cap he began spouting off to the barber. “These fucking people have no idea what is going to happen to them. They don't know what the healthcare law is. They are gonna be real sorry when they lose their social security. These people are fucking idiots”(Blair 7/18/12).

I certainly understand his frustration, but power works in dynamic and complex ways. The issue is not as simple as people, miners, being able to have power with the union and without it they are vulnerable to the will of the company – the union had its own complex power dynamics with the membership. The question of how power works is an age-old question, one which John Gaventa theorized about, asking “Why, in a social relationship involving the domination of a non-elite by an

21 Hall, “Toad in the Garden:” 45

22 Eagleton, *Ideology*.

elite does challenge to that domination not occur?”²³ Gaventa gave explained dynamics of power and powerlessness with an examination of inequality and the identity of the non-elites in such unequal relationships.²⁴ Gaventa's examination of power relations have been seminal for all the literature about Appalachian power dynamics ever since. In more recent theories, I have gained much from Shannon Bell's argument, which comes out of sociology, arguing that pro-coal mobilization has been a product of the coal industry's cultural projects to solidify a dying industry into the identities of communities and people.²⁵ I weigh in on both Scott's rich and textured approach to unpacking the Central Appalachian identity in the context of mountaintop removal and Bell's structured and pointed research into the cultural influences on coalfield *community economic identity*, the two authors I find myself most in conversation with.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Stories

What follows are the stories coming out of deindustrialization – told from, and ultimately important to, a present where the coal industry has cut jobs and seems to be threatening to disappear altogether, as Bell and York argue.²⁶ Broken into three parts, I begin with a history, examine how people talk about ideologies, and then analyze how subjectivities are practiced in the coalfields.

The first section provides a historical overview of the coalfields. The history situates the Rightward shift in a meaningful past - historical processes of political economy and culture situate the coalfield residents in their current political economy and environmental conflict. Since the beginning of the coalfields existence the coal industry has relied on a large, wage dependent population, a process witnessed today. I start with the agrarian past of the 1870s, when central Appalachia produced stock and agriculture for export, mostly a self-sufficient economy. I move through the industrial transition,

23 Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*.

24 Ibidem.

25 Bell and York, “Community Economic Identity.”

26 Ibidem.

unionization, mining mechanization, President Johnson's War on Poverty, the rise of surface mining, then mountaintop mining. I also look towards national processes in and amongst this localized history, particularly the history of environmentalism and conservatism that give context for political decisions and ideology.

The second section looks to how these processes have constituted ideology in the present. I argue that people in the coalfields reacted to the US left's mainstream adoption of climate change as a platform, deploying messages that overtly opposed coal. First this section looks at electoral data as quantitative and measurable moments of political transition. Then, I examine the pro-coal movement's history, the institutions at play, and I look at social media representations to see how individuals frame their ideology – what they are fighting for, and why. I then look at the environmental conflict, as the source of this new ideology, looking at the history and the practice of environmentalism in the coalfields, followed by a discussion of individuals' social media representations as part of coalfield environmental groups.

The third section looks at how subjectivities work to constitute ideology – I argue that new practices of masculinity and whiteness have been part of the changing politics in this space. ATV use, as a recent technology, maps power in the coalfields - coal mining masculinities, and identities of a troubled whiteness of Appalachian difference, are critical to understanding why people today adhere to the pro-coal ideology. I look at how pro-coal individuals employ discourses^{iv} of modernization and development, in the context of race and gender, to discipline subjects into an imagined unmarked white coalfield resident, whose identity fits with middle-class paradigms. I turn to the ATV to see how new geographies of masculinity are embodied in new developing tourist economies – the ATV becomes a consumable for a sport rather than a tool for accessing supplements to income, a process that speaks to a new identity people ascribe to.

In this work I rely on the relationships of kindness and trust that I have built with many people in the coalfields, especially with those who gave oral histories. Therefore, I have changed the names of

people and some places to keep peoples' identities hidden.

Throughout, I find Stuart Hall's approach central to making sense of coalfield politics.

“The first thing to ask about an “organic” ideology is that, however unexpectedly, succeeds in organizing substantial sections of the masses and mobilizing them for political action, is not what is *false* about it but what is *true*. By 'true' I do not mean universally correct as a law of the universe but “makes good sense,” which – leaving sciences to one side – is usually quite enough for ideology.”²⁷

27 Hall, “Toad in the Garden:” 46

In a Land Before and After Coal **Situating the History of the Central Appalachian Coalfields**

“We’ve been here since before the coal company.” Bill Marcum

“But will it [Blair] be here after them?” Denise Marcum (Bill’s daughter)

Introduction

Atop of Kelly Mountain, in Southern West Virginia, a man in orange reflective stripes operates a drilling machine, boring holes dozens of feet into a rock shelf. Another man operates a truck that fills the hole with explosive charges from a mechanical hose. They move their equipment away, sit back, and after safety experts have given clearance, ignite the charges. Several tons of rock shelf are lifted into the air for a second, only to tumble back down, lying on the ground of a mine site, some 150 feet below the ground level of years ago. Ten years prior, and 50 feet higher in elevation, the mountain was forested, and its springs fed a creek that ran down into the town of Blair, West Virginia.

One-hundred and forty years before that, at the close of the United States Civil War, the landscape likely looked relatively similar, covered with hardwoods – probably with a few very large trees – and clearings interspersed on the slopes of the mountain. Much of the mountain and valley below belonged either to a Hiram or Nathaniel Mullins, the first legal title holders – in 1840 - along the Spruce River, of which Kelly Mountain is one of the sources.²⁸ Likely white people farmed the land before them, only without title or without title that was granted legal, and before them, the Shawnee or to-be Cherokee used the lands as hunting grounds, perhaps even had a village. The Mullins might have grazed cattle and swine in the forest, for sale to traveling drovers, while farm family members collected non-timber forest products, such as ginseng and yellow root, for export to the global market. A few dozen acres were likely under production for corn and food crops, most of which sustained the family all year round, while the sale of a few agricultural products or small home manufactured goods

28 Logan County Deed of Sale, 1840.

provided some imported goods like oysters and iron.

We can now only imagine the Mullins' homestead, although historical research about the region makes the story quite plausible.²⁹ In reality, the true history of Kelly Mountain and its valleys may never be known, as surface mining has cleared away the physical trace.

Blair Mountain, sits next to Kelly Mountain, where thousands of spent ammunition cartridges have lain, buried in the forest, since 1921. “I can't really tell you much about it. Some stories that the old timers would tell, that my papaw would tell. About that Blair Mountain war. He was pinned down under a rock up there for about three days and he had to come out at night time, crawling down a creek. And he was shot there, at the time. I think he was about 30 years old.... My papaw come to this country around when he was ten years old....” (Blair 06/23/12).

RJ's grandfather was a coal miner who eventually came to own a few mines, along the Spruce Fork of the Coal River. RJ's father was a miner as well, and so was he, all of them along the Spruce Fork. In the late 1980s the coal company came around and told people they would buy their homes if they would agree to leave the town, telling him that they were going to start mountaintop mining behind his house. “They told me that there'd be no stripping around Blair, that I should move there. So I did. Then in '93 they started here.... It was awful. Dust everyday, noise, lights.”(Blair 6/23/12).

This section looks at the construction of the Central Appalachian coalfields. Support for the coal industry has not been a constant, and through history this period stands out in the level of vocal defense for the industry – the coal industry has become an activist cause. In the last thirty years the coal industry has decreased employment in the local economy, and the rise of pro-coal is undoubtedly a reaction to deindustrialization.³⁰ I agree with Bell and York that pro-coal mobilizations have also been a result of coal industry efforts to maintain community allegiance while decreasing employment and regional benefit. However, this section looks at what constituted deindustrialization. I argue that the

29 Pudup, “Town and Country in the Transformation of Appalachian Kentucky.”

30 Bell and York, “Community Economic Identity.”

early construction of industrial capitalism in the coalfields created a vast wage dependent labor surplus, and as labor organized and leveraged power over the companies, in the form of the unions and governmental policy, the companies restructured the industry to not need workers – mechanization.

As the coal industry decreased employment the hollows in Logan County emptied ever since, leaving a shell of a once populous place. In the midst of this depopulation came the rise of the environmental movement and the New Right. Environmentalism, in most of its forms, alienated the impoverished, working class coalfields residents, however to understand why environmentalism did not align with coalfield peoples grievances requires understanding the connection between the New Right and economic liberals, termed 'neoliberals,' such as Ronald Reagan in the late 1970s and 1980s. The New Right, with family values as its flagship, aligned with neoliberals to ideologically construe unregulated market individualism as the solution for the American people. Environmental regulation did not sit well within this framework, and in the context of that Right-wing articulation. Out of a legacy of poverty and humiliating public assistance programs the logic of the New Right and neoliberals made sense in a way that environmentalism seemed to oppose. However, union loyalties kept the coalfields voting Democrat after the 1980s, into the 1990s, until the coal industry and neoliberal policy finally did in the union.

The Agrarian Transition

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a wealth of academic research went into studying the roots of Appalachia's industrial transition. Salstrom, Billings and Blee, and Shifflett, present narratives of an internal transition that prefaced the industrial development: they relied on the data of population increase as key to their narratives of how parts of Appalachia became coalfields – families expanded while land remained constant and thus people willingly entered a system dominated by wage labor.³¹

Other scholars presented a narrative with more external impetus from the beginning of such a

31 Shifflett, *Coal Towns*; Billings and Blee, *The Road to Poverty*; Salstrom, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency*.

transition, including the role of capital and non-regional state actors in causing a crisis in agricultural society and forcing such a transition on the region such as Lewis, Waller, Banks.³²

Whether arguing for an internal or external cause, all the research on Appalachian industrialization has provided a substantial base of knowledge about the process of capitalist transitions and Appalachian history. What is clear is that the coal industry managed to debase a local population from the land, whether previously mobile or not, and brought even more people in to the region to create a saturated labor market, unable to survive without coal mining wages. The industry was forced into a relationship of negotiation with their workforce only after decades of bitter fights for unions.

Central Appalachia as a place is a construct of industrial place making – the presence of coal distinguished the space from the surrounding mountains, and the industrial space followed.³³ The region has been discussed as the United State’s first and last frontier, a borderland to the heartland, and a place where land tenure was not legally stable until the industrial transition in 1890.³⁴ Anna Tsing, in *Friction*, her discussion of uneasy capitalist development in rural Indonesia, defines frontiers as places that “create wildness so that some – and not others – may reap its rewards.... A frontier is an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet – not yet mapped, not yet regulated. It is a zone of unmapping: even in its planning, a frontier is imagined as unplanned.”³⁵ Tsing's definition helps understand the process of settlement in the mountains, and the process of industrialization that came to dominate the landscape by the turn of the twentieth century. Paul Salstrom identified the process of settlement in the Appalachian Plateau as unique from other regions of Appalachia in *Appalachia's Path to Dependency*, and described the region as a perpetual frontier until the twentieth century.³⁶ Land titles were not secure, as the process of settlement and ownership itself unclear, leaving room for large landholders

32 Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*.

33 Howell, *Culture, Environment, and Conservation in the Appalachian South*.

34 Dunaway, *First American Frontier*.

35 Tsing, *Friction*: 25-26

36 Slastrom, *Appalachia's Path to Depedency*.

and land speculation to occur throughout nearly two centuries.³⁷

Wilma Dunaway analyzes settlers as speculator capitalists in the Appalachian sub-region, using world systems theory to understand the role of Appalachian land in the global market. With vast tracts of land given as grants to royal court favorites, and then as payment for service in the American Revolution, vast amounts of land requires surveying and titling. The reality during the Appalachian frontier era was that land became the site of speculation and accumulation, people in faraway cities buying tracts and parcels, and selling when appropriate. This type of accumulation took place under conditions of an intentionally unregulated space – capitalists paid surveyors in land who took the liberty to take anyone’s land they so chose. Those who prospered were large absentee capitalists, invested in the land market and their petty capitalist employees marking the deals and holding the properties on the ground. What such frontier conditions did was create a space where “nearly half the region's households remained landless in 1860.”³⁸

This research demonstrates how the coal industry was set to hold a vast majority of land in the coalfields after the industrial transition – absentee land ownership simply transferred. It is important to note that different Appalachian regions have had different histories when coming into the industrial era – some areas have remained agrarian until the present day.

Landless people in the region were still involved in farming and home manufacturing, often in quasi-feudal relations as tenant farming families to wealthier, landed, (often) family members.³⁹ As ownership transferred to the industrialists, these relationships changed. Widespread timbering generally came first, or simultaneously with coal – people who had once practiced forest farming, grazing herds of animals in large tracts, found they were unable to do so. Farming became difficult even for landowners, as new cheap foodstuffs that the rails brought in undersold the local agricultural

37 Dunaway, *First American Frontier*.

38 Dunaway in Pudup, et al, *Appalachia in the Making*: 67

39 McKinney in *Ibdem*.

economy.⁴⁰

The coming of industry was a process that meant capitalist investment. Ronald Lewis shows in his account of timbering in the region, an industry that came hand in hand with coal, required significant infrastructural development for accumulation to begin: “Since the capital for this next level of steam-powered transportation and milling was scarce in the sparsely populated mountains, external capital investment was required, which meant absentee ownership.”⁴¹

Furthermore, local industrialists realized they needed a free labor base and capital. That process involved deliberate advertisement for disenfranchised labor in Europe – coming out of racial notions that prejudiced them against the recently freed black labor – as well as for capital investors. In such a fashion capital flowed into the Eastern Kentucky mountains to develop mining and timber industries, while laborers poured in to build the rails and then work the mines and mills.⁴² Locals soon found their former way of life impossible, and unprofitable.

Appalachian peoples had certainly been involved in trade and markets, yet the industrial transition dispossessed, “freed” in a Marxian sense, a population of people that had been in landed relationships (whether owners or not) in which they reproduced their own means of production. What occurred was the (relative) removal of access to land for a majority of the non-elites, land that had been used to produce their own subsistence. People became dependent on timber production and coal mining as their source of access to food and life necessities, through wages. Previously the market had been for luxuries and non-necessities, but the end of the 1920s tied the majority of Appalachian Plateau peoples to a wage.⁴³

The power dynamics in the transition are more complex than simply the removal of non-elite agrarian peoples from land, and tying them to a wage for sustenance. Coal mining, which became the

40 Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Landscape*.

41 Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Landscape*: 9

42 Pudup, *Appalachia in the Making*.

43 Slastrom, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency*.

overwhelmingly dominant employment in the Plateau by 1920, was the site of male-bodied labor.⁴⁴

Silvia Federici's account of women in the transition to capitalism gives a good framework to analyze the changing role of access for Appalachian women, actors often neglected in accounts of this transition. Federici notes that in a feudal system, women's "domestic activities [such as reproduction of the workforce, gardening, farming] were not devalued and did not involve different social relations from those of men, as they would later, in a money-economy, when housework would cease to be viewed as real work."⁴⁵ Women in the Appalachian transition became restricted from spaces they previously were in control, and lost significant access to act without a male-figure.^y

In coal towns, companies allowed, and even encouraged, miners and their families to grow large gardens. Salstrom quotes several West Virginia miners: "We needed a garden. We didn't always have enough [money] for food even when I was working."⁴⁶ That work falls into Federici's category of 'not real work,' uncompensated through market means, and became the domain of women, whereas farming had previously been inclusive of both gender roles.

Another often-overlooked changing actor in this dynamic has been the ecological system – nature. Polanyi's wrote: "Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed."⁴⁷ The role of industrial extraction on the landscape of the Appalachian Plateau was striking, and such a legacy has remained to the present. The self-regulating market is itself a fiction, as per Polanyi's thesis, as shown in the counter-movements against the degradation in the Appalachian hills – the federal government created Monongahela National Forest in 1920 and the Great Smokey Mountain National Park in the 1930s, to spare the waterways of the Eastern flowing rivers.⁴⁸ Yet this process of the commodity frontier had dramatic effects before the federal government and general common sense

44 Williams, *Appalachia: A History*.

45 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*: 25

46 Salstrom in Pudup, et al. *Appalachia in the Making*: 91

47 Polanyi, *Great Transformation*: 76

48 Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Landscape*.

halted its move forward.

Discussions of the need to modernize were also ever present in these years. Altina Waller's study of feuding in the Appalachian region is extremely useful for the evidence it provides of cultural depictions and discourse around Appalachia during the 1870s- 1920s. She describes how accounts of feuding, backcountry, hillbilly people only arrived in publications like the *New York Times* and *Time* in the 1880s.⁴⁹ Previously, discussion of violent domestic disputes was present in regions like the South, Corsica, Italy, and the Scottish Highlands, although most of those conflicts were amongst elites. Her research shows how at the time when frontier capitalism was entering the Appalachian Plateau, places such as Eastern Kentucky and Southern West Virginia were being described in the light of pre-modern, savage, wild, and violent. "In 1885, however, the reporting of feud violence changed dramatically as the mountains and impoverished mountaineers began to be singled out as the unique locus of family feuding."⁵⁰ The only solution presented for the violent, wild people, was to bring the railroad and all the modern progress and civilization held therein – the company towns not only tied people to a wage but gave them access to new consumer goods and consumer markets.⁵¹

That new class structure serves as a rupture from previous dynamics of the Appalachian Plateau, yet not all access regimes changed. Those elites who had accessed substantial economic and political power before were often the local elites working for or with outside capital. Families that had controlled large landholdings during the agrarian period were certainly able to make good on their frontier investments, as were those capitalists who moved in during the 1870's and 1880's and partnered with local elites, especially those in politics and regulatory positions. The landless peoples and poorer farmers were generally the people who had few options but to mine coal. The coming of the industry created a new social paradigm - class and gender dynamics whose forms have remained constant into

49 Waller, *Feud*.

50 Waller in Pudup, et al. *Appalachia in the Making*: 356

51 Shifflet, *Coal Towns*.

the present.

The Mine Wars

Hershel Aleshire, an eighty-two year old coal miner sat in his Blair, WV, kitchen as I pestered him with questions about his past in Blair. “When I was young I didn't say nothing about that stuff. I should'a asked questions of the old people, I should'a asked a lot of questions about stuff, but that didn't concern me at that time”(Blair 6/24/12). He did not know anything about the battle that had taken place on the land he had lived on his entire life, barring the 3 days he moved to Cleveland. All over Blair, when asked about Blair's history very few people brought up the battle that had occurred there. They would talk about what their grand parents had done, how they came there, but few mentioned the week, back in 1921 when some portion of the 10,000 strong miner's army used Blair as a base camp in their thwarted assault on the city of Logan, a company stronghold on the other side of Blair Mountain. Furthermore, very few people knew anything about it when asked, other than that it had happened and that there was now a controversy over it.

That controversy, a political issue that residents, labor and environmental activists have actively campaigned around for near a decade, is about the designation and the use of land upon which the battle occurred. Labor historian academics, cultural heritage preservationists, some nearby residents, and anti-mountaintop removal activists have been attempting for years to make the Blair Mountain battlefield a site in the National Register of Historic Places. That institutional, and Federally recognized designation, would protect the archeological and physical site from disturbance as well as make the area a potential nationally funded, recognized, and controlled space.

However, the area of the battle remains undesignated, except for a national historic landmark highway marker explaining the battle. A major reason for attempting to register the mountain is that several mining companies now have surface mine permits that would potentially remove all the topsoil, and artifacts therein, and leave reclaimed, rocky, grasslands. In 2005 the site was placed on the

National Register of Historic Places. In 2006 a lawsuit brought by Arch Coal used a survey showing less than the required amount of local land owner's support for the inclusion of the site on the Register, and the site was removed from the register. Activist organizations claimed that the survey was flawed, non-inclusion, and potentially a piece of fraud, however the courts have refused renewed attempts to place the site on the Register.⁵²

The battle was part of what has been termed the West Virginia Mine Wars, over the ability to organize unions in the mines. They began in 1912 with the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strikes from 1912 to 1913, where striking miners relocated to mountain camps. A series of gunfights with company-hired gunmen ensued, including the use of an armored train that peppered miners' camps with bullets. Violence continued for the better part of the decade, including a shoot out in Matewan, WV, between local police with deputized miners and coal company-hired Baldwin Felts agents. The Sheriff of Matewan, Sid Hatfield, on route to a trial for murdering the Felts agents, was assassinated on the courthouse steps. His death, and the build up of violence in general, sparked a mobilization of union miners in the central-south coalfields, around Charleston as well as far away places, resulting in the rallying of an estimated 10,000 armed union miners. After the UMWA officials gave speeches not condoning the march and left the state, the loosely organized army, under what appears as anarchist principles, marched to liberate the southern coalfields and bring the union to the miners in Mingo County. A hired army of Baldwin Felts agents and deputized towns people met them at Blair Mountain, numbering a few thousand, and four days of fighting followed. The Federal Government sent in troops and the miners went home.^{53 vi}

“My grandfather fought in the war of Blair Mountain and I don’t want to see it destroyed. I want to see it preserved and well taken care of.”⁵⁴ RJ’s grandfather was wounded and made it off the mountain to organize a small union at a company. The miners lost the Mine Wars, as the UMWA did

52 “Blair Mountain Removed from Register of Historic Places.”

53 Corbin, *Gun Thugs, Rednecks, and Radicals*.

54 “More from the March: Charles Bella, 1921 Marcher’s Grandson and Former Strip Miner.”

not come to the southern coalfields until ten years later, in the 1930s. But workers were agitated to the point of rebellion, because, by that point, they had no other options than the coal industry.

Mechanization and Surface Mining

“I'm not saying stop mining coal, just do it like they used to. Small strip jobs, that didn't hurt nobody. Not like these mountaintop jobs they've got now”(Madison 7/27/12). Bob Whiteman works underground at a mine in Boone County, WV, and stood out as one of the few active miners in over 50 interviews that did not support mountaintop mining, but it was his understanding of varying scales that stood out to me. Mechanization released the coal companies from labor investments, instead focusing on capital investments that resisted less, however the scale has only increased from the 1940s until the present. From the turn of the century to the 1920s there had been an economic boom for the coal industry, as with much of the rest of the country. In the context of the land and labor relations, local elites, agents of the landholders and coal operators, became entrenched. The Great Depression of the 1930s set the population of wage laborers free in search of anything. “Almost half of the mountain population laid claim to some kind of public assistance during the Depression.”⁵⁵

The 1940s and wartime demand for coal brought back the industrial boom, and jobs, to a host of destitute mountain people. As people flocked to industrial counties and the mines. The remaining farm populations dwindled, the landscape full of abandoned and non-producing farmsteads.⁵⁶ Mechanization had not come to Central Appalachia, behind the rest of the coal industry, in part due to the ability of coal operators to resist wage and benefit increases. However, after 1946, the UMWA launched a series of strikes that raised the wages and benefits for all workers, pushing the industry towards reducing the number of workers. Only after World War Two was mechanization of coal extraction possible, with new diesel powered earth moving equipment, huge augers, and higher-powered explosives. Inside the

55 Eller, *Uneven Ground*: 11

56 *Ibidem*:12

mines this meant automated mining machines, large continuous miners that did the work of breaking the coal out of the coal seams, work that dozens of men once did with picks and shovels. Such technology also meant the development of surface mining, previously infeasible.

“A local entrepreneur, backed by a loan from a supportive banker, could open a seam of coal [on a surface mine] with minimal investment and only a fraction of the labor costs of a deep mine.”⁵⁷ Surface mines levied a high toll on the land and on the people – trees and soils were pushed into hollows or piles on mountainsides, while exposed rocks leached sulfur into the creeks and streams, killing the fish and poisoning water tables. Rains would bring rocks and earth sliding down mountainsides, onto and through peoples’ properties, fields, and barns. The 1950s brought resistance to the practice, Harry Caudill famously writing of Buchanan County, VA, “A bird's-eye view of it reveals marooned and isolated farmhouses perched disconsolately on high pillars of dirt and stone. Towering high walls make access to them impossible. Much of the county's total land surface has been stripped of vegetation and reduced to jumbles of stone and gulying spoil-banks.”⁵⁸ The resistance to surface mining was born out of several groups in Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky, such as the Council on Southern Mountains, as well as a series of other groups. Through the 1950s and 60s mobilizations to ban surface mining in the states mounted, as the scale of the production continued. The Tennessee Valley Authority's newly built coal fired power plants increased the demand for dirty and cheap local surface mine coal. Many of the young volunteers sent as part of the War on Poverty ended up organizing efforts against surface mining in, and in 1977 the Surface Mine Control and Reclamation Act was passed in congress, not outlawing but regulating the practice.⁵⁹

As mechanization increased in scale, employment steadily dropped.⁶⁰ Poverty increased, welfare rolls filled, and migration out of the region came in droves. As had happened first in the 1930s,

57 Ibidem:36

58 Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*: 322

59 Montrie, *To Save the Land and People*.

60 “West Virginia Historic Coal and Coke Production.”

people filled cars, got on trains, and headed for the cities and mill towns of the New South. Akron, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Detroit all have Appalachian diaspora enclaves, their factories filling with white working class families from the hills of West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia, and Ohio.⁶¹ Employment in the coalfields has steadily declined since its height in the 1940s, while production levels have remained relatively constant.⁶²

Scott was raised in Blair. “Blair was full of houses, I mean plum full. You couldn’t tell it today though.” From the oral histories, Blair had over 1000 people at one point around the 1940s. By 1979 when Scott was going to college, the town had nearly 700 people. Today the town has between 40 and 80 people.

The War on Poverty

The War on Poverty attempted to tackle white poverty in the mountains during the height of the Cold War - the coalfields blemished Western capitalism’s record. In efforts to deal with this white poverty the Appalachian coalfields became not only the focus of poverty programs, but also the public face of poverty, a marking that people have not forgotten today, inside nor outside the coalfields.

When John F. Kennedy won the West Virginia Democratic Primary in 1960 it was clear the man would be the candidate. The Senator from Massachusetts had won the hearts of the West Virginians, with promises of poverty alleviation and a direct promise to create program to work on Appalachian issues, as well as a generous campaign budget. The Appalachian Redevelopment Act was passed through congress in 1961, establishing a basis for the Appalachian Regional Commission(ARC) to remain as a lasting regional governmental commission. The goal of the Act and the Commission was the find ways of developing the region, with new highways and increasing economic growth for a

61 Ibidem.

62 “West Virginia Historic Coal and Coke Production.”

“trickle down” approach to poverty and unemployment.⁶³

Upon Kennedy's death, Lyndon B. Johnson took the Presidency, almost immediately taking up Kennedy's fight for Appalachia, and in 1964 LBJ launched the War on Poverty under the new Office of Economic Opportunity on an Eastern Kentucky front porch. With massive federal funds grants offered to poverty work in Appalachia, the Council on Southern Mountains organized college students to come and volunteer in Appalachian communities, building homes and helping people with basic service projects. The result was the creation of the group the Appalachian Volunteers, which became a separate non-profit as they became more social justice oriented. As they worked to organize communities for policy reform and structural political changes, they started to challenge local elites, and thus loose federal grants. The Appalachian Volunteers were replaced with the AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America(VISTA) that remains an important institution in the region today, a group more cautious about its use of funds to challenge local power relations.⁶⁴

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The Office of Economic Opportunity(OEO) programs such as Job Corps and Head Start remained in place, although the office was disbanded in 1981 under President Reagan. The programs were very important for Central Appalachia. The Appalachian Volunteers and later VISTA were critical in bringing in paid organizers to help people campaign around poverty and surface mining, as were educational programs important in the mountains with Head Start and Job Corps. The ARC is a legacy of this era, bringing in funding for highway construction and industrial parks in the 1990s and 2000s. However, that said, the promises of the OEO and LBJ's War on Poverty, which he launched on a porch in Eastern Kentucky, were unmet. Poverty in Appalachia did not significantly change, and the local situations did not change. Schools remained bad, health systems poor, unemployment high.⁶⁶

63 Eller, *Uneven Ground*.

64 Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals*.

65 Bennett, *Time Magazine*.

66 Eller, *Uneven Ground*.

As the OEO programs ran, Appalachia became the both the proving ground and the public face of the War on Poverty. Denise Giardina's novel, *Unquiet Earth*, depicts the situation well, a situation she herself lived. In the novel, Rachel hears about the War on Poverty: "I also watched the television. I heard President Kennedy talk about stamping out poverty in America and learned for the first time that I lived in a place called Appalachia."⁶⁷ Jackie is the little girl born after World War Two, the experience that Giardina lived: "The television people have come to Blackberry Creek, right to my school at Felco. They're making a news show about Christmas in Appalachia, and they have cameras with those eyes painted on them." The news crew gives out ugly shoes to children at the school.

Dillon comes to our house to watch the show about Blackberry Creek. We see Mom listening to a man's chest and I point and holler, "There's Mom!" "Poor health care," says a voice. Mom sighs loud like her feelings are hurt. We watch children lined up for shoes and I see Brenda Lloyd and Toejam Day. I don't see me. "Children go barefoot," says the voice. "Schools and houses in terrible condition." The TV shows empty falling-down coal camp houses. Phil Vavanti looks at us from the TV set. He stands in front of a camp house. "There is another America hidden away in these hills," he says. "Like something out of another century," he says, "a land time forgot, a life most Americans will never experience. Why do people want to stay here? How will we bring them into the mainstream of American life?"

We sit downhearted like we have been beat on. Then Dillon gets up suddenly and flips off the TV set. "Mainstream of American life! Sonofabitch! Coal companies been shoving the goddam mainstream of American life down our throats since my papaw's day."⁶⁸

In Appalachia, the War on Poverty in many ways is considered a failure.⁶⁹ Appalachians were and still are publicly showcased as America's poverty problem, while the problem remains unsolved.

Environmentalism and the New Right

In the same moment of the 1960s and 70s two national movements were coalescing. The discourses they developed over the next decades sets the stage for Appalachian's historic shift to the Right, and the energy and environment conflict underway in the coalfields today. Out of the moment of the 1960s, the Left movements, the Vietnam War, and the War on Poverty, as well as new levels of mechanized

67 Giardina, *The Unquiet Earth*:117

68 Ibid: 124-127

69 Kiffmeyer, *Reformers to Radicals*.

scaled up industrialization, came the environmental movement and the birth of a populist New Right. Both of these social movements were to construct discourses that have had long lasting effect on the politics and culture of the coalfields.

The environmental movement was linked to the increasingly noticeable effects of massive industrialization. Rachel Carsons published *Silent Spring* in 1962 sparking a widespread environmental movement different than anything the United States had seen. The 1960s were filled with young anti-establishment mobilizing, and the environmental movement was swept up in that. At the core of the movement was an approach to stopping pollution and destruction of ecosystems that widespread industrialization had brought. The Clean Air and Clean Water Acts came out of that environmentalism, past first in 1970 and 72 respectively, regulating pollution from energy and industry, including coal fired power-plants.⁷⁰

This new environmental movement was drawing on the Transcendentalists of the 1890s and the conservation movement in the 1910s and 20s. Appalachia's great parks, the national forests and the national parks, which bound the coal fields virtually on all sides, were put in place in the 1920s and 1940s. The parks and conservation areas had meant the exclusion and expulsion of the local residents, in advancing the protection of navigable waterways that were filling with sediment from logging's devastation. The parks had also provided the urban inhabitants of the Eastern Coastal cities havens out of the industrial life, a days train or eventually drive out into the mountains. The coalfields, however, were notably not included in these conserved areas, in the heart of the mountains, and were not the Appalachians the urbanites saw, or cared to visit.⁷¹

The environmental movement of the 1960s and 70s was similarly an urban movement about saving nature from destruction, again from the devastation of industrialization. Polyani's double movement can be seen in both these moves to stop industrial destruction of natural resources and the

70 Kline, *First Along the River*.

71 Davis, *Where There Are Mountains*.

environment.⁷² This time the movement was also led by middle-class urbanites searching for safe and clean environments, with the creation of more “roadless” areas and wilderness designated areas.

However the discourse of the new environmentalism was focused around global ecology, coming out of conceptions of ecology and a world at peril from pollution – hence Earth Day.⁷³

The Endangered Species Act was passed in 1966 in the United States, a landmark that is critically used still today to stop industrial development in areas considered to have valuable ecology. In 1978 the first conference around conservation biology occurred, part of the new ecological ideas of biodiversity with concern about tropical deforestation, loss of endemic species, and inherently the value of resilient and diverse ecosystems. Critical to the new conservation biology was that humans were the main cause of destruction to these important and valuable resources, and that humans were encroaching on the last wild spaces of the planet.

Out of this movement came several of the important social movements important to the conflict in the coalfields today. In the 1970s the Clamshell Alliance in New England organized to stop a nuclear reactor from being built. They lost, but sparked a national anti-nuclear power campaign, that included people symbolically breaking into the nuclear weapons labs and test sites to protest – the No Nukes campaign. Out of that was birthed Earth First!, started in 1980 as a product of radical environmentalists deciding that mainstream environmental groups had sold out in protecting wilderness ecologies across the United States, adopting the phrase, “No compromise in defense of mother earth!” Radical environmental organizing started in the Southwest around desert lands conservation and wilderness protection. In the 1990s a long and notable campaign in the Pacific Northwest drew national attention as a non-violent direct action campaign took place to stop the logging of old growth redwoods. Redwood Summer. The Save the Redwoods campaign in the national forests in Northern California imprinted upon the minds of the American public that foresters, loggers, and by extension, miners, did

⁷² Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

⁷³ Kline, *First Along the River*.

not get along with environmentalists – they had different interests.⁷⁴

The New Right first coalesced in the 1940s and 50s as a set of interests unsatisfied with the Republican Party of the times people looking for a newer approach to conservatism. The populism of the New Right really came in the late 1970s, in the context of young Left mobilizations around the Vietnam War and the growing militancy of black power groups. The New Right, after Goldwater's failure to win against LBJ in 1964, grew around a new populist platform. An alliance with the institutions of Christianity were formed – Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority was in large part the spearhead of the Christian Right, soon to be part an integral part of the New Right. Such an alliance meant framing the Republican Party and the Right movements as committed to a newly birthed idea of “family values,” a set of values that Christian-Americans could under no circumstances deny they supported.⁷⁵

A crucial organizing moment was in 1971 when the Supreme Court ruled that organizations that racially discriminated were not tax-exempt because they were not charitable. Therefore, Bob Jones University was threatened with loosing its tax-exempt status. Christian groups and a new brand on conservative political people got together and launched a campaign, not only around Bob Jones, but also abortion, that brought in the pro-life Catholics, as well as school prayer. This new alliance brought to power Ronald Reagan in 1980, bringing in sweeping political economic changes for the country.⁷⁶

President Reagan came to power under the auspices of making the economy better and getting America back on track. His economic policies came on the heels of Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker choosing to cut inflation over keeping employment up. Reagan immediately took on unions and began moving around and cutting government programs of the New Deal and War on Poverty. This first meant undercutting the ability of the National Labor Relations Board to keep unions

74 Zakin, *Coyotes and Town Dogs*.

75 Petchesky, “Antiabortion, Antifeminism, and the Rise of the New Right.”

76 Steenland, “The Religious Right Wasn’t Created to Battle Abortion.”

in power, as well as demonstrating the time had come to make unions back down. In 1981 Reagan backed down the PATCO air-traffic controller's union in a national strike, setting precedent and sending a message that unions were now vulnerable to corporate and government pressure.⁷⁷

Reagan was coming in with a new ideology – a type of market liberalism that had not been seen in decades - neoliberalism.⁷⁸ He was on the tails of economic recession and the oil crisis of the 1970s, moments where Keynesian economics seemed to have broken down in the US and in Britain. Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US came in with a moral mandate to put economics back into the hands of the market, out of the suppression of the state. This was a new type of conservatism, especially with such free market rhetoric linked to the 'family values' of the Christian Right – this was ultimately about people being rational economic actors and allowing individual citizens to act freely within a market, without the oppressive state of Keynesian social welfare. It was this turn to freeing the market as well as the family values of the Christian Right that have become entrenched in conservative values today, and such ideas have travelled, people who are drawn to the moralistic Christian Right find themselves in positions of free market economics in today's politics. The New Right created a discourse where being independent, self sufficient, moral actors in a market was linked to 'family values,' and thus was morally righteous – taking handouts, government support, and by extension, regulation, was not moral in this value system.⁷⁹

“The lord put coal in these mountains for mankind to use, to better ourselves. I shall not stand against the will of God. You dare...”(Sundial, 5/23/2009). This market morality comes to fruition in the coalfields. “We’re good Christians. We support our community”(Logan 7/15/12) the two coal miners at Burger King told me.

77 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

78 Ibidem.

79 Petchesky, “Antiabortion, Antifeminism, and the Rise of the New Right.”

Fall of the Union

I met Annette years ago - one of my friends' mothers, whose husband works in the mines. “I remember a couple times I begged Billy not to go to work, because I was so worried about what he was tellin' me they were doin' down there. I was so scared for him.” Annette has slept easier since Alpha bought Massey Energy, with an improving safety record and a cleaner image over all. Although people widely told me about how horrible Massey Energy had been, it was in the era of Massey Energy that the pro-coal mobilizations started. Massey, as the modern coal corporation, relied on regimes of punishments and rewards, making some peoples lives amazing and terrorizing others, while also relying on local managers to represent themselves as coalfield insiders – the federal government, and environmentalists are represented as outsiders.

Ronald Eller, an eminent Appalachian historian, wrote an overview of the rise of modern coal corporation – after the 1980s when coal companies left the Bituminous Coal Operators Association that had made agreements with the UMWA. Coal companies saw an opportunity to profit without the union:

“After the election of Richard Trumpka as president of the UMWA in 1982 and the ascendancy of conservative, probusiness interest in the Reagan White House, the union adopted a policy of supporting selective strikes rather than launching national strikes to shut down the entire coal industry. Trumpka hoped to bring stability to the coalfields and preserve jobs by helping American companies compete more efficiently with imported coal, but this policy of cooperation failed to halt sliding union membership. Then the A.T. Massey Coal Company in 1984-85 and later the Pittston Coal Company in 1989-90 broke away from industry-wage agreements in order to advance lower-wage and non-union operations. The latter confrontation erupted as a spontaneous strike in southwest Virginia when Pittston refused to sign the union contract and brought in strikebreakers to replace picketing UMWA members. The strike resulted in the arrests of thousands of miners and their supporters and spread to more than fifty thousand miner sin eleven states before reaching a compromise settlement. Pittston was permitted to continue to employ nonunion miners and to set a twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week work schedule. The Pittston strike signaled to smaller mining companies in Appalachia that they too could break their union contracts, and nonunion miens proliferated.”⁸⁰

Emmett is Annette's father, and lives next door to Annette in the Coal River Valley, southern West Virginia, a major battleground in Massey's fight against the UMWA. On an oddly warm, soggy

80 Eller, *Uneven Ground*.

winter day Emmett had agreed to tell me about his UMWA days, so Annette and I walked next door. “I worked at the Hazy Creek mine, subcontracted for Peabody. They called it a punch-hole mine, just a little thing in the side of the mountain. So when the contract was up for renewal they said they would close down the mine if we didn't give up some union jobs, like fire-boss... Well, we didn't take the agreement, and we went out, and they closed the mine”(Eunice 1/7/13). Peabody had joined with A. T. Massey by that time in the mid-1980s, closing down union mines if they had to in order to operate without union workers. “In the 1980s ArmCo sold to Peabody, and then Peabody and Massey were moving in slow. It was little at a time, like this mine than that one...”(Eunice 1/7/13).

People in the valley did not take this quietly. Annette remembers the strikes, which she recounted to me after leaving Emmett's house. “I must have been in like the eighth grade, and we would skip school to go to the union rally. We would always worry because we didn't want Dad to see us.... No, we never got caught”(Eunice 1/5/12). She smiled while me and her son laughed.

As Massey set up a preparation plant to process their non-union coal – vertically integrating, - the strikes heated up. Annette and her son had told me about some of the violence around the strikes at the time, relishing the stories of resistance. Emmett was a little uneasy when I asked him about Massey putting in the Elk Run Preparation Plant, but Annette seemed to tell him it was fine.

Well, there was a big rally down on the highway there. The UMWA officials were getting everyone riled up, and liquored up. Then some folks headed down to the bridge there, to the plant, and the UMWA officials took off. I remember the one UMWA fella' who crossed the bridge was a real good guy, not that bright though. He ran across the bridge with his shirt pulled up over his face, his belly all out. Somebody threw the camera into the river. But there was another camera, and some of the boys got caught. My brother went to jail. But those boys messed that place up pretty good(Eunice 1/7/13).

The 1984 Elk Run confrontation was part of a Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and West Virginia Massey strike – Massey has decided to focus on keeping Elk Run and two other mine operations working through the strike, which ended with the death of a UMWA striking miner, John McCoy.⁸¹ Today the entire Coal River Valley is non-union, although Massey is now gone, and Annette is married

81 White, *Death on the Picket Line*.

to a man who works at Elk Run, non-union.

Out of the strikes that followed, violent as they were, came a corporation that maintained a labor force that would not have any threat of collectively bargaining or unionizing. Their strategy was twofold: to impose harsh rules on site, which made it possible to fire almost anyone for anything, while keeping the entire labor force frightened to take any steps for them to appear discontent with the company. The second point was then to reward and build senses of community that were based around being a corporate member. Much in line with similar US companies of the post 1970s, such as Walmart, employees were “members” of Massey Energy. This membership distinguished the employees from the wealth of contractors which the company kept, and let go of with frequent regularity, and as such there were perks given – like “Masseyopoly,” the board game, which Annette showed me one day in her home, company yearbooks, or pay bonuses. Such fear and reward situations lead to the development of a workforce, and general community, which was not in a position to resist the corporation and found benefit in allying themselves with the corporation.

The constant fear of unemployment is compounded with the reality of a six-figure salary, at least for some. “I make \$106,000 and I just can't go from that onto unemployment”(Logan 7/17/12). The miner from Kentucky, working two hours away in West Virginia truck-pooled to work with some co-workers. Another tactic in the new coal company has been new employment patterns of regional employment, rather than local employment. Corporations have taken to employing workers who do not live in the communities they are mining around, instead asking their miners to drive more than an hour or two to commute. Therefore workers are not invested or connected with communities they are actively surface mining or being in proximity to – there is less chance of organizing or resistance in the workforce. Through these processes of control the Appalachian coal industry has shaped and garnered the pro-coal mobilization of their workforce and the communities they are important to.

Massey's CEO, Blankenship, embodied and espoused pro-market, anti-regulation ideology at the Friends of America Rally, on Labor Day, 2009, where some 70,000 coalfield residents came to rally

for coal: "We also endure a Mine Safety and Health Administration that seeks power over coal miners versus improving their safety and their health. As someone who has overseen the mining of more coal than anyone else in the history of central Appalachia, I know that the safety and health of coal miners is my most important job. I don't need Washington politicians to tell me that, and neither do you. But I also know — I also know Washington and state politicians have no idea how to improve miner safety. The very idea that they care more about coal miner safety than we do is as silly as global warming."⁸²

On April 5th, 2010, 29 Massey Energy miners were killed in a mine explosion in the Coal River Valley, an event that put many Massey officials in jail for negligent homicide.⁸³ A Kentucky Republican Party official told me privately, "You know, Massey Energy almost justified having a union. But, the union was outdated, it was going to go. It was holding the industry back, and everyone knew it, except the miners who were making bank off of it"(Pikeville 1/11/2013).

I asked Hershel what happened to the union. "They stopped fighting for the workers." I consider the new coal company corporate model that emerged out of A.T. Massey and Pittston union breaking efforts parts of free market policies and ideologies of a *neoliberal* era. In a moment after President Reagan had stopped the PATCO strike, Trumka clearly felt that industry-wide strikes would be politically costly, if allowed at all. Such a political climate was part of the transnational political economic environment of neoliberal policies favoring the freeing of markets from state and labor control, as clearly occurred in the coal industry.⁸⁴ Emmett remembers when that agreement happened. "Trumka, in my own heart, sold the union out..."(Eunice 1/7/13).

Mountaintop Mining and Depopulation in the Coalfields

Looking at a 2007 map of the West Virginia I spotted the little town of Dehue, just on the other side of Kelly Mountain from Blair. "I grew up in Dehue. Little company town, it was race segregated, but we

82 *Don Blankenship.*

83 Urbina and Cooper, "Deaths at West Virginia Mine Raise Issues About Safety."

84 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism.*

weren't black and we weren't white, so we lived in the houses in between.... But they shut that place down in the 1990s. Kicked everyone out. Its all sediment ponds now I guess”(Logan). The coalfields are covered with places liked Richard Ojeta's hometown. The coal company surface mined the mountains atop Dehue, and use the land the town sat on, a hollow following a creek, as an area for the required sediment depositing ponds for water quality. The company did not let people renew their leases on their homes some people had lived in their whole lives, because Dehue was one of the few coal company owned towns left.

Most companies sold their homes at low cost to their workers in the 1940s and 50s. At that time companies laid off tons of miners, as mechanization swung into force, no longer needing a vast close at hand, and easily controlled, labor force. Several coal companies owned large tracts of property in Blair, most of which sold to individual owners in the 1930s and 40s. When they started mountaintop mining in Blair, around the 1990s, they offered to buy most resident's homes, but no longer holding title on the homes they could not remove the entire town.

“Coal companies kept offering people money for their places, their homes, and most of them sold out and moved. A lot of them has regretted it, because they thought they was getting a good deal but when they went to buy a new home they found that what they got here wasn't enough to buy a home there”(Blair, 7/11/12). Delmar stayed in Blair to stay near his parents, who were never going to leave. I asked him why the coal company wanted people gone so badly.

“OK you take sixty some, people from the head of Kelly down to the lower end of Blair, if they um, if we wasn't here, in this valley right here, they could come in here, they would come in here, they'd clear cu this and valley fill all these hollows. And there wouldn't be anybody to complain. To say anything.... If there wasn't anybody living here they wouldn't have to worry about messing up the creeks. Cut all the trees off and fill up all the hollows. Yea, its pretty bad.”(Blair 7/11/12).

To get to Blair from Logan you have to drive over Blair Mountain, the route the miners in the mine war were trying to take. On a the 2007 West Virginia highway map a little dot marks Ethel on the

map, just on the Logan side of the Blair Mountain. Ethel disappeared in the last ten years. I witnessed the last of the trailers moved and burned that once sat in the town. Ethel still has a Wikipedia page, as does Dehue, as does Twilight on the over side of the mountain, and Google Maps still marks those roads as accessible.

Many people in the coalfields see what has happened as a travesty – as the loss of their community. People in Blair certainly feel this way, as Delmar put it. “You just have to live it, to see what is was, and what it is now. Its completely different, its a nightmare really to what it used to be”(Blair 7/11/12). The entire coalfields have lost significant population. Going around Logan County I heard many stories of the towns that people grew up in filled with children, playing games, lots of sports, going to church. Dozens of communities that people mentioned were now virtually deserted, filled with abandoned buildings. There were fewer schools – they have been consolidated into bigger schools, - and everyone talks about how it is not the same for kids in Logan County anymore. In Blair there are only two families with children under 18.

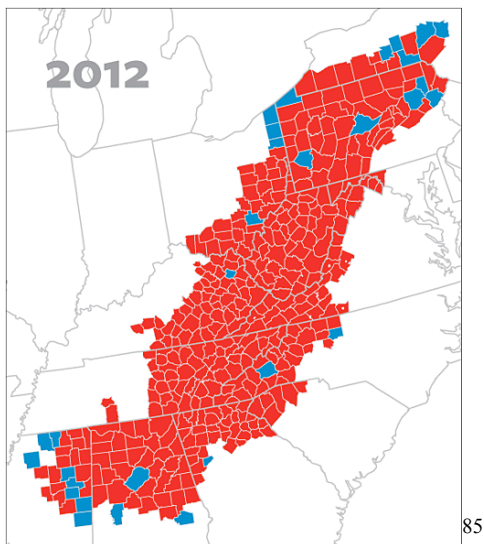
Many coalfield people have seen a decline in their quality of life since their youth – a process of deindustrializing. Furthermore, a lived Appalachian experience at this point has been one of understanding their identity as Denise Giardina did – from the news reports on their poverty. People watched the union leave them as well, for good or bad riddance, left with only two institutions: the coal industry and the government, and I found a mountain of stigma and resentment of people of welfare in the coalfields. “People here just teach their children how to get on disability. One girl asked me today, ‘Why do you work?’”(Pikeville 1/11/13). The Republican chairperson from Knott County, KY, felt there was abuse of the system. I found people angry and scared. In the context of new and enticing conservative politics since the 1980s, ones that broke with politics of the past, and especially without the long standing support from the UMWA, people have turned to a hopeful, grounding, option.

Articulating Pro-Coal Ideology in the Era of Climate Change Politics The Coalfields Go Republican

“Cause coal is West Virginia.” - RJ

Introduction

“How much difference did Friends of Coal and all the other coal groups make in this past general election? Look at this map. The red counties voted for Romney.” (1/14/2013 Citizens for Coal, on Facebook)



From the 1990s back until 1932 the Central Appalachian coalfields voted consistently with the Democratic Party. In fact, the coalfields of West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky were the last places to make this transition in the Appalachian region. The map, posted on Facebook, is all the counties in the Appalachian Regional Commission's designation, and it indicates that in the last election very few Appalachian counties voted for Obama, none in the coalfields. In the last decade, since the election in 2000, Appalachian counties started to vote with the Republican Party for presidential candidates.

This transition has much to do with identity and the politics of coal, fossil fuels, and the Democratic Party in the 2000s. People in the coalfields identify with coal mining. From the labor struggles to the present, people in the coalfields have imbued coal mining with meaning and identity. In

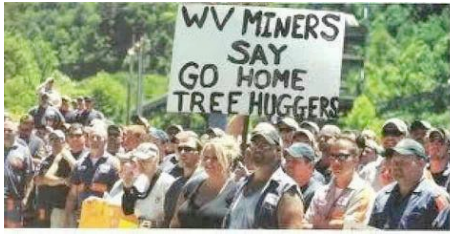
85 “Citizens for Coal.”

people's own self-representation there are narratives about how their value, their sacrifice, has been part of building the United States, bringing progress and economy to this nation through coal.

In the 2000s, climate change has become part of the mainstream Left agenda in the United States, a constituency I call the 'climate Left – the Democratic Party establishment essentially agreed that climate change is going to destroy our way of life if we do not reduce carbon emissions. In that narrative coal is front and center. In response to this discourse the coal industry represented itself as attacked and in need of defense. People in the coalfields, situated as they are without unions and quickly loosing jobs, have rallied behind the industry because they see this attack as one on themselves – their identity and their material interests, such as the \$100,000 a year coal miner salaries.

This trend is evident in the way that people aligning with the pro-coal movement and the anti-mountaintop mining movement characterize their struggles, in interviews, and conversations, as well as on social media. I find that environmentalists are represented as outsiders, while coal companies that are also based out of state are seen as insiders. The question of 'astro-turf' becomes key here: are the pro-coal politics simply a product of coal industry spending? I look at the history of the pro-coal groups, and how the pro-coal politics started. I examine one pro-coal group active in Logan County, which I became familiar with in personal encounters and on Facebook, and I show how pro-coal mobilizing has started from corporate coffers but generates grassroots support. I argue that this grassroots support is important for understanding the ways people see their interests in the coalfields.

“Where you from?” I looked straight forward as I walked towards the mine processing facility, one of the same ones that Emmett and Annette were protesting in the 1980s. Tensions had risen with the heat all day, and by mid afternoon the crowds were sweltering. “Go home!” The men and women in reflective stripes were screaming “tree-hugger” at the crowd. A woman in orange stripes jumped past a police officer and smacked Judy Bonds, the late executive director of Coal River Mountain Watch, in the face. A state trooper grabbed the woman and took her away. That was the first anti-mountaintop mining protest I ever went to, at Marsh Fork Elementary School, in 2009.



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An Electoral Transition

In the last 30 years people in coalfield counties have shifted from a long held pattern of voting for Democratic presidential candidates to voting for Republican candidates. Coalfield counties in West Virginia and Kentucky have been the last counties to shift to voting Republican in the national elections, a trend which has followed the shift of the two states to consistently voting Republican presidential states, Kentucky first in the 1990s, with West Virginia following in the 2000s. To understand the national significance of this transition I first lay out what the transition has been.

Out of a past of strong union activity from the 1930s until the 1990s, the transition in electoral politics has been stark. Unionization came to the coalfields in the 1910s and 20s, in the form of mobilizing workers for strikes and eventually battles for the union, but unions did not take effect until the 1930s when F.D. Roosevelt passed the National Labor Relations Act legalizing and supporting unionization. The Democratic Party took hold in this unionizing period in West Virginia, in the 1932 election, at the moment of the Great Depression. Furthermore, it is important to note that the union's decline in membership in the 1990s maps well onto a trend away from the Democratic Party.⁸⁷

Below is a table that focuses on 5 counties in the southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky coalfield regions, all within 200 miles of each other. Boone and McDowell, West Virginia Counties, stand out as the last Central Appalachian coalfield counties to have a majority of votes for a Democratic presidential candidate – Barack Obama in 2008. The other counties, Pike and Floyd in

86 Ibid.

87 *David Leip Atlas of Presidential Elections.*

Kentucky, represent an earlier and much more common (in other Central Appalachian coalfield counties) shift that was occurred between 2004 and 2008.

	2012	2008	2004	2000	1996	1992	1988
Boone Co. Rep	64.32	43.39	41.25	36.68	21.5	20.9	29.8
Boone Co. Dem	32.82	54.11	58.18	61.88	67.8	68.1	70
McDowell Co. Rep	63.98	44.82	37.84	32.15	18.9	20.5	27.2
McDowell Co. Dem	34.08	53.34	61.67	66.34	73	68.1	72.5
Logan Co. Rep	68.83	54.41	47.02	36.94	17.4	19.8	25.4
Logan Co. Dem	29.04	43.62	52.56	61.83	72	71.8	74.2
West Virginia Rep	62.27	55.6	56.06	51.92	36.76	35.39	47.46
West Virginia Dem	35.53	42.51	43.2	45.59	51.51	48.41	52.2
Floyd Co. Rep	65.71	49.43	36.97	32.92	21.8	19	29.8
Floyd Co. Dem	31.79	48.09	62.24	65.53	67.1	71.5	69.4
Pike Co. Rep	74.42	55.89	47.11	44.13	30.5	29.2	37.8
Pike Co. Dem	23.89	42.07	52.3	54.59	60.1	61.8	61.5
Kentucky Rep	60.49	57.37	59.55	56.5	44.88	44.55	55.52
Kentucky Dem	37.8	41.15	39.69	41.37	45.84	41.34	43.88

All data is represented as a percentage of the vote between the Republican and Democratic Parties.⁸⁸

I spent time asking involved parties about why they thought this political shift occurred. “Floyd County might be the last coal Democrat county in America to go Republican! Fact check this, ok? They always say that George McGovern won Massachusetts, D.C., and Floyd County, Kentucky.” The Floyd County Democratic Party Chair was right. In 1972, Floyd voted for anti-war Democrat McGovern, along with seven other Kentucky counties, - one other coalfield county, - and one West Virginia county – coal country’s Logan County. “Its just this Obama... And the economy being so poor, all these unemployed... But I have no doubt the county will shift back after all this and after Obama. You know, some people are prejudice, sure, but that’s not it. If that Greg Stumbo, in the House [of Representatives], made an anti-coal move, they would loose the election.”

I heard that story retold again and again – that it was Barack Obama's anti-coal policies, and his EPA, that lost him the election and the Democrats the coalfields, at least in this election cycle. I was told again and again, it was not about race. Most Democratic Party officials assured me that the

88 “Dave Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections.”

counties would not stay Republican, and that the overwhelming representations of Democrats in county and state positions were a clear indicator of this. Republican officials, on the other hand, were quick to laugh at these assertions. “The Democratic Party in [West Virginia] is run by dinosaurs. They don't have a strategy, they have a legacy, and that's where we come in,” (Pikeville 1/11/13) Republican Party officials told me. Across the board, Republican Party organizers told me that anti-coal politics have been critical in winning the coalfields for the Republicans.

Evidently, the Coal Association is made up of all Democrats. However, I heard that they fund most of the work the young, new Republican Party did in West Virginia for the 2012 election. Each group in the Coal Association gave Romney at least \$75,000, one source informed me. The Coal Association's alliance with the Republican Party was called COALition Romney. The figure above was only the contributions directly to the Romney campaign, not including the anti-Obama/pro-coal work that the Coal Association took part in as well. While the Republican Party organizing was direct mail targeting voters in the coalfields around Obama as anti-coal, anti-American, and anti-gun, the Coal Association was funding the distribution of signs and stickers reading “Fire Obama. Stop the War on Coal.” “Obama.” Out of this moment was born the “War on Coal” messaging.

In Boone County this past election was the first time a Republican was elected as the State House of Delegates representative. Josh Nelson ran mostly as a pro-coal coal miner, with immense funding from the West Virginia Coal Association and companies in the area. The Boone County Democratic Party Chair, and County Clerk, excitedly showed me pictures of Hillary Clinton campaigning at the Boone County Courthouse – Hillary swept the coalfields in the 2008 primary, part of a connection with the Clintons that the coalfields harbor. “Coal is in decline, with gas and remaining stocks..., but coal companies blame Obama.” She continued: “Older miners fought, but the young miners didn't inherit that. When they start loosing jobs they fear striking.... They don't look further than the company says”(Madison 1/7/13).

Josh Nelson has family in the coalfields, but grew up in Georgia, a man who moved to the

coalfields less than year before the election cycle began. In his late 20's he got a job in the coal mines, and was laid off, when he began campaigning against the long seated Democrat – a man who was attacked as being part of the Obama “War on Coal,” with no voting record of environmental or anti-coal behavior. The man simply was out-coaled. As Ashley Stinnett, a young, conservative pundit from West Virginia writes in *Grasping Appalachian Conservatism*, “Unless something drastic happens with the Democratic organization, coal will be under assault as long as those folks are in power.”⁸⁹

Similarly, Obama's voting record on coal specifically, and the environment at large, is seriously muddy – the Democratic Party under his leadership attempted to initiate any climate legislation nor any real changes to fossil fuel policy. However, the EPA under Obama did begin regulating carbon dioxide emissions, and forced the phase out of several old, inefficient, polluting coal fired power plants. Yet, Mitt Romney had a record of closing coal plants in Massachusetts, as Governor, far worse than Obama's personal record, while Romney had even done press conferences about how “coal kills.”⁹⁰

Furthermore, data on coal output shows that there has been steady continued growth in output of coal from the Central Appalachian region, however jobs have declined steadily as well. Employment in the coal industry today is still in decline, although nothing like the surges in employment cuts in the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, mostly employment has been relatively steady while coal has boomed.⁹¹

Therefore, the theory that Obama's anti-coal policies put him in a completely adversarial role to the coalfields seems to not make sense. To reconcile these realities we need to consider the anti-coal rhetoric as a mobilizing tool. There is a long history of mistrust towards outsiders in Central Appalachia, one that the Appalshop film *Stranger With a Camera* explains well.⁹² That proclivity has surely been at play in much of the new coal industry strategy, pitting themselves as insiders, part of ‘us,’ and the environmentalists, with Obama, as the outsiders. The coal industry becoming considered

89 Stinnett, *Grasping Appalachian Conservatism*.

90 *Romney in 2003*.

91 “West Virginia Historic Coal and Coke Production.”

92 Barret, *Stranger with a Camera*.

insiders has not been 'natural.' This process started with the creation of a managerial class in the coal production of the industrial transition, however its modern form was a work of Massey Energy. Eventually the largest industry player, Massey Energy had a cadre of local boys running the corporation. For example, Don Blankenship, from Rawl, in the West Virginia coalfields, became President of the Board of A.T. Massey in 1992, and in 2000 was named Chief Executive Officer of Massey Energy.⁹³

Certainly President Bill Clinton and George Bush had insider cards in West Virginia that Barack Obama did not. Race must be a factor, although not *the* factor, in the insider/outsider dynamics in the last three elections. Appalachian identity has been linked with whiteness, evidence starting in the industrializing era with folklorists such as Cecil Sharp collecting what was deemed the pure Anglo-American music.⁹⁴ Therefore, Obama's non-whiteness does not win him insider points in the coalfields, although I was assured in nearly every interview that “It's not that he's black. Race has nothing to do with it”(Blair 1/4/13), as the Perry County, KY, Democratic Chairman said. I believe him.

I find that fossil fuel identities and politics are critical here. Today a considerable majority of people consider themselves pro-coal. One might call it a dominant ideology. “People around here like a Democrat like Joe Manchin [former Governor, current Senator].” The Boone County Republican Party Chair reiterated a sentiment I found prolific around the coalfields: Manchin, is a conservative Democrat, openly opposed to the President, a “Friend of Coal,” however willing to vote for health care reform and similar left issues.

Several months after the election the “Stop the War on Coal” signs and stickers were popular, as were anti-Obama images and signs in front yards, on trucks, and on billboards – paid for by the “FACES of Coal.” Their presence alludes to something more than a passing political campaign or the result of industry fund dumping. There is a resonance in the cultural, political, racial identity of the

93 Lewis, *Mine War on Blackberry Creek*

94 Campbell and Sharp, *English folk songs from the southern Appalachians*.

coalfield individuals, one that is certainly in relation to the efforts of institutions and outsiders (both 'climate Left' activists and coal companies), however it is also deeply located in the way coalfield residents see themselves and give meaning to electoral politics.

Tree-huggers VS. Scabs

Rusty Shackelford, a young anti-mountaintop mining protestor, will tell people that he faces a constant barrage of threats of violence and acts of intimidation. People know where he lives and they let him know that. Environmental activism, that locals take part in, is countered with terror and violence – death threats are given and pets are found dead. At a Mountain Justice event in Fall 2012, – the coordinating collective of young, anti-mountaintop removal activism in the region - with dozens of out of state college students visiting, counter-protestors blocked the gate to the property they were staying and began throwing fireworks into the property. Rusty was there: “They knew I was there. They called me out by name. They were coming for me. They told me as much”(Rock Creek 1/3/13).

To understand the dynamics of electoral politics in the coalfields we have to look at the conflict that has defined recent politics in the coalfields. Pro-coal groups have positioned themselves directly in opposition to climate Left groups, many of which are social justice-oriented and not simply about conservation. Individuals in groups on both sides of this conflict consistently represent their opinions and positions on Facebook. The social media site is used in organizing people for both groups, but also a clear representation of the discourses they engage with, and what events and actions are meaningful for them.

Citizens for Coal

Citizens for Coal is a group based mainly in Logan County, WV. I had known of Citizens for Coal when one of our neighbors in Blair's children came around the museum we worked at during the summer of 2012. “Ya'll having a rally this weekend?” I responded 'no,' a little confused. “I saw it on

Facebook, ya know, that there's supposed to be a rally here.... About coal, you know”(Blair 7/18/12). The woman did not seem to fully understand our political position in the coalfields conflict. That weekend over twenty pick-up trucks arrived at the museum, horns blaring, and a rally formed outside with “Friends of Coal” and “Stop the War on Coal” signs. That week a 'campaign' called Radical Action for Mountain People's Survival(RAMPS) had announced they would shut down a mountaintop removal site as a protest in southern West Virginia. The Citizens for Coal seemed to think our museum was affiliated. To be fair, people affiliated with RAMPS had helped at times with the museum.

Since then I have followed Citizens for Coal on Facebook, for research. On March 15th, 2013, there was a rally against fracking, mountaintop removal, and oil pipelines RAMPS and some other people and groups planned in Charleston, WV. Citizens for Coal posted on their Facebook page on the 13th: “COME ON PEOPLE WE NEED YOU FRIDAY MORNING AT THE CAPITOL! THE TREEHUGGERS ARE AT IT AGAIN! LET'S SHOW THEM EXACTLY WHAT WE SHOWED THEM LAST SUMMER!”⁹⁵

In the summer of 2012 RAMPS mobilized a very large action where 50 people walked onto the largest surface mine in West Virginia and shut it down for a six hour period, with 21 arrests. Pro-coal groups knew the action was happening and rallied quickly on the mine site, making a confrontational experience for both activists with nearly 100 miners and their supporters rallying and heckling the mountaintop removal protesters. The post from above continued:

“WE REALLY NEED AS MANY PEOPLE AS WE CAN GET AT THE CAPITOL AT 11:00 am FRIDAY MORNING TO PROTEST THE RADICAL ENVIROS...THEY ARE PLANNING A PROTEST IN THE CAPITOL COURTYARD AND WE NEED TO BE THERE TO STAND AGAINST THEM.....IF YOU CAN GO, PLEASE LET US KNOW...IF YOU CANNOT, PLEASE TRY TO GET OTHERS TO GO.....WE CAN NO LONGER GIVE THEM FREE REIGN TO TAKE AWAY ANY MORE OF OUR JOBS.....I AM URGING YOU TO PLEASE TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY AND URGE PEOPLE TO GO....LET'S LET CHARLESTON AND THE LAWMAKERS KNOW WE CARE MORE THAN THE HUGGERS!!!” (Citizens for Coal 3/13/13)⁹⁶

95 “Citizens for Coal.”

96 Ibid.

The page, with over 2200 'likes,' serves as an organizing platform mostly in Logan County but also for southern West Virginia's pro-coal aligned people, and serves as a space of pro-coal rhetoric, with little dialogue among opponents. Therefore, I find the site extremely useful in understanding how people see their actions and their situations today. Many quotes come from the administrator, whose name appears as Citizens for Coal. I do not know if that is one person or several, however I was always told that the Citizens for Coal was a group built around a vocal miner at the Hobet Mine in Logan County. I do not disclose the names on other posts.

One of the comments in response to the above post expressed a sense of urgency and despair about the situation in the coalfields:

"I would love to be able to go to the Capital, but due to those jackasses in D.C. my husband lost his coal mining job! Rallying support will be hard since a great deal of miners are out of work! A trip is the last thing on their minds, since they are worried about paying bills and putting food on the table. Big difference from last year. Obama is getting what he wants and the treehuggers just may win!"(3/13/13)⁹⁷

The response brings up one of the most unavoidably apparent parts of today's coalfield politics. An overwhelming majority of coalfield residents think that Obama is at the root of their problems. That connection has always seemed a difficult to rationalize abstraction – that mine closures and layoff were the direct effect of the President. On face value, as a biased Lefty, that abstraction did not make sense to me. Why would people not blame the industry for laying off jobs or for keeping West Virginia's economy on a single track, not diversified? I believe the coal industry and local officials waged a successful campaign to convince and instill in coalfield residents an association between themselves and the coal industry as victims of bad politics – of aggressive, outside, relatively irrational attacks on them. However, the coal industry did not force this campaign down people's throats, but instead people have resonated with the position the campaign taken.

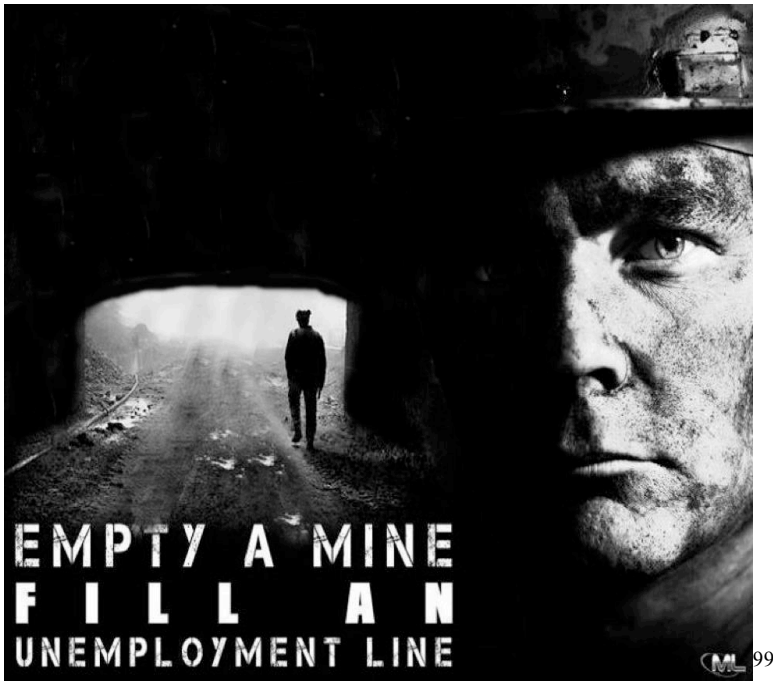
Some of this understanding of being under irrational attack is illustrated in a Citizen's for Coal comment, attacking the Charleston Gazette, a local paper that is often called Left-leaning.

97 Ibid.

“Gazette drops all pretense with latest editorial lamenting the use of West Virginia coal by countries overseas. They won't be happy until every single coal miner in West Virginia is unemployed. In fact, they even trot out the claim that the 16 percent drop in West Virginia production is caused by bad coal rather than Obama. When are we going to demand our car dealerships and grocery stores stop supporting the Gazette and Sunday Gazette Mail? That's the way to end this? Hold them accountable in their pocketbooks.”(Citizens for Coal 3/17/13)⁹⁸

Important here is the part that industry institutions, such as the Coal Association, play in peoples' posts such as these. A meme, part of a series of *A Coal Miners Reality* chain, produced by a group called MP reads: “A Coal Miners Reality: Fact 3: Electricity Bills in the United States have risen faster than the overall inflation rate for five years in a row. Thanks Obama” (Citizens for Coal 3/04/13). The meme had 62 shares. Another one, with 34 shares, reads: “A Coal Miner's Reality: Fact 2: Real median household income has decreased by more than \$4000 dollars since Barack Obama entered the White House” (Citizens for Coal 3/4/13). I can not trace who produced the memes, ML is not a very traceable logo, however it is clear that the memes have the feel of corporate development of some kind. Although people can make memes very easily, these are clearly professional quality: the photo with half a coal miners face requires someone proficient with Photoshop.

98 Ibid.



Parts of the media campaign are meme letters, one written from a grandmother and a little girl, to Obama, asking him to “stop the war on coal.” These were funded through the Mountaintop Mining Coalition, a group that has no history other than a notice from the West Virginia Coal Association's website announcing, in 2009, that such a mountaintop mining coalition had formed, with a defunct link to their website. Here are the letters:

“Dear Mr. Obama,

My name is Zoe. I am six years old and I live here in West Virginia. My daddy is a coal miner. He runs a big shovel. Daddy says you are trying to take his job. Mammy cries a lot. She is afraid we are going to lose our house. Daddy is worried too, but he doesn't say very much. He doesn't play with me like he used to. Please don't take my daddy's job. I like my school and I don't want to leave my mamaw and papaw. Please let my daddy work. He is the best coal miner and the best daddy in the world. I promise.

Zoe.

Paid for by the Mountaintop Mining Coalition” (7/24/12)¹⁰⁰

- Logan Coal Vendors page 1,269 shares

“Dear Mr. Obama,

I have been making a house payment for our son since February. If anyone in Washington doubts this is crisis, have them call me. The financial and emotional toll this has taken on our family is recorded in the new wrinkles I see in my face every day. Don't get me wrong, he could

99 Ibid.

100 “Logan Coal Vendors Association.”

live under a bridge and get by, but those two little babies-my grandchildren- don't deserve anything less than you, Mr. President, Lisa Jackson, or Sen. Rockefeller have for dinner tonight. Your war on coal makes me sick.
An Angry Grandmother” (8/28/12). “This letter is real” (Citizens for Coal 8/28/12).

I find it likely that the funding came through the West Virginia Coal Association. Republican Party officials privately told me that the West Virginia Coal Association was really the institution in the coalfield counties behind the War on Coal and all the Friends of Coal organizing. I do not know, but I guess that the Obama letters were part of that spending.

RAMPS

Ramps are a type of wild green onion that is common all over the Central Appalachian hills during the spring. RAMPS, the campaign, works mostly out of Boone and Raleigh Counties, just north of Logan. They frame their Facebook presence very differently from Citizens for Coal. First of all, they are a profile on Facebook, while Citizens for Coal is a page, however both work essentially the same way: pages have 'like' buttons, and profiles have friends. As such, RAMPS has 1,900 friends.

RAMPS positions themselves as a group concerned first and foremost about people's health and safety – about justice, 'climate justice.' They use banners such as “Coal leaves. Cancer stays.” and the “revitalize our economy, reemploy our miners.” However, even still they brand themselves as anti-extraction, pegging the extractive industries, such as coal and gas, as the problems .

They organized the rally in Charleston, WV, on March 15th that Citizens for Coal was mobilizing people against. “Over 100 WV residents and supporters had a raucous rally today at the West Virginia State Capitol for voice our opposition to all dirty, extractive industries in WV and demand a new clean economy. For the first time, activists opposing fracking and strip mining in West Virginia united to bring our fight to the Legislature's and Governor's doors!” (RAMPS 3/15/13)

At the rally people carried signs saying, “Keep WV Wild & Wonderful,” “People Over Profit,” “Support the People Not the Polluters,” “No More Extraction,” “Restore our mountains re-employ our

miners.” The conflict in the coalfields is over which claims to health and wellbeing are best for 'families,' really people in general: the classic jobs versus environment, only played out in terms of jobs versus climate justice. The jobs RAMPS talks about are also theoretical, and as such do not necessarily convince these ideologically rooted pro-coal supporters.

Another of the main dynamics with the anti-mountaintop removal movement is that there are many young people from outside the state involved in the struggle. RAMPS' leadership is comprised of majority people from outside the coalfields, many activists openly stating that they acting in solidarity with local community members that are interested in stopping mountaintop removal. This dynamic is part of the construction of the idea of environmentalists as outsiders.

Citizens for Coal posted on their page one of RAMPS' photos, where people held a banner reading “Stop Extraction: Reinvest in a Healthy Future.” A stream of insults came out on in the comments, such as “Run them out of town,” “Lazy bums don't want to get a real job.” The pro-coal people do not believe the climate justice rhetoric about “no jobs on a dead planet.” These individuals are ideologically convinced of the role extraction plays in bettering their lives and supporting their families.

Citizens for Coal responded to the above comments: “I will remind everyone again, that we must be on our best behavior. They will try to use our words, our actions against us to raise money and to recruit more of these kids as 'volunteers.' Don't let them have the win.”(Citizens for Coal 1/25/12). That narrative of outside kids, with no idea of what was going on, is one I encountered often as I interviewed coal miners during the time before and after this action in the summer of 2012.

A coal miner had been flippant when I first asked if he had a minute to talk about coal. It was at 5 am, at a gas station, and he was clearly en route to his shift. However, some other miners had advised me the practice and it had been getting good results. The miner came back out. “Look buddy, I'm sorry I was like that, its just that I see your out of state tags, you're young, and I'm just angry. I mean, we were told that we couldn't say anything to these people who were locked to our equipment or anything.

Just be real polite. And I've got a family. I'm trying to send my daughter to college”(Madison 7/26/12). He was a minor manager up the road and we chatted for a bit, and he respectfully conveyed how precarious he felt his position was at this moment, because of these protestors. He was afraid he would lose his job because of people who fit my profile.

In those interviews there was lots of talk about how the activists were all kids funded by the Sierra Club to come here and stop mountaintop removal – that they didn't know anything about the real issues and were just pawns of a the Big Greens. On some level they are right, that the Sierra Club, indirectly and directly, funds a lot of projects in the coalfields, but nothing to do with direct action – it is against their bylaws.

This conception of the origin of the “tree-huggers” seemed pervasive. “Go back to the left coast,” one of the signs read. Citizens for coal posted a meme of Timothy DeChristopher, a leader of the anti-extraction movement who spent two years in jail for disrupting an oil and gas lands auction in Utah, telling people to occupy mountaintop removal sites. “And who do you think will come down here and get arrested? It sure won't be this joker, nor any of the 'leaders' of this organization. It will be kids who come here thinking they are 'helping the poor people of West Virginia in their fight against Big Coal.' They don't know any better. They have been lied to. IF you want to be angry at someone, be angry at this guy”(Citizens for Coal 7/25/12).

Many of the anti-mountaintop removal protestors do consider themselves as supporting the people of West Virginia in their fight for their mountains, against the coal industry. As such this “environmentalism” has roots in discourses of nature as wilderness, and the separation of nature and culture, but most notably comes from a position that recognizes the problems of mountaintop removal as social issues of inequality and oppression of non-dominant-white communities. As such, RAMPS' posts on Facebook have more of an attention to social injustice rather than the loss of nature to people, as some environmental groups do embody.

As news of new state legislation to make testing for selenium in water based on the content in

fish bodies, rather than suspended in the water, RAMPS posted a reply: “An embarrassment to our state...some West Virginians do believe in science and good health for our people...and some of those in power believe in lining their pockets at our expense”(Facebook 3/9/12).¹⁰¹ Although many people who are part of RAMPS are from outside the region, basically all of the organizing team now lives in the coalfields, as part of the campaign. At every action they do there are community members consulted and generally life-long coalfield residents take part.

On their Facebook, RAMPS tells narratives about their struggle in the context of other struggles around the world, as a network of resistance to extraction. They posted a blog post from indigenous activists in Minnesota: “For over a week there has been an encampment to stop Enbridge tar sands pipelines from encroaching on sovereign Red Lake tribal land in frozen Northern Minnesota”(Facebook 3/10/12).¹⁰² These narratives put the RAMPS as part of a movement based around human rights and environmental justice – solidarity for frontline communities, as I often heard their work described while I spent time around them. RAMPS' budget comes from individual donors, unable to get a hold of Sierra Club or other big non-profit dollars while they do non-violent direct action.

However, certainly RAMPS and the anti-mountaintop mining groups still have environmental focuses, particularly around climate, although they are not the same as those conceptions of nature that the Sierra Club and other wilderness conservation groups hold. RAMPS posted: “West Virginia's streams are already in Peril - from decades of mining, and increasingly, from the state legislature. Public officials should be trying to clean them up, not actively working to make them worse by preparing to move forward with a plan to weaken selenium standards”(Facebook 3/5/13).¹⁰³ This is certainly about an environment, however in the context of RAMPS' greater mission we understand that they are interested in clean streams for people to use and have safe water, in combination with care for

101 “Ramps Campaign”.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

the environment because of nature's intrinsic value.

Another part of the RAMPS' politics are climate change. They are the reformulation of the former group, Climate Ground Zero, founded by Earth First!'s co-founder Mike Roselle, which operated from 2008 until 2011 in the same area. RAMPS, and many groups like them, have crystalized their struggle into an anti-extraction struggle, and specifically a fossil fuel struggle, framed as 'climate justice.' “Wow. It seems like hardly a day goes by without people taking a stand against deadly extractive energy. Solidarity with folks resisting fracking in NY!”(RAMPS 3/18/13).¹⁰⁴ That climate focus has, from the get-go left no room for people involved in the carbon economy – coal miners.

“Look, coal's all we got. I'm working here because of them [miners], its why I've got a job”(Buffalo Creek, 7/29/12). The gas station and mini-mart attendant in Logan County, West Virginia, at 5 in the morning was somewhat weary of my presence at first, but when I told her I was writing a story about coal and the miners she became extremely nice to me. She has a clear understanding that her employment is tied very closely to the coal production in her valley. She did not charge me for the coffee. Her position comes with substantial fear, of a time when people will have to move out of their family homes and find work elsewhere, not in the coalfields. Climate justice may not seem as just to her.

“I don't have any sympathy for them [pro-coal people]. I can't see ever respecting them” (Berkeley 11/5/12). Rusty told me that he feels the need to keep guns around him, especially after people harassed him at his home in the middle of the night. Logan County, West Virginia, is his home, and like the mini-mart attendant, he is not being driven out either. He sees the need for a drastic economic restructuring. “We should all go back to sustenance farming... it's really the only solution”(Berkeley 10/28/12).

104 Ibid.

Is Pro-Coal Organizing?

Ashley Stinnett wrote about the emergence of the Friends of Coal in 2007, when he realized it was becoming big: “I know it moved me to recognize the value of the industry and its people more than I had.”¹⁰⁵ Pro-coal mobilizing is a very recent phenomenon, and one that the industry has had a heavy hand in creating, and sometimes I wonder: is this just the result of coal industry funding? And I find the answer both yes and no. The signs and the billboards and the rallies are not directly the coal companies, although their money is present. There are a host of organizations, some of them non-profit although not necessarily, that are supporters of the coal industry that constitute the pro-coal mobilizing network – Citizens for Coal is the most grassroots of any of the organizations that I encountered in the coalfields. Most of the organizing of pro-coal rallies, events, and publicity comes through this organizational network. The bodies and entities themselves are relatively nebulous, and difficult to find the funding, labor force, or history behind. What follows is an attempt at describing this organizational terrain.

With the help of The Center for Media and Democracy's *Source Watch*, a project in conjunction with *Coal Swarm*, I learned that Friends of Coal was the first of these organizations, starting in 2002 as a project of the West Virginia Coal Association.¹⁰⁶ Also, the Friends of Coal receives funding from the WV Coal Association.¹⁰⁷ Although the Coal Association certainly promotes Friends of Coal gear and any public actions they take, there are no clearly publicized connections between the two groups on their websites. The West Virginia Coal Association has existed since 1915, but only since 2001 has it been the non-profit trade organization to maintain over 80% of the coal business in West Virginia. The organization has no role in labor negotiating.¹⁰⁸ Not only do they fund and work with Friends of Coal,

105 Stinnett, *Grasping Appalachian Conservatism*: 66

106 Source Watch, “Friends of Coal.”

107 E-WV, “West Virginia Coal Association.”

108 Ibid.

they have their own “coal education” program, CEDAR(Coal Education Development and Resource of Southern West Virginia, Inc.) that works to educate the people of the coalfields about the many ways coal is important to their lives - “CEDAR's target group is grades K-12 in Mingo, Logan, Boone, McDowell and Wyoming counties in southern West Virginia.”¹⁰⁹

Across the region two major entities exist that promote “Pro-Coal” activities. These are the Friends of Coal and the Federation for American Coal, Energy, and Security (FACES of Coal – whose funding I was unable to trace, as it is not a non-profit). These both appear to have large budgets, as they fund many billboards regionally as well as distribute yard signs widely. FACES has claims to have 60,000 individual members, near 50 of whose first names and states they disclose, and “support” from 450 local groups, around 25 of which they name. The group also has a wall of faces on their website, with around 20 people's comments and first names, explaining what coal means to them, a list that has several women, and two black faces.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, FACES funds smaller, more local based organizations. Coal Mining Our Future, a more regional Eastern Kentucky group based out of Hazard, KY, has FACES listed as one of its four “Diamond Sponsors,” along with three coal companies, while five other coal companies are smaller contributors.¹¹¹ Coal Mining Our Future's mission statement reads that they are “an organization made up of coal companies in Southeastern Kentucky with the sole purpose of keeping people informed about the facts concerning coal mining.”¹¹²

Friends of Coal makes bumper stickers - “Friend of Coal,” - and t-shirts, and has a website where they ask you to join as a 'Friend of Coal,' or join the ladies auxiliary and help teach classroom presentations on the benefits of coal to West Virginia's economy (a model the Union used). Friends of Coal has chapters on Facebook, for West Virginia, Tennessee, and an at large one, where they talk about the big legislative actions coming up. They also run a list-serve that puts out petitions and asks

109 “West Virginia Coal Association | CEDAR”.

110 “Faces of Coal - About Us”.

111 “Coal Mining Our Future: Making a Difference”.

112 Ibid.

people to call-in occasionally, once a month, about legislative issues. FACES has similar Facebook and email presence.

Citizens for Coal is a local West Virginia group, the only fully grassroots group I have encountered. They run an active Facebook group that mobilizes people from the southern West Virginia coalfields to go to protests and to counter any environmentalist action. In response to a person calling the Citizens for Coal a coal industry front group, the administrator responded back:

This is an organization of coal miners, their families, friends and community members. We are NOT coal "industry" people. Most of us are working coal miners trying to take care of our families. We have no relationship to CEDAR or the Friends of coal other than we support many of the same things. We differ on others. We also support fairness but for many on the other side fairness means only they get to tell their stories. We have seen it many times. They peddle a fiction claiming to only be against MTR when they are really against coal. We are tired of sitting back and taking it as thousands lose their jobs so now we are confronting the fiction. We are turning the tables and using the same tactics that were used against us against the enviros and they can't take it (Citizens for Coal 3/31/13).

A War on Common Sense

Bell and York (2010) have written a very good analysis of this activity as a deliberate industry construction, arguing that the coal industry has built a deep community economic identity as they become less important to actual incomes. That taken I analyze how the construction of consent has occurred – how the coalfield subject assented to this industrial effort. Don, a local documentarian, and I sat in his film studio in Kentucky, running through the footage he has of the pro-coal mobilizations. Don has made films about Appalachian culture and politics for going on several decades, and recently he has been filming all the pro-coal demonstrations. “I think a lot of this shit is really people coming out to get a hot dog, and a t-shirt, and for the hundred dollar bill raffles... I mean come on, do the people really give a fuck about what these guys are saying?” (Whitesburg 1/10/13).

I do not necessarily agree. A hundred dollar bill give away can not hurt the attendance at rallies, which are not large in the first place, a few hundred generally. Like activism around other issues, this mobilizing seems to rely on a committed core of organizers, and perhaps that core has

motives that are deeply entwined with industry politics and the production of coal – some are likely employees and miners themselves. However, there is, without a doubt, a popular element to the pro-coal mobilizing. People are willing to show up to protests and become wildly irate, even physically assault people and get arrested. The yard signs are everywhere. Families are divided along lines of pro-coal and anti-mountaintop mining, as Rusty told me. People in the coalfields believe very much that their well-being is under attack, and that they are in the middle of social and economic ruin. What is interesting is how lived experience of this disaster situation, one that prompts calling it a “War on Coal,” is highly subjective.

The numbers are ambiguous. Production figures have faltered slightly in the last several years, however appear to continue to remain relatively constant. In fact, by some estimates employment has stayed relatively constant since the 1990s, however a host of possible problems with the data arise when trying to draw conclusions – the number of employees estimated for years before 1990 does not include independent contractors, and the system for measuring contractors changed in the 2000s, in the Mine Safety and Health data, to name a few confounding variables.¹¹³ The Appalachian Regional Commission's studies seem to indicate that in a decade coal production will peak, then fall drastically.¹¹⁴

However, the lived experience of this data has been understood as dire. A young miner got out of his truck, on this way to the 6AM shift. He was covered in new tattoos and big earrings. I asked him how the through coal was doing, and what impact it had on the region. “Its bad. I tell you. Its bad.... My dad was telling me its not as bad as it was in the 1970s, but we'll see where it goes here”(Buffalo Creek 7/23/12). Almost every miner I approached I started with the generic discussion of how coal was, and every single miner responded that they were in a dire situation.

There has been a war on coal for the past 5 years. The loss of jobs in the industry, the filing of

113 “West Virginia Historic Coal and Coke Production.”

114 Appalachian Regional Commission, “A Study on the Current Economic Impacts of the Appalachian Coal Industry and Its Future in the Region.”

frivolous law suits over Selenium, protesting any new permits any update to any permits, the trespassing onto coal property and the list goes on and on. *This is not just a war on coal but all fossil fuels.* We are in trouble in this country because common sense has gone out the window (Citizens for Coal 4/12/13 – italics added).

Citizens for Coal may be the best tool to examine pro-coal's populism. I did not do a detailed survey, however I have followed pro-coal rallies and organizing since 2009, and I have not encountered another so grassroots an organization. Since 2002, when Friends of Coal started, the coal industry has thrown funds at the idea that they are under attack from environmentalists and the increasing number of mainstream Left institutions, like the Democratic Party. That rhetoric and narrative, one way or another, has made sense to people in the coalfields – certainly a complex process of coal industry narration, the work of the New Right and crack Republicans in the region, the narrative frames that environmentalists have used has all been part of the articulation of pro-coal populism. Today, people mobilize outside of the prompting and courtship of the coal industry, such as showing up to intimidate and protest the museum in Blair. And Citizens for Coal mobilizes people very effectively to counter protest environmental regulation.

At the same time, such groups have not taken off all over the coalfields. Certainly, people from all over come support rallies and turn out miners and their families, but Citizens for Coal is based out of Logan. Logan is a city and a county that is notoriously a coal mining, specifically a coal operator, stronghold, as it was in the Blair Mountain battle in the 1920s. As such, the Citizens for Coal are part of an activists coal industry base that has been part of coal county for a century. Seeing that this grassroots support is highly limited in scale is important to note that this mobilizing is not fully out of people's backyards or fully from their creation. Most places in the coalfields are full of “Nobama” and “Stop the War on Coal” signs, but that is a much simpler action than doing political organizing.

Some of the reason there is not Tea Party like organizing everywhere is the major pro-coal groups are not trying – there is no, start your own chapter function, or conferences, or any visible work on popular leadership development. They do not fund field organizers, in part because of the radicalism

that labor organizing and War on Poverty community organizing has left. Pro-coal groups like Coal Mining Our Future.Net gets sponsorship and publicly create networks of local business and institutions, but not individuals. Schools and fast-food places all over Hazard, Kentucky, sport the signs and stickers of CoalMiningOurFuture.net. Such collaboration is common, but the specter of direct grassroots organizing in the coalfields must haunt industry officials – the union struggles and the surface mine struggles in the 1970s and 80s. I think there having widespread grassroots organizing is possible in the coalfields, however, such organizing might turn from pro-coal towards a host of potential grievances, and that may be dangerous line that the industry is treading.

When Don Blankenship told the crowd at the Friends of America – pro-coal - rally on Labor Day, 2009, that he spent a million dollars to have the event, he was speaking to a crowd of nearly 20,000 people. The money certainly worked in the early 2000s to ignite a conflict, but people in the coalfields could not have missed the national media pundits talking about climate change, either, which put them squarely in the crosshairs of environmental climate warriors. The struggle for coal fundamentally makes sense to people, to their understandings of self, and of their identity in relation to coal. The struggle particularly makes sense in understanding how they see the climate Left.

One of the men that runs a lot of pro-coal Facebook groups, and potentially is the administrator on the Citizens for Coal page wrote an op-ed on Facebook, laying out the language of pro-coal populism as right wing.

Policy (economic or otherwise) must be based on a balance of impacts -- impacts on the environment, on the economy and on people. Your agenda on the left ignores one of the legs of that three-legged stool, and in doing so you are also creating problems for a second -- the people. You are asking them to give up their livelihoods "for the common good." Sorry, but most people don't roll that way (Friends of Coal-Ohio 8/24/12).

Geographies of All-Terrain-Vehicles, Surface Mining, and Nature in the Coalfields Masculinities and Whiteness in a Pro-Coal Moment

“But, I understand why they’re closing off the hills...” – Emmet

“I feel like a Sioux Indian, being forced off my land.” – Delmar

Introduction

Delmar has spent his whole life going back into the hills around Blair, hunting, fishing and collecting forest products. In the last thirty years Delmar has ridden all-terrain vehicles (ATVs)^{vii} when he goes into the hills. But now the hills are much more difficult to access. There are “No Trespassing” signs, roadblocks, ditches, rock piles, cameras, and gates at every access points – all the old roads and trails through the hills.

Why do they [Arch Coal] do it? I think its just another way that they try to put pressure on you to make you leave. They say they do it to keep you off their property. And [you] get hurt, and sue them. And I'm 63 and I've never heard of anyone who was hunting, or riding a four-wheeler getting hurt and suing the company around here. I've ridden four-wheelers since '84 and I've never heard of anybody, them suing the coal company in that many years.... I know a guy he lost his leg in an ATV accident and he didn't sue the coal company....(Blair 7/11/12).

Residents such as Delmar who have refused coal company offers to buy their homes since the 1990s, when surface mining started around Blair, believe that the closure of the mountains to public access is a strategy to drive the remaining resident's out. However, some of the residents do not see the closure as intentionally as Delmar does.

“I understand their position. What if someone gets hurt on their property? These days people are looking to get money wherever they can.... Its a shame, though, to not get up on those ridges”(Blair 7/18/12). I had met Mr. McKinney a few days prior when I chatted with him on the road, him heading towards his home on his ATV. Today he was riding with his grand-daughter on the back, coming back from picking berries in the remaining area of hills that were accessible. Sitting on the porch that he built years ago, he told me about how he rides in the woods everyday these days. “Since I retired I

decided to stay home. People would ask me, 'where are you going on vacation,' and I would say, I ain't going nowhere. I'm gonna stay home. These days I just spend time in the hills, and with the family”(Blair 7/18/12).

Most men in Blair own ATVs as a means of accessing the forested hills, collecting forest products like ginseng and other roots for cash value, hunting, and general recreation. This type of use is part of a long history of using the forests for supplements to income, as a commons.¹¹⁵ Closing the hills is breaking with a long history of collective forest use, and even those in Blair who do not dispute its occurrence, lament the closure.^{viii}

At the same time, private investors are building private ATV trails on Blair Mountain – the Hatfields and McCoys Trails – ATV and dirt bike trails, nominally themed for the infamous family feud during industrialization.¹¹⁶ To ride in the acres of trails one needs a pass and riders' insurance, two things that most locals never before encountered. Local press tout the trails as economic development, and their presence is seen in Logan with “Rider Friendly” signs in the shops, while the city has legalized riding ATVs on city streets.¹¹⁷ The trails also make use of formerly mined land, part of what is heralded as post-mine land use, or 'mountaintop development,' a narrative I often encountered in conversation with pro-coal individuals.

However, the coal companies are closing far more land than the Hatfield and McCoys Trails are taking up. A shift has occurred around Blair, and in other parts of the region as well, where the coal companies have decided to keep people off of their property. Delmar thinks that the coal companies do not want to deal with people that might cause liabilities to their surface mining endeavors. “So, they just wanna put pressure on you so they can use this whole valley for a valley fill. I think that's what their whole goal is. They get us out of here, and they can just do whatever they want to this place”(Blair 7/11/12).

115 American Folklife Society, “Tending the Commons: Folklife and Landscape in Southern West Virginia.”

116 Waller, *Feud*.

117 “Tourism Boon.”

On the opposite side of Blair Mountain was recently a town called Ethel. Arch Coal bought all the homes in Ethel in the last decade, demolished them, and put up gates along all the former entrances up the hollow. Locals said that the hollow is mostly a wide mine road now. Similar stories happened around in Dehue, on the other side of Kelly Mountain, and in Twilight, one county over in Boone County.

The changing access regime has accompanied the rise of pro-coal political mobilizations, and has constituted a new relationship that people in the coalfields have to nature and the industry. Forest access regimes, in the coalfields, are symbolically meaningful in the landscape of masculinities – accessing nature as a method of providing for the family, supplementing income, as well as riding vehicles that allow for the mastery of any terrain, affirm a certain masculinity in the coalfields. A new masculine identity has emerged from that *hillbilly* masculinity, in the wake of narratives about poverty and development, ones that I find are racially located in the specter of 'white-trash' and welfare rolls.¹¹⁸ Pro-coal rhetoric is situated exactly in these narratives – this discourse – coming out of them and producing such narratives. The new forestland access regimes rely on a new masculine figure, one that is salaried enough, at a family wage, to engage in consumptive acts of riding the ATV rather than productive ones, such as sports on the Hatfield and McCoys Trails. That masculinity is accessible reality for the few coal miners left in the industry, however most of the coalfields residents do not have access to such salaries.

What I find surprising is how even people who are very angry about the closure of land around Blair still see no other option than supporting the coal industry, and support the creation of these new trails. Delmar blames the company, not the industry. I asked Delmar when the enclosure started.

When arch coal put these mines in at Seng Camp. Before that the other coal companies would let you do what you wanted. They'd let you go up these hollers, and they didn't put gates up or rocks up, or try to block you or anything like that. When Arch, Arch Coal came in, as soon as they got established, their mines going, they started blocking everything out of the places they did work, which I'd went since I was a kid. Now, you go anywhere you run into a gate, or rocks,

118 Scott, *Removing Mountains*.

or a ditch... they got it blocked, they got it posted, everywhere you go they got it posted (Blair 7/11/12).

But Delmar is conflicted. One evening I related to him my stories of doing direct action environmental protesting against mountaintop mining. He became somewhat annoyed. "Ok, you tell me something. What would people here do without the coal industry?"(Blair 8/1/12). I do not have a good answer for him.

Poverty, Whiteness, and Development

The story of how people relate to the land, nature, and coal industry around them is framed within Appalachian difference, especially in the ways that pro-coal voices talk about development and change in the coalfields. Rebecca Scott's work on identity and nature in the Appalachian coalfields figures large in my analysis here, particularly in leading me towards understandings of a troubled whiteness and masculinities that arise from that.¹¹⁹

The rest of the United States understands Appalachian people as different, as far back as the era of British colonies. Early nineteenth century accounts of the Appalachians depicted the area as rugged, dangerous, and wild. Indeed, as Dunaway argues, the region was the United States' first and last frontier, particularly in codifying property rights.¹²⁰ Cecil Sharp, and a handful of folklorists in the late 19th century, as the area was industrializing, relied on the space as one that was 'a window back in time,' to a land 'forgotten by time.'¹²¹

Into the 19th century, the United States labor movement represented the coalfields as a place of intractable violence and company control, as the Appalachian coalfields remained one of the few non-unionized spaces in the United States coal industry. Mother Jones, the labor organizer of the 1910s and 20s, famously remarked on organizing the West Virginia strikes in her autobiography: "Medieval West Virginia! With its tent colonies on the bleak hills? With its grim men and women? When I get to the

119 Ibid.

120 Dunaway, *First American Frontier*.

121 Sharp and Campbell, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*.

other side, I shall tell God Almighty about West Virginia!"¹²²

Much of what these authors and observers saw was poverty – a certain endemic poverty from pre-industrial land relations onwards in the coal camps and company towns that kept workers on the edge of starvation. Unemployment rose as the coal industry mechanized after the 1950s, and Johnson launched his "War on Poverty" on a front porch in the eastern Kentucky coalfields. Appalachian difference quickly became the poster of poverty in the United States. Images of Appalachian homes and television specials on coalfield Appalachia became stock in the 1960s and 70s as the image of poverty, along with the African-American urban ghettos.¹²³ From churches, to development agencies, to the federal government, to local politicians, the call for development in the Appalachian coalfields was heard across the United States.

In this call for development was particular implications of Appalachia's past, and how ending poverty could happen. Museums in the coalfields often reiterate narratives about the solutions to poverty: development through progress and modernization. The term *heritage* is used often about the historical past in Southern West Virginia. In 1996 the U.S. Congress passed an act that made the region of southern West Virginia the National Coal Heritage Area, giving funding and AmeriCorps volunteers to the construction of a regional tourist destination.¹²⁴

The Coal Heritage Trail builds a clear narrative of how the coalfields were developed from a wilderness to an industrial heartland, in service to the nation. The Heritage Farm Museum and Village in West Virginia serves as a useful source of insight into narratives of this progressive development – modernization. The video for the museum narrates that the curators “arranged the items to show progress over time,” and that the curators are “telling a story of how men and women worked to tame the Appalachian landscape, [cut to scene of a model railroad] and how progress didn't mean working less, but working more.” The museum is branded as a place where

122 Jones, *Autobiography Of Mother Jones*: 25

123 Eller, *Uneven Ground*.

124 “National Coal Heritage Area/ Coal Heritage Trail.”

people learn “what it really meant to live in Appalachia,” as Mr. Perry, a curator, is quoted, “that’s extremely important to our Appalachian heritage. Independence, self-sufficiency...”¹²⁵ The museum has several sub-museums, including a Progress Museum designed to tell about the changes throughout the history of the region, how the railroads came and brought jobs and towns, as well as a cabin one can rent to spend an overnight in the “‘good ol’ days’ (no running water, electricity, or indoor restrooms).”¹²⁶ This site exemplifies the depiction of the ‘frontier’ as a difficult and ultimately lower quality of life space. The Progress Museum’s narrative of the coming of the railroad, and the industrial development that ensued, becomes the engine that tamed the wilderness, bringing prosperity and modernity to the Appalachian landscape.

The Coal Heritage Area website presents the history of coal mining as a forward step in the progression of the region as well as of the nation, as well as something firmly located in the past:

The coal mines along the Coal Heritage Trail produced the abundant and economical fuel which transformed rural America into an industrial power, provided jobs and homes for thousands of people fleeing persecution and oppression, made immense fortunes for those who invested in the industry, and produced a storied society with a peculiar and fascinating legacy.¹²⁷

The Logan, WV, Museum in the Park, at Chief Logan State Park, section titled “Rails to Progress” tells a similar story, of railroads bringing progress and modernity to a landscape of isolated farms and forest peoples. The National Coal Heritage Area is designed to speak to a United States public, to pique interest and bring tourists into the area, and as such play on depictions that have become narratives in the national imaginary of Appalachia.¹²⁸

However, poverty as Appalachian difference also involves racial, not just economic narratives, because Appalachia is coded white in the national imaginary as well. Rebecca Scott discusses Appalachian whiteness: “As prototypical white rural citizens, they are in some senses ideal Americans,

125 “Heritage Farm Museum and Villiage of Huntington, West Virginia.”

126 Ibid.

127 “National Coal Heritage Area/ Coal Heritage Trail.”

128 Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*.

but at the same time they are culturally and economically marginalized.”¹²⁹ That marginalization works to haunt Appalachian's with the stain of being 'white-trash,' of not being white like other white people – the fear of being on welfare rolls, as Lisa Disch discusses in *Steep*, about white citizenship rejecting government assistance.¹³⁰

Wider United States culture displays Appalachian difference often for comedic effect or for tragic narratives of poverty, as during the “War on Poverty.” Such comedic effects are seen on Saturday Night Live's *Appalachian Emergency Room*, on the 1960s *Beverly Hillbillies*, on the proposed, and declined, CBS reality show *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*, or on Discovery Channel's reality show, *Moonshiners* - "In Appalachia, moonshining is considered by many to be a way of life. It is also illegal." Potentially the best example is *MTV's* best rated show for 2013, until it was cancelled, *Buckwild*, a reality show about young adult West Virginians having fun doing wild and dangerous things.¹³¹ Within Appalachia the discussion that geography holds the region back from development therefore must not only be read as *economic* development, but potentially with *racial* implications.

'Mountaintop Development'

County Clerk Hayden seemed to be a busy man. Sitting in the Coal Mining Our Future headquarters across from the county court, he hung up the phone and resumed his well-worn act. "What people don't realize is how important mountaintop development is for these communities. We just don't have enough flat land. We could resurface the mountains and put in industrial parks, housing developments, and golf courses, but the coal industry is doing it for us. That's what these people don't understand about surface mining." Hayden came from a background in the coal industry and now runs Coal Mining Our Future. Based out of eastern Kentucky, Hayden and his group promote the idea that mountaintop mining is a form of development that the coalfields need in order to progress from their

129 Scott, *Removing Mountains*:31

130 Rosenthal and Trost, *Steep*.

131 Starcasm.net, “Buckwild Ratings by Episode for Season 1.”

situation of poverty into one of economic growth.

Mr. T.L. Headley appears to run several pro-coal facebook groups and websites, who I first encountered in the middle of a long, heated debate on the War on War on Coal's Facebook page, a page made to bait and attack pro-coal rhetoric. War on War on Coal directed me to a Facebook “op-ed” that Mr. Headley wrote, in which he made a very common argument that blames the isolation of the mountainous geography for Appalachia's poverty. In his editorial on Facebook, in response to a “radical environmentalist,” he noted that few well paying jobs, other than mining, are found in rural Appalachia: “This is not because of mining but rather is due to the extreme isolation, lack of quality highways, lack of readily developable land and a host of other geographic factors”(Friends of Coal – Ohio 8/24/12).

The discussion of mountaintop development comes directly out of that logic. Friends of Coal put this graphic on their website to the progressive effects of surface mining. Although the graphic

seems somewhat as starting with developed into infrastructure.



poorly labelled, I read it wilderness and becoming recreation, housing, and

Friends of Coal's educational department - CEDAR – explains the argument perfectly. They begin with, "In West Virginia and across Appalachia, any type of major development requires the natural landscape be altered. The mountainous terrain provides little land naturally suited to development." Nature is represented as in need of development.

What this means is that any development is naturally limited by the landscape. Overcoming this limiting factor is an expensive undertaking. Moving the amount of earth necessary to build a road, a shopping center, a school or an industrial park requires an investment of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars before construction of the facility or the road even begins.

At right is a partial list of facilities either located on former mine lands or in the process of construction. The sites run the gamut of development, including everything from golf courses to hospitals, from schools to industrial parks and from prisons to residential areas. The businesses and facilities located on these sites provide literally thousands of good, quality jobs. These are jobs that would likely not have existed without the land provided at low if any cost by the coal industry.¹³³

The informational page continues on to discuss residential development. "In West Virginia, the little hollows along which most people live often flood, wiping away lives and life's work in just minutes. Like industrial and commercial development, the people of West Virginia build their homes along these little hollows because there are no other good options." Relocating entire towns, as the site cites is happening in eastern Kentucky, to the former surface mine sites becomes the solution.

Looking at the images of the new residential development, a stark difference appears between realities of housing in most of the coalfields and this new vision of newly located towns on flat developable lands. The homes are built in suburban-subdivision fashion, huge homes with flat, graded, lawns. In a place where a great deal of the population lives in trailers, the vision of residential development is one of suburban America.

However, this narrative was reiterated to me in everyday encounters, from miners to people

132 "Friends of Coal."

133 Ibid.

living in Blair. "There just is not enough flat land in the state for the economy we need." The man is a coal miner, and on his way to the mine he took a minute to talk to me. "Look around. All we got is mountains, so we got to have room for businesses and things to come in"(Buffalo Creek 7/26/12).

"We're standing on one right now. We're on it. This all was a former strip mine"(Logan 7/24/12). The miners at Burger King pointed to the ground of the Fountain Place Mall shopping center in Logan, WV, with a Walmart Supercenter, quite visibly a former surface mine. "They're better for hunting too. I mean I've seen more animals up there on the strip than I have anywhere around here. They love it. It's a big meadow." The surface miners continued to tell me about the great hunting that you can do on reclaimed surface mines, and how well hardwoods do transplanted onto reclaimed sites, and how they had once even seen an orchard on top of a mountaintop mined site.^{xi}

However, I expected the miners to hold those beliefs about the mining, because they are directly confronted with the mining and with coal industry rhetoric around the practice. What surprised me was how some people in Blair approached the surface mines. One older couple that I had met in church had invited me over to do an interview. After several visits, talking with them and recording some of their stories, I returned to do a last follow up before I left for the summer. Sitting in the gazebo that the Mister had built, with the perfectly manicured lawn on the property he had been raised on, without prompting the Missis brought up the issue of mountaintop mining Blair Mountain. In the warm misty early-evening we had gotten very casual, but I became somewhat uneasy as she broached the political topic – I was sure we did not see eye to eye. Blair Mountain, with all its archeological and labor historical significance, has been on the National Register of Historic Places, and then delisted after the coal company property owner demanded a resurvey of the local population's interest.

The thing I don't understand about this whole Blair Mountain thing is that the place used to be a dump. I mean, quite literally, a dump. Everybody put their trash back there. I remember, the whole thing filled with washers and driers, and mattresses. People'd drive right off the road and into the mountain and leave the trash there. And now they're saying its a historic site and we need to preserve it? I mean really. I say just strip it, and let them put in a nice park. That's what I would like to see(Blair 7/15/12).

The Missis lives at the foot of Blair Mountain, where the fight around surface mining the battlefield continues. The Missis and the Mister both presented the same idea - that the forested, untamed, unkempt, Blair Mountain was virtually useless, and that preserving that made no sense. What made sense to them was letting the coal company develop the place, give people jobs, and leave a park for people to use - a grassy expanse, developed and sculpted.

I was struck that the Mrs. and Mr. did not see the mountaintop mining of Blair Mountain as a sacrifice of their forest or their heritage, especially for people who were born in Blair and had stayed in Blair when they could have moved out. They witnessed the worst of the surface mining impacts, but for them, the wild, undeveloped slopes and ridges were serving little purpose, other than to hunt and collect ginseng or other forest products. However, they seemed to value the development of the land over the uses of the forest, even though the Mr. often took his ATV down paths in the forest.

West Virginia folk singer-activists Jay Kirby and Michael Kline, in 1977, came out with an album of songs about surface mining and the plight of mining communities: *They Can't Put it Back*.¹³⁴ Even in Blair, where most peoples' stories were about the glory days of Blair in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, I found that some people did not want the mountains back. They wanted something new - they wanted a citizenship that they saw extended to the rest of the country on television, without poverty and without degrading stereotypes, and with that might come the decent living of a bustling Blair. On some level many I understood people wanting to strip away the troubling parts of their Appalachian difference, something that surface mining symbolically has come to represent.

Enclosing the ATV

The Hatfields and McCoys Trails exemplify 'mountaintop development,' as these trails rely on open expanses of surface mines as well as wooded pathways. Parts of Blair Mountain and the ridges that residents in Blair were formerly able to get on are accessible through the Hatfield and McCoys

134 Kirby and Kline, *They Can't Put It Back*.

Trails, a private, pay-to-access ATV riding trail systems. The trails are bringing spaces of ATV use to the coalfields that have not previously been present – those of sport rather than a mixed recreation and supplemental income. The closing of the commons around Blair is not about turning land into ATV sports parks, however that is certainly one of the results. Instead I read enclosure about a new approach that coal companies are taking: around their surface mines they would rather have control of who enters, sees what is happening. This change means a formalization of movement and property in the coalfields, something that Rebecca Scott discusses in her chapter “ATVs in Action: Transgression, Property Rights, and Tourism on the Hatfield-McCoy Trail.”¹³⁵

The Hatfields and McCoys Trails not only exemplify a new type of formalized land use inherent in the 'mountaintop development' narrative, but also are symbolize a new masculinity. Accessing the forest for hunting, collecting firewood, ginseng, and other roots and herbs was symbolically meaningful

for a masculine identity in the coalfields tied to providing for the family and a certain rugged hillbilly closeness with, and mastery of, nature.¹³⁶ The Hatfields and McCoys Trails symbolize a new masculinity tied instead to a large wage that allows for the leisure of sports, which in the coalfields means a coalminers' salary.



135 Scott, *Removing Mountains*.

136 Ibid.

Gender in the coalfields is often very stark, and must be understood as intertwined with the political economy – men, in the coalfields, work as coal miners, work that few women do, with noted discrimination lawsuits.¹³⁷ As such, women are generally in service jobs or at home, with the medical industries as a notable route for independence and income for women. Even though a third of the oral histories were with women, I actually did not make strong connections with women in the coalfields, unless it was as a couple with the husband, or unless they were queer.

In Blair virtually all the men were retired and they virtually all of them owned ATVs that they rode back into the hills where they still could. Men hunted, or dug for ginseng or other roots like cohosh and herbs that they sold for cash. Using this land as a commons is part of a legacy they have taken part in their entire lives. “All the hills were our backyard. We spent all day playing in them, running in the creek. Oh, it was great.” Sitting on the porch of his Charleston, West Virginia, (the capital) home, Danny recounted a cherished childhood of playing in the woods, swimming, and community sports with all the children. He moved away from Blair when he went to college, but he told me that, “I always dreamed of moving back. There's just no jobs, I wouldn't have nothing to do there.”

Floyd Troy has stayed in Blair his whole life, with no intention of leaving, even turning down an offer to buy him out. On the porch of the house that his father and him built he talk at length about spending entire weekends during his childhood in the woods. “When we was kids it seemed like we'd spend all summer in the hills. We would spend days in there, building cabins, hunting, and fishing... Leave on Friday, come back Sunday...[*he laughed*]”(Blair 7/6/12). The ATV, entering the landscape thirty years ago, has been an integral part of this "hills as our backyard" mentality.

Most men I walked around the hills with or took ATV rides with would identify plants and

137 “Hatfield & McCoy ATV & UTV Trails - ATV Trail Riding Trails Heaven.”

138 Ward, “More On the Alpha Buyout.”

places where certain types of wild valuable species could be found. Mr. McKinney spends most of his time in the hills looking for cohosh, a root sold in medicinal herb stores internationally.

Well, I pass time in the hills digging for cohosh.... Yea, it makes decent money. But I just do it more for fun. I used to dig ginseng, but there's too many people doing that these days. Too hard to find the five-prong anymore, and I wasn't about to start digging the little ones. So I just dig cohosh now. I like spending time in the hills. Its how I enjoy life (Blair 7/13/12).

Blair, and the region at large, is full of men like Mr. McKinney, who dig roots and collect plants forest products, including goldenseal, yellow root, cohoshes, and ginseng for cash value. “Probably just pays the gas money, really.” Mr. McKinney was more on the recreational side, but at upwards of \$800 a pound, people who collect ginseng are often helping pay the increased winter bills, after a fall harvest.

Land dynamics are crucial to why this commons has become so culturally and materially significant for people's lives. A 1979 survey, still the most current survey, found that upwards of 80% of the land in Logan County was under corporate ownership – in the hands of coal, timber, or land companies, as is the case with most coalfield counties.¹³⁹ Juxtaposed are the “postage-stamp lots” in the coalfields, the tiny properties that were sold to workers when company towns sold their holdings.

The first couple visits to Blair I took the wide areas of neatly mowed yards for granted. It appeared that there were only a few houses along the road, with large yards that stretched down the two-lane highway. As I became more familiar with the community I came to understand that indeed those large mowed fields did not belong to the people who mowed them, the homeowners adjacent to them, but actually were the property of Arc Land Company – the land company associated with Arch Coal Inc. I came to understand that people owned very small lots, generally no more than around a fifth of an acre, a very standard practice in the coalfields that comes out of histories of company owned towns, with houses close together. The various company owned spaces in Blair were all sold, divided into the postage-stamp properties, around the 1920s and 30s, as my own research in deed books has

139 Appalachian Land Task Force, *Who Owns Appalachia?*.

shown.¹⁴⁰ As such, people in Blair, and in the rest of the coalfields, have quite literally used the hills as the backyards they lacked.

In 2012 I witnessed a marked difference in Blair from when I first visited in 2010. The remnants of Ethel had become engulfed in forest, and gates and cameras block access to roads that I mountain biked and drove trucks down. Even in 2010 we had been wandering the woods and accidentally run into trail signs for the Hatfield and McCoy Trails, at first not realizing what was happening until we would hear a horde of ATV riders, and quickly dart into the bushes, not interested in dealing with rangers or the legality of the land we were on. Today the main road is lined with “No Trespassing” signs. Some of this is certainly from the protest that happened in 2011, where hundreds of environmental and labor protestors marched on Blair Mountain to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the Battle of Blair Mountain and push for preserving the mountain. Although the severity of the enclosure may be heightened around Blair, the site is not alone in this transition.

Emmett, in the Coal River Valley, moved from talking about the end of the Union to Massey's reign, seamlessly back and forth. "They [Massey] posted everything, told you you couldn't go back up on their property, otherwise you'd be trespassing. You couldn't cross the river. You weren't supposed to hunt. This Alpha... I guess we'll see what they do. They might be better, I don't know"(Eunice 1/7/13). Emmett had not seen the change yet, and although he still accessed the land, as many people did, there is a heightened level of care entering and exiting the forest, a state of fear.

The new land access regime around Blair still centers around the ATV, interesting, now as an object of consumer leisure – sports – and precludes using the land for supplemental incomes. The ATV, arriving thirty years ago in the coalfields and around the world, became a symbol, much as with the horse was and still remains, of the ability to bring home more than a family wage – a symbol of masculinity, tied to 'real' men's work, between \$5000 and \$25,000, while also requiring hundreds of

140 Deed of Sale, Blair, 1930.

dollars of maintenance a year, not including gas.¹⁴¹ However, the ATV became an object that most families had, and that people in retirement would often get, something of a standard for families in the coalfields. “Look, if I get laid off what am I gonna do about the house payments, the truck payments, the four-wheeler [ATV] payments, the car payments?”(Logan 7/14/12). The Kentucky miner had found those investments part of being a decent family in the coalfields. Several miners asked me if I had ridden the trails, as it seemed like a go to practice for them.

I did not meet any locals that visited the trails – Blair people do not visit the trails. Old man Hershel's nephew built a barn on Hershel's property to keep his ATVs, visiting from Florida, and the nephew sometimes road the Trails. But people in Blair still find their way onto a few of the other trails, although last time I visited more trails were closed. People talked about needing to get acetylene torches and cut through the locks on the gates, and some talked about shooting out the cameras, but to my knowledge no such acts happened. Delmar said off handedly one evening, “seems like pretty soon won't be a single trail we can get up on”(Blair 7/19/12).

Pro-Coal Masculinities?

In the story of Blair enclosures and the Hatfields and McCoy's Trails I am left wondering how the pro-coal positionings have factored into these material changes in the coalfields. These changes are crucial for understanding how people see mining, and therefore the industry, for one. But also, these stories seem to show a new masculinity forming, one that is very based on a coal miner or industry employed man earning the high paying salaries, near \$100,000 a year for the modern coal miner. That masculinity comes out of the enactment of the narratives about development in the coalfields – requiring a taming, perhaps even a stripping, of nature in the coalfields to bring prosperity. Inherent in the narratives about mountaintop development is that someone has to have the money to live in the subdivisions that are built and use the airstrips that are developed – those are implicitly (even explicitly

141 “ATV's For Sale.”

sometimes) the modern, well paid, coal mining men. And the Hatfield and McCoys Trails are a great example of these coal industry *subjects*.^{xii}

This new masculine figure is not one of poverty, but of middle-class styled values and practices, at least as the pro-coal sites and individuals project. That means not relying on a commons for supplemental income, but instead taking part in the consumption of sports. However, this new identity does not fully reject former forms of masculinity, instead taking ATV riding and being in nature and turning it into a consumable act. Therefore, people in Blair and those men that ride ATVs elsewhere outside of the Trails do not reject the Trails, for they too enjoy trail riding, however different the context.

I believe the enclosure of the commons is not directly a product of creating new space for the subject of the new modern coal industry, but is part of the same ideological project – mining (surface mining included) as the route to development in the coalfields. Clearly, as surface mines face greater scrutiny the coal industry would like less people to scrutinize their work. But, the result of that increased regulation has been the removal of local people from around surface mines, most of whom were impoverished coalfield residents. The industry has, through this protective measure of displacement and enclosure also started disciplining the coalfield subject into the model subject that the pro-coal institutions are projecting. They are giving the residents no options but to stop supplementing their incomes through the use of forests, and in some cases, such as in Dehue and Ethel, they are doing away with those subjects that live near their mines entirely.

I find there to be a disjuncture between this ideological project of disciplining subjects out of poverty and the reality on the ground. Most people in Blair, and the people living in trailers and old coal camp houses all over the coalfields, do not have access to the salaries and jobs of the modern coal companies – they will not reap the rewards of privatized mountaintop development, likely ever. And in the context of enclosures and buyouts, those impoverished coalfield residents will be relocated, far from the mines and the development that may, theoretically, follow, potentially in the cities where there

is employment. I am left wondering then, who does this development really serve, and how would it change identities in the coalfields? Essentially, what happens to the *hillbilly*?

Delmar has little hope for the situation in Blair. “They're mining underneath us, and they're mining five different directions on top of the mountains. And the politicians [laughs] seem like they just stand back and gather up the money. And we take it. We suffer for it”(Blair 7/11/12).

“I feel like the Sioux Indian, forced off my land.” Delmar, and many people in the region like their connection to the land to that of indigenous peoples. “You just have to live it, to see what is was, and what it is now. It's completely different, it's a nightmare really to what it used to be”(Blair 7/11/12). Yet, Delmar still defends the coal industry. He does not see another way for West Virginia other than coal.

To Clerk Hayden, Delmar, and his way of life, may be exactly what he sees is holding the coalfields back. When I asked him about communities around mine sites leaving he acknowledged that some people had to be relocated but would be compensated. I assume people like Delmar who refuse to move are suffering their own consequences to Hayden. As I finished the interview Hayden gave me a second look, as if he did not think he had really convinced me. “Look, come by tomorrow, I'll take you out to see some elk. You ever seen elk? In Kentucky? We get big game hunters coming down here to pay big bucks to take a shot at these elk. All on a former surface mine site”(Hazard 1/10/13). I politely declined the offer.

Going Forward

In my years of research and writing I have been forced to face challenging questions about my own identity and politics. In this project I have tried to make sense of people who did not make sense to me, and at this point I understand their actions. I respect people who support the coal industry for making difficult decisions in difficult situations, and I do not fault coalfield people who vote for the Republicans or for coal.

Throughout this project I have grappled with the same question as Geoff Mann, and I find myself in the same knots he finds himself tied in:

Many of the people who attended that climate justice meeting (including me) can and do tie themselves in knots trying to answer the “what’s the matter with Kansas?” question (Frank 2004; cf. Halimi 2004), and can certainly learn a lot from those efforts. But even in the most compelling of these efforts—Mike Davis’ *Prisoners of the American Dream* (1986), for instance, or Stuart Hall’s work on Thatcherism (1988)—the explanation for the problem cannot, and does not, legitimate conservative or reactionary politics. The living political divide between “them” the people and “us” (the Left, “progressives,” the “educated,” or whatever the label) is an essentially analytical premise—the distance is assumed in the very idea that conservatism is a problem to be explained.¹⁴²

So yes, I have an understanding I feel comfortable with in the question of explaining conservative voters in the Appalachian coalfields. They make sense, and their support for mountaintop mining makes sense. But, as Mann asks, does that make them right?

Indeed, although I know it does not exhaust what “real” democracy is, the idea that “average voters” in the U.S. or Canada should have *more* say in how we confront climate change scares the pants off me. They already seem to have far too much say; if you put climate policy in the hands of the electorates of the world’s dominant capitalist liberal democracies right now, my panic button tells me we’re doomed.¹⁴³

I am not willing to support, or even passively condone surface mining simply because I understand why so many people in the coalfields do, nor do I want to condone the Republican Party take-over of West Virginia. As someone who identifies with the Left, as a progressive at least, I am

142 Mann, “Who’s Afraid of Democracy?”

143 Ibid.

relatively convinced that Leftist institutions will help people in oppressive situations in the coalfields. However, West Virginia is not *my state*, especially in light of the rigorous standards of identity ownership in that state, and therefore I have the privilege of observing from the sidelines. However, in commenting on the politics of the region I find myself grappling with questions of agency – I am speaking about the coalfields and its people, and have no claim on speaking for them. However, out of personal experience in participating in climate organizing – the climate Left – since around 2007, I find myself needing to speak for and about climate organizers. In trying to make sense of my own politics I still find myself returning to basic questions of power. How is power working in the coalfields, who is making good in this situation and who is not, and what is my role in these dynamics of power?

I find that people in the coalfields are making decisions to publicly support the coal industry, and that they are not doing it out of ignorance or deceit, but from complex articulations and situations of cultures, identities, and political economies. But I have, in many ways, been treating the coalfields as a block, taking the liberty of talking about the majority opinion of the coalfields as speaking for one entity. Perhaps I have unduly given the impression that the coalfields at large is loosing, and desperately turning to fast departing ship of the coal industry for refuge from the economic and cultural typhoon that is deindustrialization. An undifferentiated mass of coalfield subjects is easy to address and pick apart their inputs to find out why they seem to be voting one way, however I want to take a moment to think about the winners and losers in the current situation.

When I first spent time in the coalfields I moved there for what would have been my first semester in college – five months in southern West Virginia, Raleigh County. The night that I moved out I spent drinking with a friend I had made, a young man who often came around to spend time with the ‘tree-huggers.’ That night, one forty deep, Brad said to me. “So you’re leaving?... Well, you can leave. I can’t leave. I have mortgages, I have kids. I was born here. I’m gonna die here”(Rock Creek 12/22/09). Brad had spent time organizing against surface mining and he had spent time in and around coal mines. He had seen many faces come and go in that organizing space in Rock Creek, West

Virginia. Brad, and many people in the coalfields do not have a luxury of mobility.

If you have a coal mining job for some time, you tentatively earn some mobility. Coal mining jobs are unstable in the modern era, yes. A coal miner's wife posted on the Citizens for Coal page: "Is there any jobs for a mine foreman in WV? My husband has a knee replacement on Wednesday April 3 and got laid off on Friday April 5. He will need to find a job after May 31!!"(Facebook 4/10/12). Yet, a coal miner and the family tied to him have a certain level of mobility that other people do not – he can buy properties far away from his work, as most do, and he can take his family away from surface mine sites if he wants, unlike Brad. Which, is not to side with Bard over the coal miner, – they are both in highly unequal positions in the United States, - but instead to shed light on a power dynamic that is present in the coalfields, and perhaps underlies much of the pro-coal politics.

"Coal company kept offering people money for their places, their homes, and most of them sold out and moved. A lot of them has regretted it, because they thought they was getting a good deal but when they went to buy a new home they found that what they got here wasn't enough to buy a home there"(Blair 7/11/12). At this point, Delmar can not really afford to leave Blair, emotionally if for nothing else. He has a house he built and a home he made going on 20 years ago.

I find this unequal mobility important because in all the discussions about politics and ideology is the material reality of mountaintop mining – some people in the coalfields live around the mining and some can live in the subdivision. There are silenced voices in pro-coal discourse - in fact that discourse silences voices that have real grievances with coal. RJ tells everyone he is pro-coal, 100%, really feeling that they need that industry. "'Cause West Virginia is coal. But not mountaintop coal, in my book. 'Cause Like I say I see what it does to our communities. Underground'd employ more men. It'd be a better environment for everyone. Today destroy everything, the next generation? No mountainsides to go play on.... They're gonna wake up and not have clean drinking water. What bothers me is not having water in West Virginia"(Blair 7/13/12).

The work of the Leftist then, or perhaps simply those that wish to work for equality, rather than

settle for being stumped on the question of how right or wrong working class or subaltern peoples are in the decisions they make, is to try to construct discourses about social change that includes those groups of people. Without a doubt, that point is more simply said than done, but I think the first step is understanding the positions and roots of ideology. From that analysis I believe a power dynamic should become clear about why these people do not seem to like the Leftists, or me, for that matter.

During the summer, Saturdays are ‘Pickin’ in the Park’ at the state park in Logan. The first one I attended with Leroy, one of the older men from Blair, we played a little music with some young people hanging around outside. Leroy happened to mention that I was from California (to him, I am). Later in the evening the younger singer got up on stage and started Gretchen Wilson’s song *California Girls*. “Ain’t you glad we ain’t all California girls?... Ain’t afraid to eat fried chicken and dirty dance to Merle.”¹⁴⁴ We left mid-song, I was not looking for trouble.

A real assessment of the why Appalachian people resent the coasts, and “progressivism,” is important for making alliances with people who are living in situations of oppression, people who’s power situations have them in the short end of an unequal position. I say this speaking as a white, wealthy, well-educated activists on the Left. There is something truly middle-class, white, and elitist about the climate discourse in this country, particularly in the way activists groups create narratives about the vision for the future. The climate discourse has been of apocalyptic proportion, and the climate science appears completely terrifying – however, the people of the fossil fuel economy have responded equally apocalyptically. As political power mobilized around the climate crisis, groups took harder or softer positions on compromising with industries and the state. In all this some people realized the long problematic issue of middle-class, white, environmentalism: the groups most affected were not at the table, such as the coalfield residents.¹⁴⁵

A climate justice movement appeared out of this moment, drawing some of the old Earth First!

144 Gretchen Wilson, *California Girls*.

145 Sitchensis, “New Directions in Climate Justice.”

crowd as well as the environmental justice/racism people. The people at Climate Ground Zero and RAMPS appeared in the coalfields out of these sentiments and logics – that the real activism around the climate needed to happen at the nodal points where climate change was going to worst impact people, and where the climate crisis was already destroying peoples’ lives, such as in mountaintop mining communities. But environmentalists showing up in the coalfields waving the banner of climate justice, saying, “now we’re including you,” did not reverse the impressions and resentment that people in West Virginia have built up against environmentalism. That said, I certainly do not think that the coalfield population should be disregarded in any activism around the climate – quite the opposite.

The real issue that stands out is that people in the coalfields are economically dependent on the coal industry, not only for incomes, - for culturally meaningful symbols and an identity. To everyone else, the place is a sacrifice zone. Therefore the question this work leaves me with is how can people addressing the climate crisis approach economic issues in a way that includes the well being of people like coal miners and their families? Simply saying that the economic transition is going to be rough will not do – clearly big coal has made an alliance with a lot of people in the Appalachian coalfields because of this approach. And, not only is calling the coal miner a loss in this fight more of the same middle-class environmentalism, but I am unsure of the ability to have real political progress on climate without at least some of the Right-wing base.

Furthermore, Marxist environmental approaches that pronounce capitalism as the problem are not about to win anyone in the coalfields either – to choose one reason, the coalfields’ culturally ingrained neoliberal discourse that years of widespread enrollment on government welfare has helped to no end. However, it is also clear that capital’s role in the fossil fuel economy is unavoidably huge and I doubt that real solutions to the climate crisis will occur without addressing fundamental underlying aspects of unrestrained capitalist exploitation of land and nature.¹⁴⁶ I also do not buy the ‘green economy is the solution’ line, however much I respect the work of people like Van Jones and

146 Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

Green for All.¹⁴⁷ I find that a vision of widespread government support for a green economy, while we dismantle the power of fossil fuel hegemony, is a real potential solution. However, that argument needs to have political saliency behind it. Telling the coal miners to wait while we get the Republicans on board with a Green New Deal seems naïve at best, and elitist at worst.

Where, then, should the progressive, the climate justice activist, or just someone who wants to see equality stand on issues of the economy in a climate crisis in a way that is non-elitist and inclusive of those people bearing the brunt of whatever decision is made? How can we actually talk about how urgent the climate crisis is when its effects will be felt in 2020 if not 2050, when the middle-class white suburbanite will keep their job and the coal miner is sure they will lose theirs tomorrow if any action is taken – whose urgency are we talking about then?

Perhaps the thing to do is have dialog with people in the most vulnerable positions, such as those in mining communities. Even more important than showing these people that the climate Left cares might be to actually refocus on the issues of inequality. However politically useful the discourse that 350.org has been engaging with is (which I am not convinced of), “We > Fossil Fuels,” and whose sentiments are echoed across climate organizing, maybe asking the impacted communities if they are part of that ‘we’ could push climate organizing at least into conversation with the very people that have been instrumental in holding back real legislative victories.

The thing is that there is real damage being done, and real grievances in the coalfields, and in all the extractive and impacted fossil fuel communities. There are many people in the coalfields that understand that they are getting a bad deal out of their relationship with the coal industry, whether in the fear that they or a husband will get laid off or not knowing if the next rain will flood out their town. But no one else has offered them any sort of hope.

“Swimming holes?... We used to, when we was kids, we used to have a swimming hole above the Blair ball field there. We'd dam it up there and swim in it.... And then we had one up here where they used to call Helen trestle. It was a big one. It wasn't dammed up or nothing it was

147 Jones, *The Green Collar Economy*.

just a big hole of water, where it washed out around that trestle. It was big... it was deep. Like 6 or 8 foot deep.... Sometimes we'd just spend a day damming the creek up. And there used to be more fish in it. Now you never hardly see them but maybe creek shad or something, and now and then you might find a hole of water a couple feet deep or something, with a few red horses or suckers or something. But its not like it used to be. Most of the water in the creek now comes from the deep mines. The deep mine up Kelly, and if someway or another we cut that off, this creek wouldn't have no water in it, it'd be dry"(Blair 7/11/12).

When I asked Delmar about the swimming holes he got very nostalgic, as did most people in Blair who I asked about them. As I left to go back to college I caught him outside to say goodbye. "You think these folks are gonna win?" He pointed to the museum and my friends and colleagues working on preserving the Blair Mountain Battlefield and the town of Blair. I conjectured a while. Delmar shook his head. "I don't think they've got a chance. We've lost this one. The coal company's too powerful. There ain't no chance"(Blair 8/3/12). Middle-class white environmentalism will never be Delmar's fight, nor will climate change. He does not even believe in it. But that does not mean middle-class white environmentalists cannot ally with Delmar. The question is, are those environmentalists ready to change their politics, perhaps even priorities, and sacrifice something to earn Delmar's confidence?

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Appendix

i

Holler – A pronunciation of hollow common to the Appalachian region. A hollow is a small valley which runs up a mountain.

ii

American is here used as it is used in common English spoken in the United States. It stands in for using words like United Statean, the issue being that all of North and South Americans consider themselves Americans as well.

iii

Important here is also an analysis of the concept of *power* and *powerlessness*, Gaventa's two categories. Although I certainly see the coalfield peoples as in relationship of hegemony with the coal industry, I argue that picking apart the concept of powerlessness is important. Michel Foucault's approach to power informs this work, particularly in his conception of power as contingent on actors having freedom: "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free.'" Actors must have the ability to choose the action, 'freedom,' in a Foucaultian understanding of power, - the choices of coal industry supporters.

The coal industry has certainly done work to shape the common sense understandings of interests in the coalfields, work that I try to pick apart and understand. With Foucault's understanding of power I build on theories of ideology as power-laden belief structures, to see political ideology in the coalfields as a product of hegemonic processes. The coalfield residents then are agential actors in relationship with the industry and the nation, and their support for the industry is an example of their agency and ultimately a form of power, in a position Gaventa and others may call powerlessness.

iv

Discourse: foucaultian term to describe what constitutes a conversation, the ideas, rhetorics, and narratives surrounding a topic or thing.

v

In line with Federici's analysis of medieval Europe, Mary Anglin (1995) noted the role of women in agrarian Appalachia's production and economy that has often been overlooked, women working exclusively in roles such as seamstress, midwife, and domestic servant, producing goods such as yarn, linen, clothes, and medicine (Anglin in Pudup, et. al. 1995: 193).

vi

Limited scholarship exists on the battle. Lon Savage's *Thunder in the Mountains* gives a good historical account of the battle and how it occurred. William C. Blizzard was at the battle, and evidently was one of the leaders of the miner's army. Wes Harris, coalfield historian, has recently edited a series that Blizzard wrote and published in the newspaper, and the book serves as a phenomenal text. Brandon Nida's work on the battle archeology and the fight over historic preservation informs this work, as it ties in the processes of erasing of the history of Blair Mountain, through surface mining.

vii

In many places worldwide ATVs are used as farm and agricultural vehicles, tools to do the work of fencing, herding cattle, and moving around large land areas for less fuel than a truck or a tractor. In the coalfields, agricultural settings are few and far between, and ATVs play a role of recreation and supplemental income – the device is a tool for accessing a virtual commons: coal, timber, and land company owned land that comprises the surrounding hills. The history of land use and corporate ownership has made the old horse trails and ridge runs, where people would walk from one valley to the next, usable for logging roads and access sites to gas wells. The ATV marks a new access regime, of the last thirty years, in its compatibility with mountaintop-mined lands. The ATV is recreationally appropriate, even suited to, the open rocky expanses of mined lands, as root digging and forestland recreation is not. The ATV's relationship with mined lands has also been mediated through the material enactment of development discourse - the start of a local ATV tourist industry, with mining and land company collaboration, which has coincided with and necessitated closing the commons for collective use in some places.⁴

Honda came out with the first ATV in the 1970s, a three-wheeler, becoming the industry leader in all-terrain-vehicles. As the product took hold as a recreational and agricultural vehicle, other companies took part in the market, including Kawasaki, Yamaha, and Polaris by the early 1990s. It was in that decade between the 1980s and 1990s that the device took off, becoming wildly popular in rural agricultural uses as well as rural recreation in the United States, becoming a central feature in West Virginia's landscape. In the 1980's and 1990s, as the ATV prices lowered and their popularity took

off, the coalfields lost jobs. Newly anti-union mining companies came to act without recourse to the union or civil society. The 1990s saw the explosion of many new mountaintop mine sites. On abandoned surface mines, which by this point were many, ATV use was a major site of recreation. Accident and death rates climbed around ATVs because old mine sites are often close to active mine sites, and were sometimes dangerous terrains with cliffs and unstable rocks. Many of these fatalities were people under the age of 25, and in the 1990s the ATV related death rate was 8 times higher in West Virginia than the national average. As such, the state of West Virginia made new legislation in 2004, prohibiting riding on roads with double yellow lines for extended periods, and enacted new safety and training programs.

viii

Enclosing the commons is a concept that ought to be understood as part of a continuation of Marx's conception of *primitive accumulation*. The works of E.P. Tompson on enclosure and class in England, as well as the work of Tania Li in Southeast Asia, and the conceptions of power and access to resources that Nancy Peluso and Jesse Ribot delineate are critical to understanding what is happening in southern West Virginia as an enclosure and a process of primitive accumulation. (Tompson, *Whigs and Hunters*; Ribot and Peluso, "A Theory of Access"; Li, *Tenure Issues in Rural Development Planning*)

ix

Discussing masculinities requires examining how gender roles and forms are constituted generally. As such this work relies on Rebecca Scott's characterization of gender in the Appalachian coalfields, as well as coming out of Judith Butler's work on gender, Michel Foucault's conceptions of power and sexuality, as well as the work of Michael Kimmel on *Manhood in America*. (Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*)

x

The discourse of development is present in modern representations of central Appalachia. MTV's 2013 top reality television show, *Buckwild*, is set in southern West Virginia with a set of young people having fun, evidently, in the West Virginia way: "wild and wonderful," as per the state's motto. The show was cancelled in April, 2013, after one of the main stars died in a truck accident in the hills.

Buckwild depicts the young people in summer, the main plot of every episode doing things that seem outrageous, unwise, and generally not done by most of the United States viewing population. We watch the male cast members getting together and doing things that are exciting because they are irresponsible or different, or both - rolling down huge hills in a tire, driving trucks through the mud, - while the females discuss juicy problems brewing between the cast members. The real thrill of the show is seeing the girls join the boys and take part in the boys outlandish, classically 'redneck,' activities - driving trucks off road, shooting guns at targets, jumping off of a huge railroad trestle into a river or off a roof into a dump truck filled with water, or riding bulls. The show, MTV's top rated for 2013, appeals because the viewer is seeing into the lives of an 'other,' whose lives are comic because of the distance the viewer has from them. We think to ourselves - "can you believe they just did that?"

Many scholars, activists, and politicians have criticized *Buckwild*, and the host of media about Appalachia, as reinforcing negative stereotypes. Democratic Senator, former governor, Joe Manchin remarked, "Instead of showcasing the beauty of our state, you preyed on young people, coaxed them into shameful behavior -- and now you are profiting from it. That is just wrong ... This show plays to ugly, inaccurate stereotypes about the people of West Virginia." The mayor of Charleston, WV, where some of the show is set has not been pleased about the show either: "The show does nothing for us and exaggerates every negative stereotype about us." However, some old men, talking in a barber shop in Blair, remarked about the show - "I watched it. I don't see what the whole problem is. I mean, we did those type of things when we was kids. We did stupid shit..." (Blair 1/4/13).

I tend to agree with the Senator about the show, however both the popularity of the show, and the old man's comments about the reality of the show cast light on discourses that disparage Appalachian lived experience. The outlandish, otherness, comes from a particular 'country' or 'redneck' identity - one that is about rural disparities in the United States. The Appalachian subject is represented in *Buckwild* as the white 'other.' Shane, the late cast member, is the typical example, as he appears to be incapable of speaking standard English, enjoys his garbage pick-up job, and is consistently wearing clothing that would be inappropriate in urban or professional environments - camouflage and cut offs. His whiteness is troubled, marked, by the need for subtitles, his centrality on the show speaking to the amount of popularity that comes from laughing at his difference.

An important point is that Shain's character typifies a masculinity that is widely respected and encouraged. Going 'mudding' and shooting guns and refusing to give in to modernity - Facebook, cellphone, or internet. He is a hick. People in the coalfields identify with who Shain was, which is why the place has a mark on its whiteness. It is different, people know they are different, and are recalcitrant in that difference. And that is what made the show, because MTV, and all the viewers, were looking for some real hillbillies.

xi

"Alpha is super environmentally careful. Everything on our site is perfect. The DEP guys come up all the time, and they've told me that everything is perfect. I mean, we wouldn't move if it wasn't"(Buffalo Creek 7/25/12). The men at the Buffalo Creek gas station and breakfast stop were very confident of the merits of their work. "You can't just leave it all tore up. You have to replant it. And you know we replant hardwoods, we replant orchards. I've been up on some of our reclaimed jobs, and there's orchards up there, apples, pears"(Buffalo Creek 7/23/12). One of the stories I heard about often was that of the America chestnut - the species that once dominated the eastern woodlands ecosystem until the mid-nineteenth century when a fungus has virtually made it extinct. Friends of Coal remarks, to counter notions that forest will not grow back, that "former surface mine lands are very good for the growth of such trees and are even being used to restore the American Chestnut tree to its former native range." And research indicates that on an Arbor Day in 2008 kindergarteners in eastern Kentucky planted some 200 hardwood seedlings, including 40-50 new American chestnuts, on a reclaimed International Coal Group surface mine.

xii

Subjects- refers to the Foucaultian notion of subjects to a ruler, and that such relationships have remained in our generations in the form of relationships to institutions, such as the coal industry.

