

THE FAITH TO SAVE MOUNTAINS: RELIGION AND RESISTANCE TO MOUNTAINTOP
REMOVAL COAL MINING IN APPALACHIA

By

JOSEPH DYLAN WITT

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To my family and the people of Appalachia

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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By

Joseph Dylan Witt

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Chair: Bron Taylor

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Mountaintop removal coal mining, a form of surface mining practiced in the Central Appalachian states of West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, presents one of the most significant environmental issues of the 21st century. Impacted Appalachian communities are often forced to choose between the few jobs offered by mountaintop mines and the preservation of the region's mountains, ecological diversity, and water quality. For national environmental groups, mountaintop removal represents a focal point for the continued fight against U.S. fossil fuel dependency and its connections to climate change. Many of these activists incorporate cultural and religious narratives into their work, whether evangelical Christian views of stewardship and creation care, mainline Protestant and Catholic views of social justice, or forms of nature-based religion. Despite significant differences (for example, evangelical activists sometimes disagree with radical environmental activists on certain social policies), these groups manage to work effectively together, respecting their mutual differences while sharing commitments to preserve Appalachian communities and ecosystems.

While some environmental groups have downplayed or simplified religious values in the past, the case of resistance to mountaintop removal reveals that religious values are necessary components of broader worldviews that motivate and support environmental activism for some

impacted communities. The influence of the movement against mountaintop removal on local communities partially derives from the commitment of its organizers to respecting local religious values, elevating local citizens to positions of leadership, and allowing impacted communities to guide the methods used to contest the mining practice. This case thus represents a valuable study on the place of religious values in grassroots environmental activism, offering models for incorporating diverse religious perspectives into the movement while at the same time respecting differences. The case also provides tools for scholars of religion and Appalachian history to understand the complex ways that religious values are translated into individual behaviors. Religious resistance to mountaintop removal reveals the place of local religious values among a myriad of factors and values that influence responses to an environmentally and socially damaging practice.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The year 2011 began with the passing of two giants in West Virginia; one passing was celebrated, the other mourned. The first death was more figurative than literal. Toward the end of January it was announced that Alpha Natural Resources would buy Massey Energy for approximately \$7.1 billion. Before 2011, Massey had been widely known for its safety violations, anti-union policies, and support of increased mountaintop removal mining and decreased environmental regulations. For many anti-mountaintop removal activists, Massey represented all of the offenses associated with mountaintop removal. Though it was not the largest land holder in the region, Massey owned mines in the Coal River Valley of West Virginia, including a mine, processing center, and slurry impoundment near Marsh Fork Elementary, one of the focal points of the 21st century anti-mountaintop removal movement. At the helm was Don Blankenship, Massey's climate change-denying and anti-union Chief Executive Officer. After starting as an office manager with the company in 1982, Blankenship had worked his way quickly to the highest position in the company by 1990. Though always controversial for his public persona and political machinations, Blankenship fell under increased scrutiny after the 2010 Upper Big Branch Mine disaster, in which 25 miners died in an underground explosion despite frequent warnings of safety violations by officials. On December 31, 2010, Blankenship officially retired from the company, and with the sale of Massey, one of the most despised figures and companies among anti-mountaintop removal activists was gone (Parker and Mider 2011).

Although some activists celebrated the sale of Massey and retirement of Blankenship, they lamented the loss of the other West Virginia giant. On January 3, 2011, Julia "Judy" Bonds lost a short battle with cancer. A tenth-generation West Virginian, Judy Bonds was undeniably

one of the most influential figures of the anti-mountaintop removal movement and one of the most influential environmental activists of the early 21st century.

Bonds became involved in the anti-mountaintop removal movement after pollution from a nearby surface mine threatened her family and home in Marfork Hollow (Brown 2011). She worked with Coal River Mountain Watch and gained international attention for her boisterous speeches, unapologetic “hillbilly” persona, and deeply evangelical Christian worldview, all in spite of continued threats and acts of violence toward her by miners and other industry supporters. According to Allen Johnson, her friend and a fellow Christian activist, “Judy was a prophet of our time” (Johnson 2011). In 2003 she was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize, which came with a \$150,000 prize and global recognition. In 2004 and 2005, Bonds was involved in the revitalization of local anti-mountaintop removal activism through the youth-powered Mountain Justice movement. By the time of her passing in 2011, Bonds had witnessed the resolution of some of the most controversial issues associated with mountaintop removal. Private donors and the local government had agreed to relocate Marsh Fork Elementary School, and in the fall of 2010, though too ill to attend herself, Judy witnessed from home the largest mobilization of national activists in resistance to mountaintop removal in Washington, D.C. Though she left countless friends and admirers, Bonds had witnessed and to a large degree guided the contemporary movement against mountaintop removal coal mining. Wherever the movement would go in 2011 and beyond remained unclear, but without either Massey or Judy Bonds, it would never be the same.

In this work I interrogate the resistance movement to mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia, focusing specifically on the importance of religious values in motivating and sustaining that resistance and situating the movement within a longer history of conflict between

the coal industry and Appalachian workers. The 21st century resistance movement developed from a lengthy history of political, economic, social, religious, and environmental engagement between coal industry officials, workers, and Appalachian landowners. In previous decades, some scholars and religious anti-poverty workers argued that the coal industry brought needed cultural and economic changes to Appalachia—providing locals with the economic means to enter U.S. capitalist society and helping them to see the value of hard work (a value that some 19th and 20th century commentators believed many Appalachians lacked). Later, scholars viewed the history of the coal industry in Appalachia as a form of colonialist exploitation—extracting the material wealth of the region and exporting it elsewhere while extending few of the benefits to local laborers and their families. These different perspectives remain influential among anti-mountaintop removal activists, scholars, and other Appalachians. Elucidating the multiple perspectives of those impacted by mountaintop removal helps reveal the complexity among environmental and religious values on the ground.

Activists employ religious and cultural narratives in their resistance that are familiar to them while at the same time they reflect on and respond to other influences, such as the arrival of radical environmentalists who bring values and perspectives that differ from traditional Appalachian cultural worldviews. The different religious and environmental values of anti-mountaintop removal activists combine and conflict in specific cases, and the current resistance movement represents both tradition and innovation. Some challenge mountaintop removal for feeding U.S. fossil fuel dependency, which contributes to climate change, while others emphasize mountaintop removal's impacts on Appalachian communities and ecosystems. The problem of mountaintop removal, then, lies at the confluence of multiple regional and global environmental issues. For some, the damages caused by mountaintop removal evoke religious

responses as well. Religious activists, whether evangelical Christian, mainline Christian, or dark green religious practitioners (those who consider nature sacred and all species as having intrinsic value [Taylor 2010]), work together and share perspectives, while at the same time preserving what they consider to be essential elements of their religious identities. What binds activists of different religious and ethical views is a commitment to preserve the ecosystems and human communities of Appalachia, though as will be seen, sometimes activists share little else (Shapiro 2010). The image of religious resistance to mountaintop removal that emerges is not one of a singular group speaking in the same voice, but of a diverse movement, comprised of multiple actors with differing motivations who manage to work together toward a shared goal of stopping mountaintop removal coal mining. This diversity of viewpoints is a key reason that the religious resistance to mountaintop removal has been so vibrant. Individuals from multiple perspectives are able to participate in the movement, at different levels, and always have their opinions respected. The contemporary movement against mountaintop removal provides a positive model for engaging and respecting different religious values within a broader environmental movement. In other words, the movement shows that religious values, even when they conflict among participants, need not be put aside for an environmental movement to be effective. Instead, they may be respectfully engaged by participants, ultimately comprising a rich texture of diversity where many different stakeholders are allowed to participate.

This study is primarily informed by the works of Robert Orsi (1997, 2005), Anna Peterson (2009), Thomas Tweed (2006), and Bron Taylor (2010) on the intersections of religions, values, and environmental attitudes and behaviors. Orsi advocated “lived religion,” a historical perspective and methodology, inspired in large part by work in the sociology of religion, focusing on how religious teachings and materials are used by laypersons in everyday

situations, and how boundaries between religions that scholars often draw too rigidly are fluid and permeable. For Orsi, “religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life” (1997:7), not merely through expressions of metaphysical or theological principles. Religion is inevitably a process of cultural creativity that cannot be “separated from the material circumstances in which specific instances of religious imagination and behavior arise and to which they respond” (1997:7). He continued, “all religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed, and improvised at the intersections of life” (Orsi 1997:8). In other words, a lived religion perspective focuses on “religion as people actually do and imagine it in the circumstances of their everyday lives” (Orsi 2005:158). Emerging as it does in specific circumstances, religion also embodies the many conflicts of everyday life. The study of lived religions “emphasizes dissent, subversion, and resistance, rather than harmony, consensus, and social legitimation” (Orsi 1997:15).

For Orsi, religions are always also situated in specific times and places: “religious cultures are local and to study religion is to study local worlds” (Orsi 2005:167), they are not just the abstract concepts discussed by scholars. In *Between Heaven and Hell*, Orsi introduced the metaphor of “braiding” to describe the interactions between multiple religious, social, economic, and other factors in the real world; religious practices are thus always braided into more complex strands of relationships (2005:9). This metaphor is especially useful to understand the various religious groups engaged in opposition to mountaintop removal, sharing ideas and perspectives on the ground but also working to retain their individual identities. Following this lived religion perspective requires attending to multiple other threads related to religious resistance on the ground, including local politics, history, and culture. It also necessitates a fieldwork approach, combined with archival and secondary-source data.

Peterson provided another useful approach, considering the complex relationships between values and their associated behaviors. While Orsi emphasized the complex ways that religious values are “lived,” Peterson focused on how values are physically embodied. She argued, “in addition to receiving moral principles and ideas that are then enacted and transformed in everyday life, people also enact moral values that they have not consciously reflected on or articulated. These are not just lived but embodied ethics. Attending to the values embodied, often unacknowledged, in everyday life requires us also to look for the ways political and economic institutions are embodied in that life, to see the structural in the everyday” (Peterson 2009:25). As a research model, Peterson called scholars to not only ask what people say about their values, but what they do with them. In Appalachia, for example, several Christian denominations have issued official statements opposing mountaintop removal mining. This does not necessarily mean, however, that individual parishioners are changing their behaviors in response, or even know about the statements to begin with (see Chapter 6). Peterson’s work likewise urged scholars to explore how social structures subtly and overtly influence individual behaviors. Regarding religious resistance to mountaintop removal in Appalachia, this approach demands a consideration of how political and economic structures (such as coal companies and their elected supporters) have influenced environmental perceptions over time. Arguments of the form that “we can’t stop mountaintop removal because the coal industry is all we have” (see Chapter 5), entail the influence of decades of local discourse surrounding the coal industry and economic structures. Finally, Peterson called researchers to understand how values and practices are “mutually transformative” (2009:133). Influenced by Marx, she argued, “values and practices, desires and structures, are always interacting with and transforming each other; to single out one as the dominant or sole factor in any social process

reflects a deep failure of understanding” (Peterson 2009:131). Peterson’s work helps to explain how religious values, social structures, and individual behaviors interact and change. In Appalachia, this reciprocal relationship between values and practices can be represented by local Christians who engage with other environmentalists and thus reframe their attitudes toward mountaintop removal and then change their behaviors by becoming involved in rallies against the practice.

In *Crossing and Dwelling* (2006), Tweed provided another useful metaphor for studying religions. For Tweed, “religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (2006:54). This describes religious responses to mountaintop removal well. Boundaries between different groups remain present but permeable, and individuals repeatedly cross cognitive and physical borders—evangelical Christians accepting anarchists as friends, despite significant personal differences, or atheist activists bowing their heads respectfully while locals offer prayers for the Appalachian mountains. Likewise, religious values are engaged and challenged as individuals confront the suffering caused by mountaintop removal and envision a positive future for the region. Finally for Tweed, religious groups “make homes” because they “delineate domestic and public space and construct collective identity” (Tweed 2006:75). In Appalachia, different religious individuals come together to form new communities, bonded by shared visions of duty to preserve Appalachian ecosystems. Activists construct a public space of rallies and events, as well as a private space defined sometimes by “security culture” and consensus group management. Combined with Orsi’s lived religion perspective, Tweed’s theory of religion helps explain the multiple influences and motivations of religious activists in Appalachia.

Unlike Orsi's "braiding," Tweed introduced fluid and organic metaphors in his description of religious processes. Organic metaphors seem particularly appropriate when describing religious resistance to mountaintop removal, acknowledging flows, permeability, and change. Sarah McFarland Taylor, in her study of environmentally conscious Catholic nuns, proposed "renaturing" the concept of religion, arguing that organic metaphors redirect religious studies to important new areas. "Scholarship that presumes religion to be preeminently organic sees religious people as active, creative, and embodied meaning-makers, symbol users, storytellers, and dynamic shapers and reshapers of culture" (Taylor 2007:283). As roots and rhizomes branch apart and interconnect, so do behaviors, values, and material conditions.

Bron Taylor provided more important concepts for theorizing and describing hybridity between religious practitioners and understanding the profound connections to a place and feelings of connectedness that underlie the motivations of many environmental activists. In *Dark Green Religion* and earlier works, Taylor described a "global environmentalist milieu in which shared ideas incubate, cross-fertilize, and spread" (2010:14). Individuals within this milieu shared perspectives and ideas, drawing upon multiple foundations in a process Taylor described as bricolage (borrowing a term from French anthropologist Claude Lévy-Strauss [1967]), or "an amalgamation of bits and pieces of a wide array of ideas and practices, drawn from diverse cultural systems, religious traditions, and political ideologies" (2010:14). Environmentalists drew upon multiple sources in their work, continually reshaping their beliefs in "a process characterized by hybridization and bricolage" (Taylor 2010:14). Taylor's work on the intersections between religious and environmental values describes conditions among Appalachian environmentalists as well, who frequently draw upon multiple traditions such as creation care (a Christian environmental stewardship perspective), deep ecology (a philosophy

positing intrinsic value to all species), and Native American religions, creating perspectives addressing the specific environmental and cultural threats posed by mountaintop removal. Unlike Orsi's braid, "bricolage" reflects the ongoing building process behind religious environmentalism: different values do not persist in a static braid, but are continually reconsidered. Taylor said that "bricolage" thus "captures better the reciprocal and ever-evolving processes of religious production" (Taylor 2001a:178).

Describing dark green religion, Taylor also argued for a more expansive understanding of religions, "taking a 'polyfocal approach' to the study of religion, exploring, analyzing, and comparing the widest possible variety of beliefs, behaviors, and functions that are typically associated with the term" (2010:2). The result allowed for the consideration of "religion-resembling phenomena" within the broader network of values and the environment (Taylor 2010:3). In the Appalachian context, taking such a "polyfocal approach" allows the inclusion of individuals and groups who express environmental values outside of traditional Christian narratives, such as many non-Christian radical environmentalists involved in the anti-mountaintop removal movement. This approach also allows for the consideration of the influence of dark green thought on those who are also members of Christian communities, including Judy Bonds, who expressed a deep commitment to an evangelical Christian worldview but who was also influenced by local, nature-revering traditions.

Finally, Taylor and others provided useful arguments on the emergence of global environmental resistance movements, acknowledging that material and religious factors remain intertwined. In the conclusion to *Ecological Resistance Movements*, Taylor argued,

"to acknowledge that basic human needs provide the most decisive impetus to ecological resistance (especially in less affluent countries) is not incompatible with recognizing that moral and religious idea motivations are deeply intertwined with the material motivations or that popular ecological resistance cannot be

accounted for if moral and religious variables are overlooked, or reduced to after-the-fact justifications” (1995:336).

This succinctly describes the situation in Appalachia (a less affluent region of the U.S.). As I show in following chapters, many local anti-mountaintop removal activists began their work because mountaintop removal directly threatened their homes, families, or communities. They also see mountaintop removal as more than just an environmental issue, but an economic and cultural threat as well. As Taylor explained, such material motivations do not negate the importance of religious and moral factors in those individuals’ work. For many activists, mountaintop removal is both a material and religious issue, and it is not necessary to unbraid these multiple motivations. Following Taylor’s work, it is clear that the resistance movement to mountaintop removal fits well within broader trends in ecological resistance movements around the world and can be used to further understand and theorize those movements.

Based on these preceding theoretical works, my own approach to religious values on the ground in resistance to mountaintop removal describes a stream of activism. Distinct traditions and values (whether creation care among evangelical Christians or spiritual connections to the land among practitioners of spiritual deep ecology) exist as currents and eddies within that wider stream. Religious values, however, are not the only tributaries to this stream. Political, social, economic, racial, and cultural histories and structures interact with religious values as well; and as the above theorists would note, religious ideas are seldom expressed on their own by embodied humans. Instead, religious perspectives coexist with other values, and people make daily decisions based upon numerous other conditions. As Taylor argued, these values are continually renegotiated as well, and are subject to revision and change given changing circumstances. While this project focuses primarily on religious values and resistance to mountaintop removal, these values can never be perfectly extricated from the larger stream of

Appalachian history. Identifying the different values deployed and perspectives on the issue is thus a necessary first step before deciding which values and perspectives potentially lead to increased justice for the Appalachians impacted by the practice and help reduce U.S. dependency upon coal and other fossil fuels.

Where is Appalachia, and What is Mountaintop Removal?

Like many cultural identifiers, the term “Appalachia” was originally applied to the region from outside visitors. Appalachia first appeared in reference to the lands held by the Apalachee tribe of the Florida panhandle, not the great eastern mountain range. Early Spanish explorers of Florida and the Gulf Coast sought gold among the local native nations, whom they believed to be directly connected to the gold-rich societies of Central and South America. Many rumors pointed to the Apalachee Indians of the Florida panhandle, the region now known as Apalachicola. Disappointed in the lack of gold among the Apalachee, explorers turned their attention north, where the coastal natives said there was a vast mountain range, rich in resources.¹ Rumors of this region continued through the decades of Spanish and French exploration. In 1564, French cartographer Jacques Le Moyne included at the northern boundary of the Florida territory (in a region now part of the mountains of North Georgia) a village called “Apalatchi” that he believed was associated with the Apalachee of Florida. While Le Moyne’s map indicated only one possibly fictitious village, later maps applied the term to the mountainous region in general. In 1569, the famous Flemish cartographer Gerard Mercator dubbed the continuous mountain chain extending from Le Moyne’s “Apalatchi” northward the “Apalachen” mountains. In this way, the name of a coastal Floridian native group became

¹ As James Axtell (1997) has shown, native peoples of the Southeast often pointed the Spanish toward unfriendly tribes, effectively using the explorers as a weapon against their enemies. The city of gold to the north promised by the Apalachee was more likely the region inhabited by competitors for resources.

associated with North America's easternmost mountain chain (Davis 2000:3-7; Wilson 2002:19-20).

Appalachia solidified as a region in 1964 when Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty established it in the popular imagination. While Appalachia was known as a unique region before 1964, media coverage of Johnson's announcement and tour through the area resurrected popular perceptions of Appalachia as an entirely other place, marked by impoverished people who failed to keep up with U.S. progress. To solve crippling poverty in the region, Johnson established the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to oversee public projects and distribute government relief funds. In an effort to cover all mountainous regions impacted by poverty, and possibly to win support from local politicians, ARC drew the borders of Appalachian widely. Ultimately, ARC defined the region of Appalachia as extending from Southern New York to Northern Alabama and Mississippi. It included 420 individual counties spread across 13 different states (see Figure 1-1). Coal had long been mined throughout this 13 state area. Contemporary mountaintop removal, however, occurs primarily in Central Appalachia—the subregion including West Virginia, western Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, and Eastern Tennessee. The focus of this study, then, is on that more limited region.

The term “mountaintop removal” is often used as short-hand for one form of the large scale surface mining that occurs primarily in Central Appalachia. Surface mining is a broad term for any form of mining in which mineral seams are exposed to the air, as opposed to deep mining, where miners and machines enter the earth to remove minerals. In 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defined mountaintop removal coal mining as “a surface mining practice involving the: (1) removal of mountaintops to expose coal seams, and (2) disposing of the associated mining overburden [or non-coal debris] in adjacent valleys—‘valley

fills” (EPA 2011). This process unfolds in several steps. First, trees and vegetation on the hillside are cleared and all the earth above the coal seam (called “overburden”) is removed by explosives and earth-moving machinery. This overburden is often pushed into nearby valleys, forming a “valley fill,” or used to create dams for slurry impoundments where the wastewater from coal processing is stored. Mining and hauling machines, such as massive drag lines, then remove the coal and surrounding materials (called “spoil”), which is sent to a nearby plant to be processed and shipped to markets. Following the completion of the mining process, the mined land is re-graded, though this provision may be circumvented if an economic alternative is offered for the flattened land. Infamous examples include prisons (such as “Sink Sink” in Inez, Kentucky), airfields, shopping centers, and even the Twisted Gun Golf Course, in Mingo County, West Virginia. Finally, the post-mine land is reseeded with grasses and other plants (see Figures 4-2 through 4-8).² Mountaintop removal mining emerged gradually as technological and economic conditions changed in the Appalachian coalfields and the United States in general. While the practice began in the 1970s on a limited basis, mountaintop removal permits proliferated in the 1990s and 2000s, although the practice did not gain significant media attention until the early 21st century. By 2011, researchers estimated that mountaintop removal had impacted over 500 mountains in Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee, and over 50% of coal mined in those states came from surface mines (Epstein et al. 2011; EIA 2009). To understand the practice and the resistance movement to it in the 21st century, however, it is necessary to understand the historical and social conditions that precipitated it.

² A brief explanation of mountaintop removal, along with some diagrams, is available at EPA 2011, “Mid-Atlantic Mountaintop Mining.” Shirley Burns provides a pithy narrative description in her *Bringing Down the Mountains* (2007:5-6). The numerous websites from different anti-mountaintop removal groups likewise provide helpful descriptions of the process (see especially Appalachian Voices’ “I Love Mountains” resources: <http://www.ilovemountains.org/resources/>) (accessed May 24, 2011).

Chapter Outline

Because understanding mountaintop removal requires interdisciplinary lenses, I begin my study surveying the relevant theories related to the study of religion, coal, and resistance in Appalachia. In Chapter 2 I review how scholarly perceptions of Appalachia have changed since the late 19th century, when the first commentators described the region. To historically situate 21st century mountaintop removal in Chapter 3, I describe the histories of religion and the coal industry in Appalachia, pointing to places of collision between the two. In Chapter 4 I then chart the emergence of strip mining and the emergence of resistance to it, beginning in the 1960s and moving to the first decade of the 21st century, along with the groups and individuals who make up the primary body of evidence for later chapters. I turn to themes of identity and place made prominent in the resistance movement to mountaintop removal in Chapter 5, including an analysis of insider vs. outsider debates between miners and activists, and problematic assertions of “hillbilly” and American Indian identities. In Chapters 6 and 7, I examine three categories of religious resistance to mountaintop removal: mainline Christian, evangelical Christian, and dark green religiosity, and conclude in Chapter 7 with an analysis of the points of cooperation and conflict between members of these different categories. My primary research includes 19 in-depth interviews (averaging an hour each in length) with anti-mountaintop removal activists, participant observation data based on two summers of living and working with different activist groups in the region and participating in protests and other related activities, and research at historical archives in the region, focused primarily on oral histories from former miners and strip mining opponents along with the records of regional environmental groups. A more detailed account of my research methods is available in the Appendix.

While the beginning of 2011 might have appeared to some as a new era in the resistance to mountaintop removal, whatever ultimately occurs, the movement offers lessons about the role

of religious values and the possibility of strategic cooperation among local and national groups struggling for environmental and economic justice.



Figure 1-1. ARC's map of the Appalachian region. From the Appalachian Regional Commission website: http://www.arc.gov/misc/arc_map.jsp (accessed May 19, 2011).

CHAPTER 2
SETTING THE STAGE: SCHOLARLY RESOURCES FOR STUDYING RELIGION, COAL,
AND RESISTANCE IN APPALACHIA

Despite the dramatic increase in mountaintop removal mining in the late 20th century, few scholarly works focusing on its cultural dimensions and environmental impacts have emerged. There has been even less scholarship attending to the role of religions in resistance to the practice. My research addresses this lacuna, building upon the work of Chad Montrie (2003), Shirley Stewart Burns (2003), and Rebecca Scott (2010), along with other scholars of Appalachian social and religious history.

Scholarship on Mountaintop Removal

Labor historian Chad Montrie, in *To Save the Land and People* (2003), provides one of the only lengthy histories of opposition to strip mining in the coal fields of Appalachia.³ Though he does not focus on the era of mountaintop removal, ending his coverage shortly after the 1977 passage of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA), Montrie's work is nonetheless extremely valuable for setting the stage for contemporary resistance.⁴ Many of the contemporary mountaintop removal resistance groups, like Coal River Mountain Watch and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, emerged out of local organizations that formed in the 1960s and 1970s to oppose widespread strip mining in Appalachia. Montrie's work also showed that radical direct action tactics such as those deployed by Climate Ground Zero and Mountain Justice—blocking bulldozers and forcing work stoppage at mine sites—began among

³*Fighting Back in Appalachia*, edited by Stephen L. Fisher (1993a), provides valuable information on Appalachian resistance groups such as Save Our Cumberland Mountains and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. It is not a comprehensive history of resistance, however. Tricia Shapiro's *Mountain Justice* (2010) provides a journalistic account of the emergence of contemporary radical groups in the region, from 2004 to about 2009.

⁴ Montrie does take up mountaintop removal briefly toward the end of *To Save the Land and People* (2003:197-200) and again in his later work *Making a Living* (2008). While relating his historical research to the contemporary practice, neither of these sources continues with deeper analysis of labor and mountaintop removal.

Appalachian locals long before the entry of radical environmental groups into the region. In fact, although contemporary activists and commentators fear growing violence among pro- and anti-mountaintop removal groups, Montrie's history shows that current tensions and acts of violence have not reached the levels of the 1960s protests against strip mining (see Chapters 4 and 5).

As a historian of organized labor movements, Montrie was particularly interested in the relationships between class structures and work, along with the transition of Appalachia from an agrarian to an industrial society. Local resistance to strip mining, he argued, presented a case of "the environmentalism of common people" (Montrie 2003:3-4).⁵ Like other environmental justice scholars, Montrie revealed significant differences between the environmental concerns of working class Appalachians and the broader, mainstream conservation movement, which emerged from and was initially supported by middle and upper class individuals.⁶ He argued, "like their middle-class counterparts, these [Appalachian] critics expressed dislike for stripping in aesthetic terms, as a concern for the conservation of valuable mineral and timber resources, and as a matter of preserving the ecological integrity of the hills. But they were more likely to bemoan the damage done by strip mining to farmland and homesteads, as well as the loss of jobs in an economically depressed region" (Montrie 2003:4). Concerns about jobs and private

⁵ Montrie's "environmentalism of common people" closely resembles Karl Jacoby's concept of "moral ecology." Influenced by E. P. Thompson, Jacoby argued that the moral ecology of poachers in the American national parks "evolved in counterpoint to the elite discourse about conservation, a folk tradition that often critiqued official conservation policies, occasionally borrowed from them, and at other times even influenced them. Most of all, though, this moral ecology offers a vision of nature 'from the bottom up,' one that frequently demonstrates a strikingly different sense of what nature is and how it should be used" (Jacoby 2001:3). Montrie is also clearly influenced by the work of Robert Gottlieb (2005), Ramachandra Guha (2000), and Joan Martinez-Alier (2002), among others.

⁶ While anti-environmental interests often make this charge to critique modern environmentalists, the historical point was also made by Roderick Fraser Nash in his highly influential *Wilderness and the American Mind*. As Nash argued, "appreciation of wilderness began in the cities. The literary gentleman wielding the pen, not the pioneer with his axe, made the first gestures of resistance against the strong currents of antipathy" (2001 [1967]:44).

property remain prevalent in anti-mountaintop removal activism today, and they sometimes cause fissures between different groups of local and non-local activists.

Shirley Stewart Burns provided a second important scholarly analysis of mountaintop removal with *Bringing down the Mountains* (2007). A West Virginia historian and coalfield native, Burns provided the most thorough history and analysis of mountaintop removal mining, its social and ecological impacts, and the political and legal debates surrounding the practice in West Virginia. Like other historians of the region, Burns focused on power dynamics between Appalachian locals, the external corporate interests controlling most of the land and resources in the region, and the local politicians and businessmen who acted as corporate agents in support of the coal industry (a group she termed the “coal interests” [Burns 2007:3]). While she focused solely on West Virginia and neglected religious history, Burns helped illuminate the complex interactions between the coal industry and the Appalachian political and legal systems. Together, Burns and Montrie provided much of the essential archival and historical background upon which I build.

Rebecca Scott’s *Removing Mountains* (2010) presented the most unique study related to mountaintop removal. A sociologist specializing in women’s studies, Scott analyzed understandings of gender and race among coalfield residents and how they are intertwined with mountaintop removal mining. Scott paid special attention to miners, their families, and supporters of mountaintop removal, groups that have been neglected by most researchers of the topic. As she pointedly claimed, “the activists are not the only interesting or agentic people in the story” (Scott 2010:11). Scott tied mountaintop removal to broader trends within American culture, arguing that explanations of the practice should not simply focus on Appalachia at the expense of the broader American culture because Appalachia “is contradictorily located both at

the heart of the national industrial market economy and within a marginalized mountain rurality” (Scott 2010:6). Debates over mountaintop removal reveal how U.S. citizens conceive of rural identities and environments. As Scott concluded, “the struggles over MTR reflect some of the national struggles over the direction of the American nation, struggles that often hinge on the meaning of concepts like progress, freedom, citizenship, and private property” (2010:222).

Heavily influenced by post-structuralist theory, Scott broke down implicit and explicit dualisms (jobs versus environment or employers versus workers, for example) presented in both popular and scholarly studies of mountaintop removal, focusing instead upon “networks of materialized signification” encompassing “ideas about private property and patterns of property ownership, gender, race and class formations and dispositions, national identity, and the civilizational discourses of modernity” (2010:17-18). Scott’s *Removing Mountains* is a powerful challenge to the assumptions of earlier scholars studying Appalachian culture and environments. Focusing on the stories of miners, highlighting the problematic dualisms in both pro- and anti-mountaintop removal discussions, and criticizing earlier academic approaches to mining in Appalachia, Scott contributed a valuable analysis of mountaintop removal and its related cultural assumptions. She offered a rich future direction for research in Appalachia, in a different trajectory from the Marxist approaches that dominated late 20th century analyses.⁷

⁷ Montrie’s, Burns’, and Scott’s books began as PhD dissertations at Ohio State University (2001), the University of West Virginia (2005), and the University of California, Santa Cruz (2007), respectively. Joyce Barry’s dissertation, “Mountaineers are Always Free?: An Examination of Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining in West Virginia” (2004) covered similar ground as Burns’ project, but also paid special attention to gender relations among activists. However, Barry’s dissertation was completed before the emergence of many of the groups examined in this project, including Mountain Justice and Climate Ground Zero. Jen Osha’s “Power-Knowledge to Move Mountains,” (2010) is another important dissertation on mountaintop removal. There are currently several students working on dissertations related to mountaintop removal, and in the coming years there will be a minor explosion in scholarly analyses of the issue. Of special note are Shannon Elizabeth Bell, a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Oregon focusing on gender and grass-roots mobilization in the West Virginia coal fields, and Robert Perdue, a PhD Candidate in sociology at the University of Florida focusing on coalition-building and social movement theory as related to mountaintop removal resistance.

Along with Montrie, Burns, and Scott, numerous popular authors have penned influential critiques of mountaintop removal. In 1997, journalist Penny Loeb published “Shear Madness” in *U.S. News and World Report*. The article was one of (if not *the*) first nationally published articles on the issue of mountaintop removal, which at the time was largely unheard of outside of Appalachia. Loeb continued her research and published *Moving Mountains* (2007), which expanded upon her earlier article. *Moving Mountains* focused on the work of Patricia Bragg, a resident of Pie, West Virginia, who fought a nearby Arch Coal mine and valley fill. Journalist Michael Shnayerson’s *Coal River* (2008) similarly followed legal actions in West Virginia conducted in the early 2000s, and paid special attention to the work of Joe Lovett, a Charleston-based environmental lawyer who led many of the legal challenges against valley fills and mountaintop removal permits in the state.⁸ Along with mountaintop removal opponents, *Coal River* provided unique insight into the biography of Don Blankenship, the controversial former CEO of Massey Energy. To many activists, Blankenship was a model of coal company arrogance with his deep involvement in West Virginia politics, known history of breaking unions among miners, and continued public statements denying the possibility of human-induced climate change.⁹

While Shnayerson and Loeb explained the complicated legal battles surrounding mountaintop removal in West Virginia, journalist and author Erik Reece’s *Lost Mountain* (2006) took a different approach. The work recounted the stripping of Lost Mountain, Kentucky,

⁸ Like Loeb, Shnayerson first published his research in the national magazine, *Vanity Fair*. See Michael Shnayerson, “The Rape of Appalachia,” 2006. Another influential magazine article was John G. Mitchell’s “When Mountains Move,” published in *National Geographic* in 2006. Like Loeb and Shnayerson, Mitchell focused on the basic dynamics of mountaintop removal and important West Virginia figures such as Larry Gibson and Joe Lovett. Unlike Loeb and Shnayerson, though, Mitchell did not later expand his article into a book.

⁹ Other legal scholars provided more in-depth (but less accessible) analyses of mountaintop removal policy and resistance actions. Important sources include McGinley 2004, Baller and Pantilat 2007, and Rivkin and Irwin 2009.

between 2003 and 2004. Rather than describing the long histories of legal actions against mountaintop removal, Reece presented his observations of the changing environment surrounding Lost Mountain and discussions with the Kentucky locals who both opposed and supported the mine. More than Loeb and Shnayerson, Reece directly engaged environmental values and spiritual responses to anthropogenic changes in nature. Drawing heavily on the well-known essayist and poet Wendell Berry and the philosopher Martin Buber, Reece concluded, “we too seldom see *value* in the natural world, whether aesthetic or intrinsic; we only see something we can use, even if that means using it up. We no longer see ourselves as part of a greater whole, a world so vast and mysterious that it deserves our reverence alongside our scientific probing” (2006:220). Reece also favorably cited Baruch Spinoza’s pantheistic philosophy and the Gaia and biophilia hypotheses, three theories frequently cited by advocates of what Bron Taylor termed “dark green religion,” “flowing from a deep sense of belonging to and connectedness in nature, while perceiving the earth and its living systems to be sacred and interconnected” (Taylor 2010:13). In this way, *Lost Mountain* not only illuminated the ecological changes and spiritual dimensions associated with mountaintop removal, but it exemplified one type of religious response to the issue as well.

Tricia Shapiro’s *Mountain Justice* (2010) described the author’s time as an imbedded journalist during the formation of many mountaintop removal resistance groups, including Mountain Justice, United Mountain Defense, and Climate Ground Zero, in the first decade of the 21st century. Shapiro provided extensive details on the multiple debates, conflicts, and victories associated with radical activism in the region. Though she concluded her research as I began mine, Shapiro’s book provided interview and observation data among many of the same individuals and groups as this dissertation, and though our analyses and driving questions differ,

it remains a valuable contribution to understanding the resistance movement to mountaintop removal in Appalachia.

Scholarly work examining the interconnections of religious values and mountaintop removal are even fewer, and what does exist tends to focus primarily on Christians. Outside of popular newspapers and magazines, one of the first introductions to Christian resistance to mountaintop removal came through Bill Moyers' 2006 PBS documentary, *Is God Green?*. Moyers' documentary focused on "green evangelicals," or members of the evangelical Christian community, including Richard Cizik (former Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals) and Tri Robinson (pastor of the Boise Vinyard Church). *Is God Green?* also included a lengthy segment on mountaintop removal mining, focusing on the activities of Judy Bonds and Allan Johnson (co-founder of Christians for the Mountains). Though problematic in its approach to mountaintop removal and simplistic in its presentation of Appalachian religiosity, Moyers' documentary nonetheless provided an early look at religious resistance to mountaintop removal and presented the issue as especially unique among movements of faith-based environmental concern.

Mallory McDuff, a teacher at Warren Wilson College in Appalachian North Carolina, provided another brief introduction to Christian resistance to mountaintop removal with her chapter "Making a Pilgrimage: Mountaintop Removal, Water, and Wildflowers," in *Natural Saints* (2010). In this chapter, McDuff described a trip, organized by North Carolina Interfaith Power and Light (a local chapter of an ecumenical Christian environmental organization), to mountaintop removal sites in Eastern Kentucky. McDuff analyzed her experience in the terms of a traditional Christian pilgrimage, a "journey for spiritual enrichment that involves travel to a place of meaning" (2010:125). While her work introduced many of the basic details of

mountaintop removal mining, as well as some of the key local activists such as Mickey McCoy and Father John Rausch, the chapter did not go into much depth about religious resistance in Appalachia.

The best scholarly work on cases of religious resistance in Appalachia was published by Dwight Billings and Will Samson in “Evangelical Christians and the Environment” (forthcoming 2011), which examined the work of local evangelicals and Christians for the Mountains, a non-denominational faith-based group in Appalachia focused on coal-field justice. While some analysts understood evangelical environmentalism and “creation care” movements as novel, Billings and Samson pointed out that evangelical work in Appalachia has important historical precedents. Using contemporary theories on cultural hegemony, including the power of language in establishing and maintaining power dynamics as well as Jurgen Habermas’ concept of “communicative action” (or the dialogical process through which a community conceives of and achieves social change), Billings and Samson argued that Christians for the Mountains and other evangelicals actively challenged dominant perceptions of Appalachian religiosity and creatively responded to problems both within evangelical communities and within the broader public. Billings and Samson provided an especially important contribution to the critical literature on religion and activism in Appalachia, and it informs my own approach to the subject which expands the analysis beyond evangelicals toward other Christian and non-Christian activists.¹⁰

Though covering an era predating mountaintop removal, Richard Callahan’s *Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coal Fields* (2009) provided valuable background on religion and the

¹⁰ Feldman and Mosely (2003) provided another relevant study of Christian environmentalism in Appalachia, though it did not focus on the issue of mountaintop removal specifically. The authors surveyed 20 initiative leaders in the region to distill certain principles of Appalachian “earthkeeping.” They concluded that faith-based groups provided useful bridges between local people and environmental groups, but ultimately left more research questions for future work.

mining industry in Appalachia. Focusing on the coal camps of the early and mid-20th century, Callahan examined the intersections of religion and work (and religion *as* work) and emphasized “the importance of the sensual body and its centrality in miners’ representations of work and life as one avenue to explore the ways that material conditions can give rise to religious expression” (2009:10). Callahan’s materialist perspective helps explain how labor is integrated into religious worldviews and helps readers to understand why Appalachians continue to support mountaintop removal when, in many ways, it contradicts some of their best interests.

Though not entirely exhaustive, Montrie, Burns, and Scott, along with Loeb, Shnayerson, Reece, and Shapiro, represent the most influential scholarly and popular books on the history and environmental and cultural impacts of mountaintop removal.¹¹ Other sources, however, provide useful foundations for Appalachian religious and economic history.

Studying Religion in Appalachia: Difference, Denominations, and the Emergence of the Field

Appalachia remains a region about which many outsiders hold specific, often stereotyped visions. Ideas of Appalachia as separate from mainstream America and Appalachian people as culturally distinct (or “Appalachian exceptionalism” [Billings, Pudup, and Waller 1995]) originate after the Civil War in the writings of Eastern authors and journalists. Though many of the early commentators on Appalachian life and culture have long been forgotten, the images they painted continue to influence scholars and popular audiences alike. Contemporary

¹¹ Shannon Elizabeth Bell published several important articles related to mountaintop removal resistance that play important roles in my analysis, particularly her discussions of gender relations among activists. See Bell 2008, 2009, and Bell and York 2010. Likewise, West Virginia University geography student Jen Osha completed her dissertation on a Foucauldian analysis of community responses to mountaintop removal in the Coal River Valley of West Virginia (2010). Kentucky authors Silas House and Jason Howard provided valuable interview data with many important anti-mountaintop removal activists in their *Something’s Rising* (2009). Other relevant articles include McNeil 2005, focusing on globalization and the increased mechanization of Appalachian mining, and Barry 2008, continuing her work on women’s involvement in anti-mountaintop removal activism. Between 2008 and 2010 I noticed a significant increase in researchers attending activist events in Appalachia, perhaps indicating that a flood of scholarly publications on mountaintop removal is imminent.

historians must still spend considerable time addressing the stereotyped views of Appalachia and correcting misconceptions about the region's history and people. While Shapiro (1978), Whisnant (1983), and Batteau (1990) have already provided excellent analyses of the literary creation of Appalachia, it is necessary to briefly examine the literature against which contemporary scholars must react.

Establishing Appalachia as “Other”: The Roots of Appalachian Cultural and Religious Stereotypes

The first influential commentaries on Appalachian culture and religion came after the Civil War as many Northerners travelled through and surveyed the post-war South. The physician and author Will Wallace Harney published “A Strange Land and a Peculiar People” in the popular *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1873 (in McNeil 1989:45-58). Based on travels through the Cumberland region of Kentucky in 1869, Harney provided somewhat sensational descriptions of the inhabitants of Appalachia to his largely East Coast audience. As historian Henry Shapiro explained later, “in a real sense it was Harney and the editors of *Lippincott's* who ‘discovered’ Appalachia, for they were the first to assert that ‘otherness’ which made of the mountainous portions of eight southern states a discrete region, in but not of America, and which, after 1890, would seem to place Appalachia and America in radical opposition” (1978:4). This “discovery” of Appalachia coincided with the emergence of the “local color” literary movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Influenced by earlier novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville, local colorists such as Mary Noailles Murfree and John Fox, Jr. sought out “those picturesque ‘little corners’ of the nation, not yet assimilated into the middle-class, nationally oriented culture which seemed so dominant in America” (Shapiro 1978:11). In the spirit of patriotism and industrial optimism among non-Southerners that followed the Civil War, these authors attempted to describe and account for the diversity of the

nation. Doing so “mandated a highlighting of the strange and wonderful ways in which the indigenous population differed from the norms of urban America” (Batteau 1990:39). Though ostensibly reporting on real conditions, Shapiro argued that authors frequently took artistic license with their subject matter and “the line between journalism and fiction became more and more tenuous as authors and aspiring authors scrambled to find ‘interesting’ subjects on which to build a literary reputation” (1978:11). Focusing on otherness exaggerated and even created differences between the quaint primitive mountaineers and refined northern city-dwellers. Many myths about Appalachian residents as a homogenous population measurably distinct from mainstream America sprung from the pens of local colorists.¹²

Combined, the works of the local colorists and later scholars contributed to a vision of Appalachia as inhabited by technologically backward people who, due to the dictates of their home terrain, preserved either medieval European cultural traditions or colonial pioneer ruggedness (depending upon the motives of the commentator). Whether backwards and pathetic or protected from the morally retrogressive impulses of industrial society (much like “noble savages” of literature),¹³ Appalachian people were markedly distinct from the rest of the nation in the popular American imagination. For some, these traditions needed protection from outside

¹² An article in the *Journal of Appalachian Studies* showed that attitudes of mountaineers as savage and strange were even conveyed through book covers. Meant to grab the attention of potential readers, book covers exaggerated the otherness of Appalachia and its people and the romanticized content inside (Plein 2009).

¹³ Though I will not go into it in great detail here, many of these early authors portrayed their Appalachian subjects as morally pure founts of manliness, a popular convention among writers promoting the “noble savage” image. For example, concluding his description of travels through Appalachia, Horace Kephart explained, “I have not shrunk from telling the truth about these people, even when it was far from pleasant; but I would have preserved strict silence had I not seen in the most backward of them sterling qualities of manliness that our nation can ill afford to waste. It is a truth as old as the human race that savageries may co-exist with admirable qualities of head and heart” (1913:391-392). James Watt Raine likewise claimed, “out of this mountain reservoir can be drawn a constant stream of vigorous native manhood and charmingly simple womanhood, fresh, unjaded, unspoiled, and in the deepest sense, American” (1924:260). A brief definition of the “noble savage” image in literature is available in Sponsel 2005.

exploiters; while for others, Appalachians needed outside support to elevate themselves out of their squalid conditions. Making the issue of Appalachian identity even more complicated, numerous contemporary anti-mountaintop removal activists favorably cite their “hillbilly” heritage, and Scotch-Irish and Cherokee identities remain popular among locals. Still, writers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries laid much of the groundwork for Appalachian studies that contemporary scholars have since corrected. Looking more closely at the shifts in perspectives on Appalachia among scholars helps to explain contemporary popular and scholarly attitudes toward Appalachian culture, religion, and economics.

Studying Religion in Appalachia: 1900 to 1970

In a reciprocal relationship with popular literature, early researchers and historians of Appalachia understood the region as profoundly different from the rest of American culture and sought to explain and correct that otherness. Many of the first commentators on Appalachian religion were Christian educators and missionaries from outside of the region working to help rural communities. They were “the preachers and missionary ladies sent by the denominations to harvest the bountiful crop of unchurched souls reputed to have burrowed back into the hollows, and to teach the swarms of children thought to be growing up in heathen illiteracy” (Whisnant 1994:3). One such preacher and educator was John C. Campbell, a Presbyterian minister hired by the Russell Sage Foundation (a scholarly society based in New York City) in 1908 to report on the social, economic, and religious conditions of Appalachian mountaineers.¹⁴

Following decades of research, Campbell concluded in his influential work *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, “in no part of our country will one find a more deep and sincere

¹⁴ For more on John C. Campbell, his equally influential wife Olive Dame Campbell, and the John C. Campbell Folk School (established by Olive after John’s death to continue his work educating and preserving the traditions of Appalachia), see Whisnant 1983, Chapter 2.

interest in matters of religion than in the Southern Highlands” (1921:176). Drawing on the popular interest in Scotch-Irish heritage in the mountains, Campbell explained Appalachian religious history as a transition from the Presbyterianism of the mountaineers’ European ancestors to the Baptist faith fostered by wilderness conditions. While Presbyterians in the lowland East could not send trained ministers to Appalachia due to staff shortages, Baptist itinerants found fertile ground in the relatively oversight-free Appalachian wilderness.¹⁵ Coining a new term, Campbell argued that the “Immersion Church,” or one making central the practice of full-immersion baptism, characterized Appalachian religion, regardless of denomination. He said, “so generally are the mountaineers immersionists that the wisest ministers in churches that practice another mode of baptism use this method if the prospective communicants desire it” (Campbell 1921:174). Though later scholars heavily critiqued his work, Campbell’s description of a distinctive, overwhelmingly Protestant, Appalachian denominational history stuck.¹⁶ Understanding and explaining this distinctiveness became a central objective for many later religious historians of the region.

While Campbell and others painted the picture of Appalachian religion in broad strokes, focusing on sweeping denominational changes and institutional power structures in American Christianity, Emma Bell Miles provided a more detailed--almost ethnographic--account of religious life in the region. Working as a teacher near Chattanooga, Tennessee at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, Miles recounted details of her interactions with mountain

¹⁵ This resembles a much simplified version of Nathan Hatch’s thesis that populist religious fervor, including the evangelical movements following the First and Second Great Awakenings, emerged in the ecclesiastical leadership vacuum following the American Revolution. As Hatch said, “the tapestry of American Protestantism is richly colored with interwoven strands of populist strength and authoritarian weakness” (1989:16). Though focused on American Christianity more broadly, historian Beth Barton Schweiger argued that Hatch’s book “should be read as a book about the South” (2004:38).

¹⁶ James Watt Raine, in his *Land of Saddle-Bags* (1924), generally supported Campbell’s argument that Appalachian religion emerged from Presbyterians and European dissenters.

families in *The Spirit of the Mountains* (1975 [1905]). Miles described attending a church service led by Brother Absalom Darney, an itinerant preacher of unclear denominational affiliation. Amidst her rich descriptions of Darney's enthusiastic preaching style and the emotional practices of full immersion baptism in a nearby creek, Miles provided the details about early 20th century Appalachian religious life other works simply glossed over.

Appalachian religion, as lived through the preaching of Brother Darney, was earnestly un-intellectual and individualist (or populist, to use Nathan Hatch's [1989] preferred term), emotional, fatalistic, and closely tied to the environment in which it arose. For example, Miles said of Brother Darney, with a note of sympathy shared by few other early commentators on Appalachian religion, "whatever his inconsistencies, whatever his ignorance, whatever the narrowness of his outlook on Scripture and theology—and these failures are sure to be many, for no amount of education ever quite rids the mountaineer of bull-headed contrariness—he is certain to be, first of all, sincere, a man among men, fearlessly expounding the gospel as he knows it" (1975 [1905]:121). Along with the radically anti-clerical approach to ministry, Miles noted the presence of fatalism among mountaineers. She commented, "inevitably he [the mountaineer in general] comes to feel, with a sort of proud humility, that he has no part of lot in the control of the universe save as he allies himself, by prayer and obedience, with the Order that rules" (Miles 1975 [1905]:140-141). Again, Miles avoided snide criticism of this fatalism as intellectually regressive. Instead, it embodied the noble characteristic of "proud humility." Finally, Miles concluded that Appalachian religion is distinctly Appalachian, emerging out of a specific geography and culture that is not shared with mainstream (or non-Appalachian) America. The mountaineer's religion, she said, "is really the outgrowth of his own nature and environment rather than of the written Word—although he would, of course, indignantly deny

that such is the case” (Miles 1975 [1905]:142). Though her book was not as widely read as Campbell’s, Emma Bell Miles provided an important, sympathetic account of early modern Appalachian religiosity. Other commentators, both in her day and later, noted the distinctiveness of lay preachers and fatalism among Appalachian Christians, but Miles was unique in turning away from studying denominational lineages and toward studying Appalachian religion on the ground, as it was practiced by Appalachians in their own terms.

Following the work of missionaries like Campbell and Miles, Appalachia regained national attention for its apparent backwardness and economic struggles following President Johnson’s 1964 declaration of unconditional “War on Poverty.” Some of the commentators on Appalachia from this time, though they sought to elevate the locals from their depressed conditions, harbored condescending and negative views of mountaineers. One such writer was Jack E. Weller, a Presbyterian minister working in Appalachia through the 1950s and 1960s. In his widely read work *Yesterday’s People* (1965), Weller proposed models of difference between mountaineers and “middle class Americans” (1965:161-163). Along with his comments on Appalachian culture and economic conditions, Weller described Appalachian religion in largely negative terms. While Emma Bell Miles compassionately described the earnest preaching of Appalachian ministers, Weller denounced the un-intellectual and individualistic religion of mountaineers. He said, “this folk religion is based on sentiment, tradition, superstition, and personal feelings, all reinforcing the patterns of the culture. It is self-centered, not God-centered” (Weller 1965:131). Clearly, for Weller, Appalachian religion represented an almost medieval form completely out of sync with modern Christian thought. Mirroring earlier comments of religious critics such as H.L. Mencken, Weller continued, “for the mountaineer, the Bible is a magical book. He has a respectful reverence for it, but it is a reverence without

scholarship or learning” (1965:130). Appalachian people practiced only a “folk religion,” in Weller’s perception; they were a pathetic people merely pretending to adhere to the Christian tradition. It was the job of real Christians, or those who followed in American denominational orthodoxy and adhered to liberal theological traditions, to lead mountain people “slowly and gently” into a more acceptable society (Weller 1965:146).¹⁷

The War on Poverty era of the 1960s marked the entry of numerous other faith-based workers into Appalachia, many of whom diverged from Weller’s initial perceptions and sought to support Appalachian people by promoting economic extensions of Appalachian culture.¹⁸ This newer era of cultural projects led many activists and scholars to call for newer, more sympathetic studies of Appalachian culture and religion; and some early anti-poverty workers made up this newer generation of scholars.

Studying Religion in Appalachia: Defining the Field, 1970 to the Present

With the increase of Appalachian cultural preservation and economic improvement projects, scholars noticed the need for more research on the history and problems of the region, including unbiased studies of the region’s religious history. In 1970, the Appalachian Studies Center was organized at Berea College in Kentucky with Loyal Jones as its chair. The first publication of the *Appalachian Journal*, sponsored by Appalachian State University, quickly followed in 1972. In 1977, the Appalachian Studies Association (ASA) formed as a scholarly organization for the study of issues related to Appalachia. The ASA also sponsored production of the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*. In 1976, a planning meeting of scholars on the state of

¹⁷ See also Weller’s “How Religion Mirrors and Meets Appalachian Culture” (1970) for a pithier summary of his characteristics of Appalachian religion and a slightly more pessimistic perspective on the effectiveness of institutional religious change in the region.

¹⁸ David Whisnant’s *Modernizing the Mountaineer* (1994) remains one of the best studies of religious and governmental anti-poverty work in Appalachia.

education in Appalachia led to a special issue of the *Appalachian Journal* entitled “A Guide to Appalachian Studies.”¹⁹ This special issue gathered scholars from numerous disciplines to provide literature reviews and methodological recommendations for the study of anthropology, archaeology, folk studies, history, economics, and literature, among other disciplines, in Appalachia. This issue also included an important essay by Loyal Jones on the study of religions in Appalachia which set the stage for the emerging study of Appalachian mountain religion.

Jones’s “Studying Mountain Religion” (1977) was both a literature review and a methodological primer. In it, Jones emphasized the diversity of Christian denominations in Appalachia, as opposed to the more monolithic portrayals of religion and culture by Weller, and argued that more participant observation and study of relevant denominational histories and primary materials were needed to truly understand mountain religion. Jones noted that many of the previous studies of religion in Appalachia were composed by privileged outsiders. These outside commentators, he continued, simplified and stereotyped mountain religion and “have written of mountain religion as if we all worship alike. They have failed to observe the differences between groups” (Jones 1977:125). Proper study should take account of such differences. Along with the emphasis he placed upon the denominational diversity of the region, experience with the people of Appalachia was central to Jones’s proposed methodology for the study of mountain religion. He explained, “it seems best to me to approach the study [of mountain religions] in two ways: (1) through attending mountain services in various sects and interviewing persons about their beliefs and (2) by reading background books and other materials on denominational history and beliefs” (Jones 1977:127). Studying mountain religion, for Jones, was not a purely intellectual, literary enterprise. It required emersion into the culture of the

¹⁹ *Appalachian Journal* 5 (1):1977.

region and willingness to drop whatever biases the researcher may have held before the initiation of study. Jones also offered interview tips and sources for background information on Appalachian denominations. In a much later book (published in 1999 though based on decades of interview data) Jones reiterated his emphasis on field-based research. “I believe that truly to understand Upland [Appalachian and Ozark] religion, one has to get out among the people and into their churches, where the oral tradition is of primary importance,” he said introducing the book (Jones 1999a:9). The work also outlined specific themes common to Appalachia’s diverse denominations, and although he only discussed white Protestant groups, Jones stressed participant observation in the study of mountain religion.

Shortly after the publication of the *Appalachian Journal* special issue, the Center for Extension and Continuing Education at West Virginia University funded the publication of *Religion in Appalachia*, edited by John D. Photiadis (1978a). The essays in this volume focused mainly on the correlations between religious beliefs and poverty in Appalachia. Photiadis was influenced by Emile Durkheim and took a functionalist stance on the social origins of Appalachian mountain religions. The particular beliefs of Appalachian Christians, he argued, arose to reduce the anxieties caused by industrialization in the 20th century. “The reason for the persistence of sectarian fundamentalism is that it performs important functions; in particular, it has helped low-income and rural Appalachians alleviate anxieties produced by social complexity, and in particular the inability to fulfill expectations that the larger society, which has recently become an important source of information, is creating” (Photiadis 1978b:14). In other words, Christian fundamentalists in Appalachia sought a simpler world and found it in their religious beliefs. Fundamentalism emerged out of the increasing alienation of Appalachian

residents from their own land, due to increased industrialization, and the greater, more advanced nation surrounding them.

Religion in Appalachia was quickly criticized by other Appalachian scholars for its negative views of religion and its apparent social determinism. These critics, such as Melanie Sovine Reid, John Wallhausser, and Loyal Jones, argued that religion was not just about connections between people, but about connections between people and the divine as well. Reid, an anthropologist working with the Appalachian Center at the University of Kentucky, responded to Photiadis's work,

Religion is not just another name for economics or government or—for that matter—the unconscious. The challenge is to study religion as religion. Religion is distinctive in that it claims contact with the supernatural—God—as its goal. The challenge of modern Appalachian religious commentary recalls us to attempt a more complete understanding of religious beliefs themselves and to an understanding of systems of belief in general (1979:243).

In a later essay, Sovine²⁰ offered a more lengthy critique of functionalist approaches to Appalachian religion, advocating instead an emphasis on religious belief systems over functionalist approaches: “functional perspectives have tended to support broad generalizations of an ‘Appalachian religion’ characterized as traditional, fatalistic, or fundamentalist. These reductionistic generalizations fail to acknowledge the shades of religious meaning which are important features of different belief systems” (Sovine 1983:50). Loyal Jones, in an article included in *Religion in Appalachia* as a dissenting theoretical voice, called scholars to remember the socially positive functions of religion as well. He said, “there are many and complex reasons why Appalachian people are the way they are, but whatever they are, this much is clear: religion serves a vital need for them in their time and place and condition” (Jones 1978:407).

²⁰ In 1979 she published as Melanie Sovine Reid, though in later essays she published as Melanie L. Sovine.

John Wallhausser, a religion and philosophy professor at Berea College, challenged the simplistic portrayals of Appalachian religion in the Photiadis volume as well. Wallhausser followed Jones's call for participant observation, living among and worshipping with the Old Regular Baptists of Kentucky. There, Wallhausser found that the easy denominational categories and criteria outlined by the book's contributors (and earlier commentators such as Weller) simply did not apply. The time for simplistic overviews and categorizations of Appalachian religions was over, he concluded, saying, "new perspectives describing the particulars (specifics) of mountain religious traditions need to be developed. These perspectives not only need to be more accountable to the people and the traditions they represent, they also need to be more theologically sensitive and informed" (Wallhausser 1983:6). Together, Jones, Photiadis, Reid, and Wallhausser formed the methodological and theoretical base for further studies of religion in Appalachia. By the early 1980s, they had established a research program for examining the subject, and later studies continued these debates on the function of religion in Appalachia and the value of participant observation and sympathetic portrayals.

Beginning in the 1980s, scholars of Appalachian religions such as Howard Dorgan followed the recommendations of Jones, Reid and others and turned to more specific, ethnographic accounts which emphasized the diversity of belief in Appalachia while at the same time arguing that Appalachian religions were not as strange and socially regressive as they had sometimes previously been portrayed. These scholars argued for the relevance of the study of Appalachian religions to larger debates in religious studies and North American religious history.

In *Giving Glory to God in Appalachia* (1987), communications professor Howard Dorgan described the preaching styles, worship practices, and architecture of six Appalachian Baptists denominations, namely, the Missionary Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Union Baptists, Primitive

Baptists, Regular Baptists, and Old Regular Baptists. In this work, Dorgan followed many of Jones's recommendations by observing and interacting with the groups he studied, emphasizing the important differences between them and supporting cultural preservation. Dorgan stated that his purpose with the Baptists was simply to describe their practices objectively and add data to the study of religion in Appalachia while withholding judgments on them (1987:xxv). In the later work *The Airwaves of Zion*, about popular Christian radio programming in Appalachia, Dorgan professed similar goals, saying, "my purpose has been to capture, as vividly as I could, the Appalachian religious experiences I have witnessed, avoiding as much as possible both editorial judgment and academic theorization" (1993:xi-xii). Another element of this objective description included the recognition of difference among groups. While each of these groups belonged under the same general umbrella as Baptists, the differences between them remained important for their own self-understandings and could not be ignored, he argued (Dorgan 1987:8). Finally, Dorgan envisioned his work as serving a preservationist end as well. He recorded many of the services for posterity, and said of his project, "it is primarily descriptive, written to document religious customs so tied to the past that they may be in danger of extinction" (Dorgan 1987:xxv). By applying many of the theories articulated by Jones, Reid, and Wallhausser, Dorgan helped to initiate a new stage in the study of mountain religion.²¹

Following the gains of the 1980s, the 1990s witnessed increased scholarly work on Appalachian religion, continuing in large part along the methodological and theoretical trajectories established by Loyal Jones and others. In 1995, Deborah Vansau McCauley published *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*, the most comprehensive work on the

²¹ James Peacock and Ruell Tyson, Jr. also contributed to this era of Appalachian religious studies with *Pilgrims of Paradox* (1989). They argued that Primitive Baptists were not strange fundamentalists locked in medieval dogmatism (as they were generally portrayed by critics) but inheritors of Calvinist tradition with valuable perspectives on community and religious belief.

subject. This work marked a new stage in Appalachian religious studies, taking a strong stance on the value of Appalachian studies and the importance of regional autonomy. Moving away from the more specific studies of particular denominations, McCauley provided a history of mountain religions and an updated review of the important works in the field. Her work was hailed by Charles Lippy as “destined to refocus scholarly understanding of religion in Appalachia in general” (1999:50, fn. 1). McCauley emphasized the distinction between mainstream religions that appear in Appalachia and religions that owe their origins largely to the Appalachian experience, or those church traditions that are in the Appalachian region but not largely of it, mostly the denominations of American Protestantism, and those church traditions that exist predominately—or almost exclusively—in the region and are very special to it” (1995:1). She borrowed Catherine Albanese’s concept of regional religions to help describe the Appalachian situation. In this way, McCauley accepted that Appalachian mountain religions owed some of their distinctiveness to economic, social, and geographical causes.

McCauley also criticized privileged, liberal Protestant interpretations of mountain religion and, like many before her, called for the value of experience in truly understanding the subject. She strongly argued that “it is fruitless to try to talk about the history of Appalachian mountain religion unless a serious attempt is made to create a feel for the sights and sounds of mountain worship life” (McCauley 1995:45). Studying Appalachian mountain religion, she continued, requires a revision of research techniques. With little written material available compared to other North American regions, scholars of Appalachia must examine other practices as texts. McCauley said, “as an emerging discipline, the study of Appalachian mountain religion challenges traditional categories of historical research that have been dependent on a plethora of written documentation” (1995:477). Scholars must examine oral histories, material culture,

testimonies, preaching, and other forms of expression to find necessary information about religion in Appalachia. As Loyal Jones noted as early as 1977, intellectual history alone will not do for the Appalachian context.²²

Finally, *Christianity in Appalachia* (1999a), edited by Bill Leonard, provided another significant contribution to the field of Appalachian religious studies. Leonard gathered essays by many of the major figures in Southern and Appalachian religious studies on various Christian denominations in the region, including for the first time two articles on Catholics.²³ As the subtitle indicated (“Profiles in Regional Pluralism”), Leonard’s work emphasized the level of denominational diversity in Appalachia and reflected upon the developments of the field in general. Leonard said in his introduction, for example, “Appalachia itself is not one region, but many; it is not one culture but is composed of a multiplicity of cultural and social experiences, ideals, and subgroups” (1999b:xvi). Leonard continued that the articles in the volume “suggest that there is not a particular type of ‘Appalachian religion’; rather, religion in Appalachia has multiple expressions evident in a wide assortment of communions” (1999b:xviii). Leonard helped to solidify the already important theme of religious diversity in Appalachian studies.

Beginning with the work of Loyal Jones and John Photiadis, moving through the corrections of Melanie Sovine Reid and John Wallhausser, and then the more specific studies of Howard Dorgan, and culminating with the volumes of Deborah Vansau McCauley and Bill

²² McCauley’s detailed work was supplemented in 2001 with the publication of *The Roots of Appalachian Christianity*. In this highly detailed study, Elder John Sparks (a Kentucky-based Baptist preacher himself) located the emergence of many specifically Appalachian religious forms through the debates of late colonial-era Baptists. Much like Nathan Hatch (1989), Sparks argued that Stearns and other early Baptists developed a uniquely populist religious form that, while rooted in New England and the Piedmont, flowered in Appalachia. Sparks also included a lengthy concluding chapter, entitled “The Legacy of the Goodly Fere: 1801-2001” (2001:199-290), which provided numerous further resources and details about Appalachian Baptist denominations and covered ground that McCauley only briefly discussed.

²³ Lou F. McNeil, “Catholic Mission and Evangelization” (1999), and Monica Kelly Appleby, “A Baptism by Immersion in Big Stone Gap: From South Side Chicago to Southern Appalachia” (1999).

Leonard, Appalachian religious studies developed from a response to lacunae in scholarly attention to the region into a sophisticated discipline with specific methodological and theoretical positions. By the end of the 20th century, the study of religion in Appalachia had moved from simplistic, overly romantic or dismissive portrayals to objective, if not sympathetic, scholarly discussions. Despite this development, the field remains young and is not without certain limitations. Several issues raised in the early literature need further exploration as the discipline develops. These include the further discussion of religious diversity (not just Protestant diversity), deeper analysis of migration and globalization in Appalachia, and more critical examination of the interactions between identity politics and Appalachian religion, both among religious practitioners themselves and among the scholars who study them.

Though scholars from Jones to Leonard have called for recognition of the diversity of religious beliefs in Appalachia, they have still focused primarily on Christian denominations and their white male leaders. An early hint of the non-Christian diversity of the region came in the writings of H. L. Mencken. Mencken described the arrival of a rabbi named “Marks” from Nashville at the Scopes trial in Dayton (Mencken 1991). Beyond a few notable cases, such as Mencken and Weiner (2006), studies of Appalachian religion have largely ignored the lives of Jews in the region. Catholics, too, have largely been neglected and treated as a group that only entered the area through European immigration during the mining booms of the early 20th century, though many Catholics arrived in Appalachia as early as the beginning of the 19th century (Boles 1976:52). Despite these hints of diversity, Appalachian religious studies still focused on Christian, mainly Protestant, denominations. Moreover, it tended to focus on uniquely Appalachian denominations such as numerous Baptist forms, neglecting any unique, localized developments in larger denominations such as the Episcopal Church of America. After

the year 2000, corresponding to similar trends in religious studies in general, new studies of non-Christian religions in Appalachia and the experiences of women and other races and ethnicities began to appear. This occurred perhaps because of growing recognition of the neglect of non-Christian religions and women's voices in Appalachian studies along with an increasing confidence among Appalachian scholars of non-Protestant backgrounds. Some important contributions to the study of religious diversity in Appalachia include Lewis and Appleby's *Mountain Sisters* (2004), about the Glenmary Sisters who worked on issues of poverty and education in the region, and *Beyond Hill and Hollow* (Engelhardt 2005), an edited volume on women's experiences in Appalachia. The work of women and non-Protestants is critical in the movement against mountaintop removal, so more work is needed to explain their historical experiences in the region.

Appalachian religious studies must also consider more carefully the importance of migration and globalization in Appalachia. Often perceived as a relatively isolated region dominated by evangelical Protestants, contemporary researchers point out that international, multi-religious connections existed from even the earliest colonial period of Southern history. Scholars such as Beth Barton Schweiger, Donald Mathews, and Jon Sensbach challenged simplistic portrayals of Southern religiosity and argued that numerous other factors have influenced the development of a complex Southern religious history that frequently finds itself masked by historians who emphasize only evangelical denominationalism (Schweiger and Mathews 2004). As Sensbach stated, "to equate evangelicalism with southern religion is to convey that there was an air of inevitability about the outcome of the eighteenth-century religious change and turmoil" (2004: 7). Such critiques likewise apply to Appalachian religious studies. While Loyal Jones, Deborah Vansau McCauley, and others have elucidated the

dynamics of Appalachian religious history in spite of the biased portrayals of the 19th and 20th centuries, their works still follow the model of the evangelical South, focusing on the permutations of local Protestant denominations with little acknowledgement of outside, non-Appalachian factors in that history. Other recent sources such as Peacock, Watson, and Matthews' *The American South in a Global World* (2005) and Cobb and Stueck's *Globalization and the American South* (2005) explore international and cross-cultural dynamics through Southern history. These are perspectives that would help move the study of Appalachian religion further. Especially since mountaintop removal (and the whole history of American coal mining) is tied to industrialization and international fossil fuel based economies, acknowledging multinational dimensions to Appalachian history is essential to understanding the response of locals to mining. Incorporating theories of mobility into the study of Appalachian religion likewise helps scholars understand the changes brought about by the multiple migrations into and out of the region, from the great out-migration following the coal crashes of the early 20th century, to the current immigration of non-Appalachians to work in the increasingly technology-driven coal industry.

A final issue needing further consideration is the interplay between identity politics and religions in Appalachia. Loyal Jones frequently identified himself as a regional and religious insider to Appalachia (1999b). Deborah Vansau McCauley sharply criticized the skewed portrayals of mountain religions by regional and religious outsiders (1995:9). Clearly, for these scholars, local identity plays an important part in determining the right to speak for the people of Appalachia and even the ability to understand the region. As with other religious traditions and groups, being an insider to Appalachian religion seems to give one a certain degree of authority among academic audiences. For clarity alone, scholars must reveal where they stand relative to

the people they study, but regional studies should avoid becoming too isolated. Religious and regional outsiders add important viewpoints, and religious studies in Appalachia would probably suffer from the outright rejection of those views, though none of the authors mentioned above suggest such an extreme position. If insider identity is so important, more clarity is needed on the meaning of that identity. McCauley (1995:7) and Leonard (1999b:xix) argued that Appalachian identity is not the same as Southern identity and that Appalachian studies should not be treated as a subset of Southern studies, though they admit that similarities remain. They argued that Appalachian Studies deserves the respect of an independent field, but scholars should not overemphasize the differences and neglect the important connections that exist between Appalachia and the South.²⁴ Clarifying the nature of Appalachian identity and its importance to the field could be an important step in moving the field forward. As Chapter 5 shows, questions of identity are not just academic concerns; they create real problems between supporters and opponents of mountaintop removal on the ground.

Emerging in the last quarter of the 20th century, Appalachian religious studies is a relatively new area of the broader scholarly inquiry into United States regional religious history. Though certain features of Appalachian religious studies have not matched developments in the more general field of Southern religious history, researchers from the region have nonetheless made large steps in establishing their field. By analyzing religions outside of traditional Protestant and evangelical histories and by taking an interdisciplinary and multinational view of mountaintop removal, this dissertation advances the field of Appalachian religious studies in some of the areas that I propose are necessary. Themes expressed by McCauley, Jones, Leonard,

²⁴ Much work on the nature of southern identity has already been done. Notable examples include David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (1983) and James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (2005).

and Dorgan appear in the analysis of Christian resistance to mountaintop removal (both mainline and evangelical), though this dissertation expands upon the religious study of Appalachia by including other religious forms, such as dark green religion.

Modeling Coal and Culture: Competing Visions of Mountaineers and King Coal

Beginning with the local color authors of the 19th century and moving through the 20th century, scholars and journalists have attempted to describe the complex relationship between Appalachian culture and the coal industry. Discovering how coal mining in Appalachia has been viewed in the past and today helps to understand contemporary visions of mountaintop removal among locals and activists. When activists speak of Appalachia as a colony to outside corporate interests, they do with the backing of decades of historical scholarship which has argued a similar point. Likewise, when coal mining interests cite an apparent lack of economic options in the region, they do so from a long history of blaming Appalachians for their own economic problems. A brief examination of scholarly interpretations of Appalachian industrialization and poverty is necessary to sort out these conflicting claims.

Culture of Poverty

Since the late 1800s, writers and researchers have questioned what, if anything, makes Appalachia unique. For a number of decades, popular writers, social workers, and historians promoted a view that was later termed the “culture of poverty model.” This model presented Appalachian culture a distinct, unique entity and Appalachian people as a kind of ancient people in the modern age, inherently prone to poverty due to genetic and environmental factors.²⁵ By

²⁵ Historian Ronald L. Lewis provided an excellent review of critical scholarship on literary constructions of Appalachia and “culture of poverty” portrayals. He concluded, “recent historical research challenges the fictional Appalachia by demonstrating that, when viewed from the perspective of the preindustrial era, Appalachia was not much different from other regions of nineteenth-century rural America. Therefore, the pervasive assumption that modern economic problems in the region somehow stem from Appalachia’s long physical and cultural isolation must be reconsidered” (Lewis 1999:38). Another excellent historiography of Appalachian identity and cultural studies comes in Dwight Billings’ “Introduction” to *Back Talk from Appalachia* (1999).

this model, Appalachians needed outside assistance to preserve their culture and elevate their society into the industrial era (Lewis and Knipe 1978:13-15; Billings and Blee 2000:8).²⁶

Based in the writings of local colorists and others from the late 19th century, culture of poverty models gained prominence in the 1960s. In his widely influential *The Other America*, Michael Harrington described the national problem of poverty, saying, “the poor live in a culture of poverty. ... There is, in short, a language of the poor, a psychology of the poor, a world view of the poor. To be impoverished is to be an internal alien, to grow up in a culture that is radically different from the one that dominates the society” (1962:15, 17). Though his thought was more complex than simply blaming the victim, Jack Weller also presented a strong culture of poverty perspective in his analysis of Appalachian problems. In *Yesterday's People*, Weller began by establishing fundamental differences between Appalachians and “middle class Americans” (1965:161-163). Where “normal” Americans were interested in economic growth and individual success, Weller argued that Appalachians were too traditional and fatalistic to allow themselves material success. He claimed that one of the central obstacles to elevating mountaineers out of their impoverished condition was the mountain people themselves: the mountaineer “does not want to change. He has found his way of life satisfying enough, and he looks on persons of other classes without a trace of envy or jealousy. He does not want to be like them. It is important for us who work with those in the folk or working class to know and understand this. We too easily assume that everybody wants to be upwardly mobile” (Weller 1965:139). This unwillingness to change developed from experiences with the Appalachian landscape, Weller continued. He said, “just as the rubbing shoe, unknown to the wearer, begins to put calluses on the foot, changing its

²⁶ David S. Walls distinguishes the “culture of poverty” model of late 19th and early 20th century authors from what he terms the “regional development” model of the War on Poverty. This is largely because the War on Poverty, rather than simply describing the culture of Appalachia, entailed actual economic inputs to the region (Walls 1978).

contour, so the mountaineer has had calluses rubbed on his mind and soul, worn there by the constant brushes of his life against a tight environment and an economy that denied him room to develop freely” (1965:29). Through such statements Weller typified the culture of poverty model of Appalachian development. The troubles of Appalachians derived primarily from their own cultural inadequacies, in Weller’s mind, and it remained the responsibility of well-intentioned outsiders to elevate the reluctant mountaineers out of their impoverished conditions.

Though now generally dismissed, culture of poverty models were embraced by scholars of the 20th century. Because this idea that Appalachians themselves were deficient was not criticized and was based in popular perceptions of the place and its people, few scholars were shocked when British historian Arnold Toynbee casually noted in his *Study of History*, “the Appalachians present the melancholy spectacle of a people who have acquired civilization and then lost it” (1974:149). Culture of poverty arguments on Appalachian history have not entirely disappeared, either. Rebecca Scott found evidence in her study of miners that some still explain the persistence of poverty in the region along culture of poverty lines. One of her respondents, a West Virginia-born mining engineer, explained that poverty persists because “a lot of it is passed down, from parent to child; they don’t know any better...it’s a very difficult bond to break, that you knew that Mom and Dad went to the mailbox the third of every month and got a check. They never worked, and you, you do the same thing” (quoted in Scott 2010:103). While this perspective is still present, most scholars and activists have since turned to alternative explanations for poverty and dependence in Appalachia.

Internal Colonialism Models

Beginning in the 1960s and early 1970s, as debates over strip mining and coal industry control over Appalachia intensified, scholars turned to new models to understand the history of Appalachian industrialization and poverty. Where culture of poverty theorists viewed

industrialization as either good for mountaineers or prescribed alternative programs to uplift individuals from their desperate states, proponents of the internal colonialism model viewed Appalachian industrialization and the development of the coal industry as an extension of exploitative capitalism (Billings and Blee 2000:8). Theorists described Appalachia as an internal U.S. colony, where resources were extracted for the benefit of those outside of the region while costs were borne entirely by the locals. The solution to Appalachian poverty, then, was not necessarily the continued development of extractive industries or government aid, but the elevation of regional autonomy and economic diversification. Later historians and sociologists such as John Gaventa, Ronald Eller, and Wilma Dunaway built upon the colonialism model, drawing in some cases upon the work of Immanuel Wallerstein on global capitalist theory. Sociologist Dwight Billings (who remains perhaps the most important contemporary theorist on Appalachian culture) offered a political economy approach to the subject, emphasizing the interconnections between legal, political, and economic systems in Appalachian history. While these different theorists disagreed on important points, and while still others offered different theories entirely, most now explore Appalachian poverty and the development of dependence upon the coal industry as situated within larger economic networks, and not just an inevitable condition following Appalachian culture.

One of the earliest proponents of a version of the colonialism model was the Kentucky author, lawyer, and activist Harry Caudill. In his influential work *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (2001 [1963]), Caudill presented a wide-ranging history of Eastern Kentucky, from the arrival of the first European settlers through the economically depressed 1950s and early 1960s. The book became relatively popular among environmentally conscious readers and

activists around the nation (Billings and Blee 2000:12).²⁷ Some of Caudill's suggestions were influential in later policy decisions regarding the region. In an afterword published in a 2001 edition of the work, Caudill's son, James K. Caudill, argued that his father's suggestions for government intervention in Appalachian poverty led directly to War on Poverty policies, including the formation of the Appalachian Regional Commission, later in the 1960s (2001:399). One of the most important elements of the work, though, was Caudill's presentation of coal industry exploitation.

Unlike previous writings on Appalachia completed by authors from outside of the region, Caudill pointed to the influence of outside business interests and their history of environmental exploitation, from the timber and land barons of the 19th century to the national coal companies of his day. For Caudill the situation was complicated, depending in part upon certain decisions of Appalachians themselves; but the central cause for the depression of Appalachia was the constant outflow of resources from the region with minimal returns. As he argued, "the nation has siphoned off hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of its [the Cumberland Plateau's] resources while returning little of lasting value. For all practical purposes the plateau has long constituted a colonial appendage of the industrial East and Middle West, rather than an integral part of the nation generally" (2001 [1963]:325). Caudill carried his charge of colonial oppression into his other writings as well. In a 1963 interview with the Louisville, Kentucky-based *Courier-Journal Magazine*, Caudill stated that he wrote *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* because he "just felt that the mountains have been reduced to the status of an internal colonial dominion for the rest of the nation" (Luigart, Jr. 1963:12). Later, in a 1968 article in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, Caudill claimed similarly, "the region cannot prosper as long as it remains a

²⁷ The Foreword was signed by Stewart Udall, then Secretary of the Interior.

vast colonial territory ripped by absentee owners” (Caudill 1968:12C). As one of the most important critics of strip mining in the 1960s and 1970s, Caudill greatly influenced a generation of activists and scholars who sought to remedy the troubles of Appalachian people.

While influential, Caudill’s work was greatly criticized by contemporary scholars of Appalachian history for what some saw as poor research, easy generalizations, and even cultural elitism. Steve Fisher, a political scientist and former president of the Appalachian Studies Association, wrote that Caudill’s writing was marred by “slipshod and poorly documented research, striking inconsistencies in his thought, his genetic theory of Appalachian development, his cultural elitism, his failure to acknowledge the extent of citizen resistance in the mountains” (1984:268). Though one of the most ardent supporters of Appalachian people, Caudill was hardly romantic, and some of his conclusions about Eastern Kentuckians rankled some readers. Although in his view mountaineers were exploited by external coal investors, Caudill also believed that they were still, in part, responsible for their own poverty. Decades with the most promising students leaving for better education and employment opportunities outside of the region left Appalachia populated by unmotivated Welfare dependents who largely lacked the faculties necessary to wrest the region from coal industry control (see Caudill 2001, Chapter 18, “The Rise of the Welfare State”).²⁸ Significantly for Caudill and later theorists, however, while Appalachians were responsible for some of their own suffering, their contemporary state of dependency was not due to their being “apathetic, fatalistic mountain people [who] won’t try to change their situation,” as culture of poverty models had it, it was primarily due to the continued exploitation of the region’s people and resources by external economic interests (Lewis 1978:1).

²⁸ Along the same lines, in an unpublished manuscript entitled “Bill Best and the Appalachian Sperm Bank” dated January 20, 1986, Caudill lamented the loss of “good genes” from Kentucky, leaving only the less motivated to defend the region against the advances of the coal industry. This is an example of Caudill’s more controversial thinking that troubled some who knew him well (Harry M. Caudill Collection, Box 2, folder 9).

These arguments proved highly influential for the development of later versions of the internal colonialism model.

A more rigorous presentation of this model came in the paper “The Colonialism Model: The Appalachian Case,” by sociologists Helen M. Lewis and Edward E. Knipe, first presented in 1970 at the meeting of the American Anthropological Society and later published in an edited volume by the same name (Lewis, Johnson, and Askins 1978). Lewis and Knipe were influenced by Robert Blauner’s (1969) work on social revolt among African American communities in the 1960s. Blauner’s theory of internal colonization was particularly useful for the Appalachian context, Lewis and Knipe argued, because it accounted for the places of technology and resource extraction in the perpetuation of domination. They said, “those being colonized have resources, natural or human, which are useful to the colonizer. If these resources can be harnessed, the technological superiority of the colonizer is further enhanced, thereby increasing the degree of superiority. Thus the resources of the colonized perpetuate the colonization process” (Lewis and Knipe 1978:17). The history of Central Appalachia, they continued, is marked by the redistribution of property from small-scale, local landowners to the external investors of extractive industries. They concluded strongly, “it cannot be disputed that the coal interests came into the region ‘uninvited,’ that cultural patterns changed as a result of this intrusion, and that the area is controlled by representatives of the industry....Since these conditions exist, it would appear that any recommendations for change should take these factors into consideration” (Lewis and Knipe 1978:24). Along with the other contributors to the volume, Lewis and Knipe reframed many of the driving questions of Appalachian studies and situated formerly insular Appalachian history within global political and economic trends.

Lewis and Knipe's work reflected a movement, called "dependency theory," among sociologists and other scholars in the 1960s and 70s toward theorizing how economic processes between nations kept poor nations politically, economically, and cultural dependent upon wealthy nations. Immanuel Wallerstein's "world systems analysis" exemplified one form of dependency theory. Beginning in the 1960s, Wallerstein developed his analytical method by observing economic inequality around the world. Taking a historical view, Wallerstein focused on the emergence of the capitalist world-economy of medieval Europe where "production is constantly expanded as long as further production is profitable, and men constantly innovate new ways of producing things that will expand the profit margin" (2000:83). This capitalist world economy required three structural positions, "core, periphery, and semi-periphery," differentiated by "unequal exchange...which is enforced by strong states on weak ones, by core states on peripheral areas" (Wallerstein 2000:86). In other words, core nations draw resources and capital from periphery regions. This dynamic not only established unequal exchanges between employers and employees, but between the nations that socially and politically benefit from resource extraction and those that suffer from it. In the following decades, Wallerstein elaborated greatly upon his thesis, but the core idea quickly gained ground among Appalachian scholars who argued that the wealthy East Coast represented the true capitalist core of the U.S. system, while Appalachia represented its periphery.

Following the early articulation of an internal colonialism model of industrialization by Lewis and others, scholars continued to expand upon the theme, testing it through various permutations of Appalachian history. In the early 1980s, sociologist John Gaventa and historian Ronald Eller wrote two highly influential books in the early 1980s that helped further define modern studies of Appalachian economics and culture.

Gaventa's *Power and Powerlessness* (1980) remains one of the more widely read books on Appalachian industrialization. Focusing on mining and union activities in the Clear Fork Valley of Tennessee, Gaventa sought to answer the question "why, in an oppressed community where one might intuitively expect upheaval, does one instead find, or appear to find, quiescence?" (1980:3). In other words, Gaventa examined why the miners of Tennessee, who sat under the domination of both coal company owners and union officials, did not challenge the very system that oppressed them. Ultimately, the answer to these questions centered on power and the ability of those in power to continually promote their interests and influence the attitudes of those without power. He explained, "in situations of inequality, the political response to the deprived group or class may be seen as a function of power relationships, such that power serves for the development and maintenance of the quiescence of the non-elite. The emergence of rebellion, as a corollary, may be understood as the process by which the relationships of power are altered" (Gaventa 1980:4). To conduct this analysis of power in the Clear Fork Valley, Gaventa proposed a three-tiered model of power dynamics: power of the elite over the non-elite operates through "observable conflict," more subtly through the "mobilization of bias" (the so-called social "rules of the game" that ultimately serve the interests of the elite), and finally, in "psychological adaptations to the state of being without power" (or the internalized powerlessness of the non-elite, maintained through the activities of the elite, that serves to prevent even thoughts of resistance) (1980:13-16). While Gaventa's work was foremost a historical study, he also aimed at understanding and developing methods for contesting the structures of economic inequality in Appalachia.

In support of his theory, Gaventa examined the history of mining in the Clear Fork Valley, covering the entrance of mining corporations into the region in the late 1800s to the

union struggles of the 1960s and 70s, including the volatile Tony Boyle administration of the United Mine Workers of America union. Significantly, Gaventa portrayed this history (like Helen Lewis) as one of internal colonization (though he also acknowledged certain caveats in the use of that term) (1980:48). Mining companies gained power in the region through “the development of social stratification and the establishment of absentee, concentrated economic control of the resources and the means of their extraction” (Gaventa 1980:56-57). These social and economic changes generated the unequal situation of contemporary Appalachia, led to the development of classes of powerful and powerless, and stifled resistance among locals, Gaventa concluded. It was not biological or cultural faults of the mountaineers themselves that led to Appalachian poverty (as culture of poverty models contended), but a long history of economic and social exploitation by outside forces. In a clear articulation of the internal colonialism view of Appalachian history, Gaventa concluded, “from the days of the first settlers, the life and work of the Appalachians has been upon and within the land. But since the colonization of these rural valleys by industrial capital in the late 1800s, the ownership of the land has been separated from the people who live and depend upon it” (1980:205). The story of Appalachian industrialization, then, was also one of the alienation of mountaineers from their land.

Writing only two years after Gaventa, historian Ronald Eller continued an internal colonialism analysis of Appalachian history and challenged previous culture of poverty models.²⁹ In his highly influential *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, Eller argued that “the persistent poverty of Appalachia has not resulted from the lack of modernization. Rather, it has come from the particular kind of modernization that unfolded in the years from 1880 to 1930” (1982:xxiv). For Eller, Mountaineers were not “yesterday’s people,” passed over by modernity as earlier

²⁹ Billings, Pudup, and Waller called Eller’s volume the “definitive saga of Appalachian colonization and industrialization” (1995 9).

commentators contended, but victims of exploitative modernization including “the growth of urbanization and industrialization, the rise of corporate capitalism and the bureaucratic state, the development of a national market economy, the concentration of political and economic power, and a weakening of cooperative life and work in local communities and family life” (Eller 1982:xxv). After surveying the economic, cultural, and environmental changes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Eller concluded that Appalachian poverty was greatly exacerbated by exploitation conducted by outside interests, much like other colonies throughout history. Stating a strong version of this colonialism model, Eller concluded, “despite the vast natural wealth within its borders, the southern mountains remained comparatively poor—not because it was backward, but because its wealth enriched the modernizing centers in other parts of the country. Such economic ‘underdevelopment’ is similar to the exploitation experienced by many Third World countries that provide raw materials to larger, more advanced industrial nations” (1982:229). Together, Gaventa and Eller added data in support of Helen Lewis’s previous arguments that poverty and dependence in Appalachia derived from outside exploiters.³⁰

In the decades following the publications by Lewis, Gaventa, and Eller, Appalachian Studies has grown substantially as a field and a later generation of scholars, including sociologists Dwight Billings and Wilma Dunaway, has continued to analyze the social and political dynamics of industrialization in the region, drawing upon sociological research.

As early as 1974 Billings raised questions about internal colonialism models of Appalachian history, suggesting that more work on specific communities was needed to flesh out the actual dynamics of poverty in the region (Billings 1974). Influenced by social movement

³⁰ Theologians have also recently turned to Appalachia in contemporary considerations of post-colonial theology. Catholic theologian Michael Iafrate suggested that Appalachia presents a useful site for the continued analysis of religious responses to colonialism. See Iafrate 2010.

theory, Billings continued his research through the ensuing decades. In 1995, Billings, along with colleagues Mary Beth Pudup and Altina Waller, edited a collection of essays entitled *Appalachia in the Making*, presenting alternative approaches to Appalachian pre-industrial history. In the volume's introduction, following a detailed review of Appalachian scholarship, they argued for the necessity of understanding Appalachian history in the longer term and broader contexts of rural history. The authors stated, "what sets apart the essays in this collection from historical studies preceding them is both the effort to push the examination of mountain social life back further in time and the effort to deconstruct the concept of an essential and universalistic Appalachian past" (Billings, Pudup, and Waller 1995:9). Though crediting earlier scholars such as Lewis, Gaventa, and Eller with making necessary contributions to Appalachian studies, the authors of *Appalachia in the Making* sought to push the field beyond simplistic internal colonialism models.

With sociologist Kathleen Blee, Billings advanced his most detailed argument in *The Road to Poverty* (2000), which presented their research on Clay County, Kentucky. Combined with earlier ethnographic work on the region, Billings and Blee consolidated nearly a century's worth of data on Clay County communities, local hereditary and political ties, and economic history. Based on their data, the authors criticized the internal colonialism models of Caudill, Eller, and others that "minimized the impact of the local state and political development on poverty and economic development by reducing political domination to a corollary of economic exploitation ... [and] reinforced the assumption that Appalachian history really only began with the history of corporate capitalist industrialization in the late nineteenth century" (Billings and Blee 2000:14). Instead, Billings and Blee suggested that the foundations of Appalachian poverty lay in earlier agrarian periods of development and sought to explain "how corporate capitalist

industrialization has fed on, rather than created, Appalachian poverty” (2000:14). To Billings and Blee, early internal colony models too easily posited distinct eras of agrarian simplicity versus industrial oppression, overseen by Dickensian capitalist villains. Taking a longer view, Billings and Blee unearthed roots of Appalachian poverty in pre-industrial economic and political systems. Perhaps one of the most insightful observers of Appalachian scholarship, Billings believes that recent research shows movement toward a third era of Appalachian studies—“work that challenges both models of Appalachia as a traditionalist subculture and as a colony”—though surely this change has been decades in the making (2009:2).³¹

While Billings and others pushed Appalachian studies in different directions, other later scholars built upon previous models, such as world systems theory. Sociologist Wilma Dunaway provided the most detailed and extensive world systems analysis of Appalachian environmental and industrial history in her work, *The First American Frontier* (1996). Like Billings and Blee, Dunaway located the entry of capitalist control in Appalachia to “the transition to capitalism that occurred in the region’s Native American societies” (1996:9), long before the arrival of the first coal barons. Appalachia remained a capitalist frontier, or a transitional zone between two “previously distinct societies” (Dunaway 1996:10). Appalachia marked an early, porous cultural and economic boundary between traditional Native American economies to the west and the capitalist culture of the colonial east. Indeed, Dunaway continued, “because Appalachia’s new settlers emigrated from zones that had been incorporated into the modern, capitalist system

³¹ Billings also studies the sociology of religion and the role of religion in promoting social change. In articles such as “Religion as Opposition: A Gramscian Analysis” (1990) and “Religion and Political Legitimation” (Billings and Scott 1994), Billings examined the “factors that enable religion to contribute to activism by becoming an oppositional discourse and practice” (1990:1-2). Influenced by the sociological writings of Antonio Gramsci, Billings argued that religion in the southern United States has been tied to class formation. Religious leaders could turn to any side of a conflict, employing religious justifications the entire way; but Billings found that “how they made this choice—the voluntaristic dimension of social conflict—was influenced by the political process of class formation” (1990:26). Billings’ work, therefore, bridges the gap between Appalachian religious and economic history.

before the region was repopulated, it is historically and theoretically inappropriate to categorize the region's inhabitants as precapitalist....Settler Appalachia was *born capitalist* [italics in original]" (1996:16). Internal colonial models, then, have to avoid simplistic distinctions between pre-industrial and industrial Appalachia, and focus instead on the longer-term dependency created by the global capitalist system.

Significantly, Dunaway acknowledged that the long-term economic changes brought by European immigration also dramatically changed human relationships with the land. She concluded,

beginning in 1700, the local institutions that dominated in Southern Appalachia were articulated with the structural dynamics of the capitalist world system. This long incorporation process entailed a reformulation of the economy, the local state, and the culture. However, social institutions were not the only elements to be irrevocably altered. Once this external arena was absorbed, its natural and human resources were reorganized as factors of production and exploited to maximize outputs for global commodity chains (Dunaway 1996:285).

In other words, capitalism alters social structures as well as visions of nature. This set the stage for Appalachia to be viewed as a resource colony, worthy only for the economic value of its trees, minerals, and labor force. The coal barons, then, did not necessarily impose an exploitative worldview onto the otherwise environmentally sympathetic mountaineers. Instead, the roots of environmental exploitation were set centuries in the past. Together, Billings and Dunaway situated contemporary Appalachian problems in longer historical processes, necessitating that future scholars acknowledge pre-industrial Appalachian history in order to explain contemporary economic, social, and environmental problems.

In his work, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency* (1994), historian Paul Salstrom likewise employed a version of world systems analysis on Appalachian history.

Critiquing internal colonialism models and supporting his own position, Salstrom said, “rather than *colonial*, the adjective *peripheral* best describes Appalachia’s economic position. Although it is not on the fringe of the international economy but within a ‘center’ capitalist country, Appalachia since the middle of the nineteenth century has increasingly been relegated to the periphery of America’s market economy” (1994:xiv, italics in original). Appalachians remain vital members of the American economy, but through their labor which is simultaneously devalued by the capitalist system. Salstrom explained, “the advantages derived from Appalachia’s subsistence labor reproduction were not *kept* within Appalachia—they were diffused outward into the entire American economy, and mere Appalachia’s valuable contribution of low-cost labor was valued very low, if not indeed denigrated [italics in original]” (1994:xxxvi). This led to the current situation of unequal access to resources and capital in the Appalachian region, or what Ronald Eller termed “the paradox of Appalachia—a rich land inhabited by a poor people” (1982:xxv).

Though Billings, Dunaway, and Salstrom criticized internal colonialism models, they still largely blamed capitalism for the poverty and environmental struggles of mountaineers. While the perspectives of Billings and world systems analysts remain highly influential among Appalachian scholars and activists today, others have criticized these approaches and offered different arguments regarding Appalachian industrialization. In 1991, Crandall Shifflett published *Coal Towns*, in which he argued against the reigning Marx-inspired views of Appalachian industrialization. Mountaineers were agentic in their transition from agrarian to industrial societies, he argued. Indeed, to many mountaineers industrialization was a welcome solution to the increasing pressures

of growing populations on agricultural life. Shifflett contended, “the real keys to rural Appalachia—both preindustrial and postindustrial—are family, fecundity, and mobility, not stasis, alienation, and immobility. Mountain families struggled to preserve their way of life, not by resisting change but by accommodating themselves to it” (1991:6).

Though he acknowledged the hardships brought by industrialization, he concluded that to speak of colonial oppression overstated the historical truths. Robert Weise likewise emphasized the agency of pre-industrial mountaineers in the transition from agrarian to industrial society. In *Grasping at Independence*, he argued, “Appalachian industrialization was not an invasion; it originated out of the conflicts that emerged from the hardships inherent in the household society as well as from the machinations of outside capitalists” (Weise 2001:13). Appalachian families persisted within a constant tension, seeking both independence and material security. While a desire for independence led mountaineers to question corporate interests, the desire for material security led them toward coal towns and industrial employment.

Finally, Rebecca Scott, in her recent work on race, gender, and mountaintop removal, charted new theoretical ground for conceptualizing Appalachian industrialization. Scott criticized internal colonialism models for their persistent dichotomies, such as Gaventa’s “dualistic logic,” establishing two social conditions of power and powerlessness (Scott 2010:13). For Scott, Gaventa and others problematically assumed the presence of independent subjects for their analyses. Her work strove to move beyond such assumptions through post-structural analysis, as she explained, “instead of relying on a liberal ideal of a unitary, rational subject ... poststructuralist theories of the subject emphasize to what extent all identities are coalitional, partial,

fragmented, and located in history” (2010:16). Along with destabilizing fundamental concepts of identity, Scott added further analytical lenses to the discussion of Appalachian society, questioning race and gender in novel ways. She said, “a cultural analysis of the complex interactions between these objects—race, gender, class, and nature—requires respecting their irreducibility while recognizing their mutually productive effects in the social world” (Scott 2010:19). In this way, Scott provided a unique perspective on the social and economic dynamics of Appalachian history, differentiating her work from earlier models and opening a new path for future research.³²

Theorizing the transition from agrarian to industrial society has been a central concern of numerous Appalachian scholars. Behind this research lie important questions regarding the relationship between Appalachia and the rest of the United States, the economic and cultural place of rural societies in contemporary culture, and the roots of the current Appalachian coal-based mono-economy.

Conclusion

Reviewing this substantial body of literature on the religious and industrial histories of Appalachia has been important for several reasons. First, it provides the first survey of scholarship on mountaintop removal and Appalachia that integrates religious and industrial histories.³³ It has been necessary to establish the underlying assumptions and methods of each body of literature and extract the common themes among them. Much like Robert Orsi’s vision

³² Debates over industrialization, society, and modernity have continued in the pages of the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, and scholars continue to develop the primary theories associated with their discipline. Of particular relevance are articles by Elvin Hatch (2008) and Susan Keefe (2008). Though differing in their methodologies and conclusions, both articulated novel perspectives on modernity in Appalachia, concluding that the region exists in a unique state, a “multiple modernity” both in and out of Western modernity (Keefe 2008:171).

³³ See Eller 1982:243-262; McCauley 1995:469-477; and Billings and Blee 2000:3-24, for example. The Appalachian Studies Association also maintains links to numerous bibliographies of Appalachian scholarship online. See <http://www.appalachianstudies.org/resources/bibliographies/> (accessed May 21, 2011).

of “lived religion” (1997, 2005), Appalachian religious studies calls for research “on the ground,” with specific attention to individual expressions of faith. My own methods have emphasized this “ground up” approach, and thus my dissertation continues in the methodological trajectory established by previous scholars. Sociologists such as Billings and Dunaway likewise argue that the contemporary coal industry cannot be understood outside of its historical, political, and cultural context. The work presented here likewise follows the suggestions of previous scholars, situating mountaintop removal and its resistance in the broader context of Appalachian human/nature relationships.

Second, I argue that mountaintop removal, and local resistance and complicity toward it, continue directly from historical precedents that are generally neglected in popular presentations of the issue. For example, few popular media portrayals of mountaintop removal today acknowledge the long history of (sometimes radical) local resistance to strip mining. Many contemporary groups owe many of their insights on local organizing and direct action methods to their mid- and early 20th century predecessors. Religious complicity and dissent toward mountaintop removal, likewise, follows from long, sometimes contradictory histories of otherworldliness (tending to eschew questions of politics and social issues) and social concern (emphasizing justice for the poor and needy). For these reasons it is essential to fully understand the events and assumptions that directly led to mountaintop removal and its resistance. Furthermore, academics and activists often work together in Appalachia, or are at least conversant with each other through local media reports and public meetings and conferences. Both scholars and activists are generally considered in documentaries about mountaintop removal, and most of the long-time activists I met during my fieldwork were very well-read in Appalachian history and the critical perspectives found in it. Academic theories and historical

data, then, transfer to activists who employ them in their own political discourse (Taylor 2010:75-77). An observer at anti-mountaintop removal rallies will no doubt hear versions of the internal colonialism model of Appalachian poverty repeated enthusiastically. Indeed, this was the case for my own research. The scholarly work reviewed above, then, is not just abstract interpretation of historical data, but information that persists in active conversation with academic, activist, and popular audiences.

Finally, understanding earlier work on Appalachian history helps to contextualize and explain the many innovations developing in the current anti-mountaintop removal movement. Contemporary religious resistance to mountaintop removal has clear antecedents in earlier protest movements, and many of the views of the coal industry and its role in directing Appalachian society derive from a lengthy and ambivalent history of industrialization. At the same time, though, the contemporary movement diverges from earlier history. Appalachians are finding new religious languages to express their environmental values, and anti-mountaintop removal activists continue to recognize Appalachia's place at the center of the U.S. energy economy, rather than an isolated cultural backwater. These changes become more visible when viewed against the backdrop of Appalachian history.

CHAPTER 3
FROM FARMERS TO MINERS: RELIGIOUS, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL
CHANGES IN APPALACHIA, 1776 TO 1930

Central Appalachia has long been known for its coal, and many of the earliest explorers knew of its presence in the area. For example, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson noted burning coal seams near the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers in western Virginia (1785 [1999]:30-31).³⁴ When Frederick Law Olmsted traveled through the mountains of North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia in 1853 and 1854, though, he made no mention of coal or mines. Instead he described numerous small farmers, depending largely upon rye and corn and livestock such as cattle, hogs, and sheep (Olmsted 1907 [1860]). Before the Civil War, as Olmsted's account revealed, the people of Appalachia were not known as miners, but as subsistence farmers scratching their livings from the narrow valleys of their mountainous home. It was not until the Industrial Revolution and the widespread interest in coal that Appalachian economies shifted toward providing the fossil fuel to national markets.

Though coal is virtually synonymous with Appalachia in the contemporary imagination, the dominance of "King Coal" in the region occurred relatively recently in the region's history. The practice of mountaintop removal did not emerge in a vacuum, but was built from cultural and economic changes that began with the entrance of train lines (that opened the region to easier resource extraction) and the timber and coal industries and their concomitant social reorganizations (including the formation of company towns and work camps). With the development of "King Coal" came changes in property ownership (typified by the broad form deed) and cultural acceptance of coal mining as appropriate labor. All of these physical and cognitive changes made possible the eventual development of strip mining, and later,

³⁴ West Virginia did not become a distinct state until June 20, 1863, when Unionists in the region voted to separate themselves from the state of Virginia, which had seceded during the Civil War (Williams 1976:76).

mountaintop removal.³⁵ Just as mountaintop removal is not fully comprehensible without first explaining its historical precedents, so too is its resistance. Since the unionization process of the early 20th century, Appalachians have fought against coal industry excesses. Many of the locals who resisted the entry of strip mining in the region in the middle of the 20th century had direct ties to this previous union organizing; and these individuals, combined with anti-poverty and civil rights workers of the 1960s, likewise directly influenced the development of local and regional environmental and social justice organizations in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Contemporary mountaintop removal and attitudes toward it are indelibly tied to these historical changes.

Appalachia in the Early Republic

Looking westward from the British colonies before the American Revolution, Appalachia was a formidable boundary to the mysterious territories beyond. White hunters and trappers like Daniel Boone traveled the area in the early and middle 18th century, but the toughness of the terrain and recurring conflicts with American Indian tribes kept all but the most determined settlers away. Following the Revolutionary War, Americans looked west in greater numbers to the less populated lands beyond the mountains. Soil depletion in the coastal and piedmont South, combined with increasing population, necessitated this westward migration (Craven 2007). By the late 1700s, enough settlers had crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains to form the states of Tennessee and Kentucky. In 1790, 80,000 individuals lived in Southern Appalachia, primarily in the foothills and along major rivers (Davis 2000:97). Meanwhile, the Cherokee and other native peoples were forced onto reservations of decreasing size until their removal to the

³⁵ It is essential to note, too, that increases in mine output occurred in response to increases in demand from North American markets. Mining in Appalachia was never only an Appalachian issue.

Oklahoma Indian Territory in 1838 (Davis 2000; Williams 2002).³⁶ While many settlers crossed the mountains into the western farmlands of Tennessee, Kentucky, and beyond, relatively few stayed in the mountainous regions, and Southern and Central Appalachia remained sparsely populated, a “land of scattered, loosely integrated, and self-sufficient island communities” (Eller 1982:6). Families preserved subsistence farms in the fertile valleys and hollows, and despite the unique features of geography, life was relatively similar to other rural regions of the United States at the same time.³⁷

Religion in Appalachia, 1776 to 1850

European migration patterns into and through Appalachia also played a role in the development of religion in the region. Like other frontier areas, Christian denominations tended to be weaker in the mountainous regions during the 18th and early 19th centuries. While Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians established themselves in the more populated areas west of the Appalachians, their theological control remained tenuous at first. As John Boles explained for 18th century Kentucky, religion hardly exploded in early Appalachia. He said, “church growth lagged far behind population; denominational bickering dispirited those relatively few who persevered in their faith” (Boles 1976:16). In this way, Appalachia resembled the rest of the South through the early Republic period. What would become part of H.L. Mencken’s “Bible Belt,” at first, appeared less religiously interested than other parts of the nation (see Heyrman

³⁶ Though of course, not all Native peoples made the trip. The Eastern Band of Cherokee retains a reservation bordering the Great Smokey Mountains National Park in western North Carolina, and many locals involved in contemporary anti-mountaintop removal work cite Native heritage as a central element to their religious connections to the land. See Chapter X. For more on the Eastern Band of Cherokee, see John R. Finger’s *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819-1900* (1984) and *Cherokee Americans* (1991).

³⁷ This agrarian condition did not mean Appalachia remained distinct from the broader North American capitalist economy. See Billings and Blee (2000) and Dunaway (1996).

1997:3-27). What was for some a theological vacuum, though, presented for others a unique opportunity for spreading otherwise controversial messages.

In the former British colonies, many communities were identified by centrally located churches that served as social, political, and religious foundations for the surrounding families (Isaac 1982:58). The widely scattered communities of Appalachia did not support the establishment of many community churches, as existed in the flatter lands of the nation. Instead, preachers travelled to the people. Methodist and Baptist itinerant preachers travelled deep into the Appalachian hollows, spreading their early evangelical messages and helping to establish the local forms of Christianity that would later characterize the region. These early preachers did not invent the word “evangelical” for themselves. The term derives from the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning “good news.” In the middle ages, the Greek term was used widely to refer to the teachings of Jesus. Thus, “‘evangelical’ religion has always been ‘gospel’ religion, or religion focusing on the ‘good news’ of salvation brought to sinners by Jesus Christ” (Noll 2003:16). In the 16th and 17th centuries, “evangelical” became synonymous with “Protestant.” The term gained greater specificity in the hands of later reformers such as John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield. “Evangelical” aptly summarized their emphases upon the teachings of Jesus and the need to spread those teachings, or “evangelize,” to the masses. By the late 1700s, “evangelical” referred to a specific movement within Protestantism (though the term has continued to be redefined up to the modern day) (Noll 1994:8, 2003; Chapter 6).

According to historian Nathan Hatch, the spread of this new evangelical movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries derived largely from a post-Revolutionary religious populism, “reflecting the passions of ordinary people and the charisma of democratic movement-builders” (Hatch 1989:5). The growth of revivals and evangelical denomination in the 19th century, then,

drew upon a general cultural movement throughout the nation; and because they operated far from the restrictive gaze of older theological elites on the East Coast, the early evangelical missionaries in Appalachia were largely free to operate without censure. Historian John Boles generally agreed with Hatch on the reasons for emergence of evangelicalism in the region. The lack of established churches across frontier Appalachia and the relative remoteness of family groups left many 18th and 19th century migrants to the region longing for religious fellowship. The revivals that began in Kentucky in the year 1800, then, emerged in a “climate of expectation,” where “people yearned for the sense of belonging provided by church membership” (Boles 1976:21). For historians like Hatch and Boles, 19th century Appalachia presented ideal geographical and social conditions for the development of the forms of evangelical Christianity that would later come to define the region.³⁸

Baptist and Methodist preachers travelled widely through Appalachia following the American Revolution. In August of 1801, a particularly famous camp meeting was held at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. Numerous Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist preachers and thousands of worshippers (and probably curious onlookers) gathered for several days around the Cane Ridge church. Often incited by the exuberant preachers, worshippers frequently fell into fits of shaking, dancing, barking, and fainting. While in the 18th century such expressions were widely feared and criticized, preachers and worshippers at Cane Ridge and elsewhere understood these physical responses as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and thus they were encouraged. Numerous other camp meetings and revivals followed across the South throughout the 19th

³⁸ Others remain skeptical of these arguments, though. For Melanie Sovine, social functional and environmental determinist arguments improperly present Appalachian religious history out of its broader social context. She said, “no religious group may be understood simply in terms of its ‘Appalachianness.’ And the notion that a religious group may be understood only in terms of itself—in isolation from other influences—is not empirically sound” (Sovine 1983:65).

century; and in time, people involved in evangelical denominations came to dominate Southern politics and society

Evangelical Christianity was never a monolithic entity, however. Evangelical groups were never static, but they changed, fragmented, and coalesced over the following decades. In the first quarter of the 19th century, the national Methodist denomination officially moved away from some of the charismatic worship practices that characterized the Great Revival. Meanwhile, the “Great Split” occurred between national Baptists, where many in the Appalachian region retained older Calvinist views of predestination (the idea that God preordains all souls to either heaven or hell) while other groups began emphasizing free will (or that individuals have the ability to choose a path to salvation). Evangelical religion was not uniform across the South, then, but from a very early point exhibited regional permutations, including in Appalachia (McCauley 1995:46-47). Over time, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian groups fragmented into smaller sub-denominations and other movements, such as the charismatic Holiness movement and the Disciples of Christ, took hold throughout the region. All of these changes led to the development of what Deborah Vansau McCauley, Loyal Jones, and others called “Appalachian mountain religion,” a distinctive set of “worship practices, belief systems, and church traditions centered around land, people, and history” (McCauley 1995:42-43). The previous chapter outlined some of the characteristics of Appalachian mountain religion as well as many of the problems associated with its study (i.e., stereotyped and dismissive views among scholars and ministers in the early 20th century). In the context of Appalachia in the period between Revolutionary and Civil Wars, however, it is most important to remember that a set of unique characteristics differentiated religion in Appalachia (in its ritual and theological forms) from other parts of the nation, including even other rural regions of the South. “Difference”

should not connote “isolation,” however, as mountain churches remained connected to broader theological and social trends throughout the nation. Thus, when the coal industry came to Appalachia it entered an area with a complex, unique, and adaptive religious history. It was in this pre-industrial era that many of the foundations of Appalachian faith were set—the same faith that would ultimately guide many opponents of mountaintop removal.

The hegemony of evangelicals in the region can be overstated: they did not entirely define religion in 19th century Appalachia. Furthermore, while evangelicals shared some common origins, beliefs, and practices, they also differed significantly, as John Boles explained, “the religious life of antebellum Kentucky was far more diverse, complex, and competitive after the Great Revival” (1976:51). Christian diversity remained present through the region, and as different waves of migrants entered from different regions of the United States (such as conscripted African American workers from the Deep South) and from Europe (primarily Eastern Europe and Italy), they also impacted the religious demographics of Appalachia. Following the American Revolution, many Catholic landowners and families moved westward into Kentucky from the former Catholic colony of Maryland. By the beginning of the 19th century, French and Belgian priests established a see in Bardstown, Kentucky, and Benedict Joseph Flaget was appointed the first bishop of the state (Boles 1976:65). When Catholic immigrants from Italy, Ireland, and Eastern Europe arrived in Appalachia in the second half of the 19th century to work in the mines and on the railroads, they entered an area with an already established Catholic presence, small though it was. The economic changes of industrialization likewise brought Jewish immigrants into the region. Though they never existed in great numbers, Jews were visibly present throughout Appalachia—particularly in county seats, where most business was conducted—by the middle of the 19th century. As Deborah Weiner, one of

the few historians of Jewish life in Appalachia, explained, “Jews were not out of place in the coalfields but were an integral part of the region’s development, along with the many other ethnic groups brought by the coal boom. If their appearance seems anomalous, it is largely because definitions of Appalachia tend to either ignore or oversimplify the ‘industrial’ part of its ‘rural-industrial’ heritage” (2006:6-7). It is easy to imagine pre-industrial Appalachia as a land dominated by enthusiastic, radical evangelicals, but when the first coal companies entered the region in the second half of the 19th century, they entered a region in denominational flux, where faith remained a diverse enterprise.

These religious changes did not emerge in a social, political, and ecological vacuum. While the early 19th century witnessed the establishment of evangelical denominations throughout the region, the latter half of the century witnessed the widespread shift from decentralized, subsistence agriculture-based communities to the camp town life of industrial Appalachia.

Industry in Appalachia: Railroads, Forests, and Mines

Beyond the reports of explorers cited by Jefferson, coal was discovered along the Ohio River in the late 1700s. Small mines existed throughout Appalachia to serve local needs, and Native Americans had used coal long before the arrival of Europeans, but few of the large, profitable mines for which the region would later become known existed until well after the Civil War (Freese 2003). As Ronald Eller explained,

throughout most of the antebellum period, the difficulties of transportation, the absence of any real market, and the deep agrarian biases of southern leaders had prevented the large-scale development of the mountain reserves. In the years immediately following the [Civil] war, however, a sudden rush of activity in commerce, investment, and new technology focused increasing attention on the mountains as a source of materials to fuel the industrial revolution (1982:44).

Instead, the large-scale coal industry first developed in the flatter coal fields of Pennsylvania, Western Kentucky, and Ohio. Locals and outside speculators and travelers knew of the mineral and timber wealth of Central Appalachia long before the end of the 19th century, but it was not until the 1870s that technology and national need led to the development of timber and coal industries in western Virginia and Eastern Kentucky.

For economic purposes, many of the earliest railroads bypassed the most mountainous regions of Appalachia, but as demand for coal increased following the Civil War, growing networks of railroad lines, connecting major cities on the East coast to Appalachian centers such as Pittsburgh and Chattanooga and then further on to major cities in the West, penetrated the region. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad first crossed the mountains of Central Appalachia in the first half of the 19th century, connecting the towns of Baltimore, Maryland and Wheeling, West Virginia (Williams 2002:148). In following phases, more companies constructed lines through the region, reaching some of the remotest regions of West Virginia and Kentucky in the early decades of the 20th century (Williams 2002:229-230). The entry of railroads in Appalachia tied the region to the “development faith” of the East Coast (Lewis 1998:53). Along with material goods, railroads transported “political ideas, cultural baggage, and the self-interest identified with those markets upon which the people depended” (Lewis 1998:56). Railroads provided the physical means for resource extraction in the region as well as the necessary cognitive connections with the industrializing Eastern regions to support resource extraction as an economic good. These changes in turn provided the foundations for the reign of “King Coal.”

Coal, however, was not the first major industrial boom in Central Appalachia tied to the railroads. While mining in Pennsylvania and the western coalfields helped fuel the Civil War and Industrial Revolution, the chief resource of Southern Appalachia remained its vast stands of

old-growth trees. Once at least as high as the contemporary Himalayan range, the Appalachian Mountains are widely considered the oldest in the world. Over millions of years, the Appalachians were spared from the deforestation brought by glaciers and sea level rises. Through various climate permutations, different species migrated to the Appalachians in search of more hospitable lands. When the climate returned to its earlier state, many of the migrants remained in the hills. This natural history has left Appalachia as one of the most diverse bioregions on the planet, including an extensive, diverse, old-growth, mixed hardwood forest (Frick-Ruppert 2010:5). In the 18th century, when quality forest products were already becoming scarce on the East Coast, the giant chestnuts, oaks, and hickories of Appalachia were highly appealing.

The growing, agriculture-based population of 19th century Appalachia applied the first pressure to the region's forests. Following the Civil War and the explosion of outside investment in the region, the extractive industries gained in prominence and output. While smaller timber producers operated throughout Appalachia earlier, environmental historian Donald Davis placed the origin of full-scale industrial logging in 1885 (2000:166). The associated economic timber boom lasted roughly 35 years, providing timber for growing populations across the United States from about 1885 to 1920 (Lewis 1998:131). During this time, wealthy investors brought technologies to the region, such as narrow gauge railroads and steam powered saw mills, which dramatically increased the speed and efficiency of logging operations.

Increased logging in steeper and steeper regions led to a dramatic increase in erosion and flooding by the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1930s, the first National Forests and the Great Smokey Mountains National Park were created in Appalachia as a means to help prevent over-exploitation of forest products, but much environmental damage had already been done.

Besides the steam-powered saws of loggers, the Appalachian forests received another major blow with the introduction of the chestnut blight, first noticed by a New York forester in 1904 (Davis 2000:193). The great American chestnut was one of the most important trees on the East Coast. Fully grown trees provided bushels of edible nuts, a valuable source of protein for humans and other animals, including livestock and game animals such as deer. Chestnut wood was also naturally rot resistant, making it an important source of lumber for houses and fences, and the tree's bark provided tannic acid needed for leather tanning. Within a few decades these versatile trees, that could grow up to 150 feet tall, largely disappeared. For Davis, the death of American chestnuts carried cultural ramifications. It "symbolized the end of a waning, albeit arguably vital, subsistence culture in the mountains. The loss of the tree no doubt gave additional advantage to the forces of industrialization that were gaining a stronger and stronger foothold in the regional and local economy" (Davis 2000:197-198). Although American chestnuts persisted in small pockets throughout Appalachia, the blight removed them as a viable resource for local communities and served as a marker of the transition from a culture of subsistence agriculture to the period of industrialization—the period when "King Coal" would take his throne.

Along with allowing the export of Appalachia's resources, railroads brought cultural artifacts and goods from peripheral regions into the previously isolated area. They permanently connected Appalachia to the national economy and culture. As Ronald L. Lewis noted, "the railroad connected local communities to the national markets and, as elsewhere in rural America, exerted a profound influence on the way people lived. They were lines of communication that made available newspapers, the telegraph, and the telephone, which also integrated Appalachians into the national culture and identity" (2004:64-65). Railroads (and their well-meaning

investors) also brought industrial era education to the hills. These new curricula supplanted folkways and traditional forms of education (Corbin 1981:7).

The railroads also transported new populations of immigrants and workers, seeking small pieces of the economic boom happening across Appalachia. New immigrants from Europe and former slaves from the Southern U.S. often made their ways through the Appalachian forests and mines in their searches for prosperity. In West Virginia, for example, the number of African American miners increased from zero in 1880 to almost 12,000 in 1910. In the same time period, the number of miners born in Europe increased from 924 to 28,000 (Corbin 1981:8). The interactions of different groups led to the development of Appalachian culture as it is frequently understood today. The railroads also provided paths out of the region. When the coal economy turned downward, leaving many with few options for survival, many Appalachians made their ways via railroads to the major industrial centers such as Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago. This continued pattern of immigration and emigration created complex kinship networks of Appalachian families in the mountains and the Mid-West that persisted through the present. Specifically regarding the future development of mountaintop removal, though, perhaps the most significant import to Appalachia made possible by the railroads came in the form of land agents, industrial managers, and their lawyers, who brought with them the legal and economic means to wrestle the land out from beneath the feet of Appalachians. The main tool for this process was the “broad form” deed.

Following the increased demand for coal during the Industrial Revolution, wealthy investors sent land agents deeper into Appalachia to purchase land as future sites of industrial hubs and for the potential valuable minerals beneath the surface. Through the last quarter of the 19th century, industrialists like Alexander A. Arthur, the so-called “Duke of the Cumberlands,”

and James Bowron purchased tens to hundreds of thousands of acres of land in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee (Gaventa 1980:47-48; Davis 2000:163). Where possible, they built industrial towns and encouraged the immigration of new classes of specialized workers to the region. Where the terrain prevented the construction of towns, agents simply purchased mineral rights using the “broad form” deed. As Harry Caudill explained, “the broad-form deeds passed to the coal companies title to all coal, oil and gas and all ‘mineral and metallic substances and all combinations of the same.’ They authorized the grantees to excavate for the minerals, to build roads and structures on the land and to use the surface for any purpose ‘convenient or necessary’ to the company and its successors in title” (2001 [1963]:74). For many mountaineers and subsistence farmers, broad form deeds offered easy money because, in practice, the soil contained much more value than the minerals beneath it. At ten to fifty cents an acre, the deeds seemed like a good deal. Broad form deeds ultimately benefited the purchasing companies, however, as Robert Weise explained, “by separating mineral ownership from surface ownership, mineral speculators gained control of the region’s resources at minimal cost and made widespread, intensive coal mining both possible and profitable” (2006:1573). The deed generally allowed the owner to retain a sense of ownership, allowing him and his family to continue living and paying taxes on the land until the company decided it wanted the minerals (Eller 2008:38). In some cases, the minerals were purchased but the land not touched by the company for generations. The “necessary and convenient” clause of many deeds allowed mining companies to use any means, including strip mining, to access their mineral property (Weise 2006:1574).³⁹

³⁹ See Chapter 4 for more on the legal battles against broad form deeds in the 1950s and 60s; also Montrie 2003:66.

Not all signors of the deeds did so willingly or knowingly. Several land agents were prominent members of local communities hired by the various companies specifically to exert their influence over the mountaineers. When the person bringing the deed was a mountaineer's employer or preacher, as was frequently the case, residents felt unique pressures to sign (Caudill 2001 [1963]:73-74; Begley 1987). Along with such social coercion, land agents also exploited some mountaineers' illiteracy in securing deeds. Larry Gibson's ancestors, for example, were the owners of Kayford Mountain, West Virginia since the late 1700s who signed a "broad form" deed in 1906. Because the family patriarch was illiterate, the deed was signed with only three "X's". After the generation responsible for signing away the mineral rights had passed away, in 1950, the deed holders returned to enforce their rights and extract the coal (Gibson 2009).

Kentuckian Joe Begley, in an interview with the Kentucky Oral History Commission, produced a similar deed signed with "X's" in 1889. This deed sold 300 acres along Bull Creek, Kentucky, for 27 cents an acre (Begley 1987). Because many residents could not read or understand the complex legal language of the deeds, and because many, like Gibson's ancestors, signed their names with unique symbols rather than script, land agents succeeding in securing many deeds from families who did not originally intend to sell. If a mountaineer refused to sign, for example, an agent could simply print three "X's" on the deed and submit it as signed. Few courts would question such signatures, and since many deeds were enforced generations after they were initially signed (again, as in Gibson's case), descendants had little legal recourse to contest the signatures. As Begley explained, "it's like taking the land away from the Indians, doing the people of Appalachia the same way" (1987). Though mining to the extent of modern mountaintop removal, with bulldozers and giant drag-lines, was inconceivable to many in the early 1900s, the broad form deeds proved to be an essential component in the coal industry's

ability to shift to strip mining, and later mountaintop removal, in the second half of the 20th century (Eller 2008:38; Caudill 1973:59-60).⁴⁰

While contemporary residents generally recount the era of broad form deeds with great sadness and regret, historian Robert Weise argued that scholars should not understand the deeds as extensions of a purely exploitative outside force of industrialization. Instead part of the willingness to sign the deeds derived from pressures internal to Appalachian agricultural society. For Appalachian farmers at the beginning of the 20th century,

mineral sales meant a new way to deal with the continuing problem of debt, a new strategy to strengthen what was often a precarious hold on their property. For farmers whose land and livestock might all be mortgaged to the local merchant, a couple hundred dollars in hard cash came in handy. Mineral sales made good, rational sense for farmers, given the shaky financial situation in which they found themselves (Weise 2001:259-260).

Appalachian farmers, driven by indigenous views of gender and social structure, strove for greater autonomy, and the sudden availability of previously untapped wealth seemed to many to be a means toward increased independence. Weise added that, despite oral histories, evidence does not always support stories of overwhelming deceit and intimidation among land agents (2001:257). It is important to remember, Weise would argue, that the accounts of Joe Begley and Larry Gibson came long after the War on Poverty era of Appalachian history, when citizens perhaps grew more conscious of the outside factors leading to Appalachian poverty. Begley and Gibson were also prominent critics of strip mining and mountaintop removal, a fact that likely also tinted their accounts of coal company abuse. Weise's work is important in offering a more restrained view of the broad form deed and Appalachian industrialization. This did not absolve the coal companies for Weise, however, as he acknowledged elsewhere regarding the original

⁴⁰ The public outcry against broad form deeds provided one of the early victories for activists against strip mining in the 1950s and 60s. See chapter 4.

sellers, “while their decision to sell made rational sense at the time, it ushered in an age of corporate domination and poverty that defines the coal fields to the present day” (2006:1574). Though the original signors of broad form deeds may have done so more willingly than their descendents believed, it remains the case that the deeds set in motion a chain of events that would lead to the overwhelming corporate control of Appalachian property, which made possible strip mining and mountaintop removal (Eller 1982:63).

Life and Work in the Coal Towns: Maintaining the Industrial Status Quo

However one theorizes the transition from agrarian to industrial life, the change was physically marked in Appalachia, as the population moved from scattered settlements to newer towns situated near the opening coal mines. By the beginning of the 20th century, the transition of Central Appalachia from a land of local kinship networks and subsistence agriculture to an industrial colony of wealth holders in the East was nearly complete. In some places, this transition occurred rapidly. A study of McDowell County, West Virginia, census records showed that in 1880, 88.5% of citizens reported themselves as farmers or farm laborers. In 1900, however, only 22% called themselves farmers while 36.5% termed themselves miners. This dramatic change was primarily due to increased immigration of individuals seeking employment in the mines (Lawrence 1983:55-58). While not every Appalachian county experienced such dramatic demographic changes, these figures nonetheless reveal the speed and thoroughness of the economic and social changes brought by industrialization in Appalachia.

Significantly, the development of the coal industry and the influx of new workers forged stronger connections between Appalachia, its resources, and the international resource economy.

Historian Ronald Eller summarized the process as follows:

Prior to the 1880s and 1890s, the Appalachian economy was locally oriented and designed to meet the needs of the resident population. Communities were small and, like the family farms, essentially self-sufficient. The development of

railroads, coal mining, timber, textiles, and other industries came about as a result of growing demands in maturing industrial areas outside of the mountains, primarily the urban Midwest and East, and the new commercial order in the region emerged to meet those nonresident needs. Because the demands of the larger economy were for cheap labor and raw materials, and because outside capitalists quickly acquired most of the natural resources of the region, the bulk of the wealth generated by the new developments flowed out of the mountains....The new mountain economic order, therefore, was highly dependent, labor intensive, and tied to the export of single extractive commodities (1982:227-228).

According to Eller, this transition tied Appalachia to the international energy economy. For the first time to a significant degree, Appalachians offered their labor to an external industry that reaped the benefits of their work. Because the transition from small-scale subsistence agriculture to an extractive mono-economy was so thorough, Appalachians were left with few options—they could stay and work for the mines or logging companies, or having already sold their mineral rights, they could leave. This era established a pattern of economic, political, and psychological dependence upon the mining industry that would persist through the modern era of mountaintop removal.

With the economy shifted toward the coal industry, Appalachia settled into a period characterized by tense stability. Company towns and coal camps became the primary centers in many Appalachian valleys, drawing landless families down from the higher hollows and employment-seeking immigrants and merchants in from outside of the region. In the period between 1880 and 1920 the coal industry solidified its hold over Appalachian economies, politics, and society. As the control of the means of production and material wealth shifted more into the hands of the wealthy, absentee elite, the citizens of Appalachia were left with few choices but to support the system. Ronald Eller explained the significant social shifts marked in the coal camps as follows: “not only was the coal camp the site of one’s work, but for many it also provided an introduction to organized community life and the setting in which new attitudes,

values, and social institutions evolved” (1982:162). Workers and other residents of the company towns sometimes revolted against the dominance of coal companies, but they were ultimately unable to weaken the grip of coal companies on the region. In 1910, near a pinnacle of the pre-World War I mining boom, 78.8 percent of miners in Southern West Virginia and 64.4 percent of miners in Eastern Kentucky lived in company-owned towns. Significantly lower percentages of miners lived in company-owned towns in other mining regions of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois (Eller 1982:162). While families remained in the rural regions of Appalachia, the coal counties witnessed the greatest population growth, and so the population balance of the region shifted greatly toward the coal towns.

Most coal towns were stratified, spatially and socially, along lines of class, race/ethnicity, and gender. Following Gaventa (1980), there were four specific classes in most coal towns. First, were the “absentee owners,” otherwise known as the “coal barons,” or those individuals and corporations directly in control of the region’s wealth. Because these owners seldom if ever visited the mines and coal camps that produced their great wealth, their interests were represented by a second class of residents, the “superintendents or managers.” In Middlesboro, Tennessee, the members of this class generally came from outside of Appalachia and were appointed to their positions because of their employment with the absentee owner’s company (Gaventa 1980:57).⁴¹ Unlike the owners, though, Harry Caudill suggested that the class of managers would at least work to understand and in some ways imitate the culture of

⁴¹ Ronald Eller cited a survey of 140 coal mine operators, from extremely wealthy corporate heads to the owners of independent, small-scale mines, showing that nearly 78% of them were born outside of southern Appalachia (1977:196-197). He concluded cautiously but clearly, “while too much can be made of the influx of Northern capital and business leadership into the South in the years following Reconstruction, it does appear that, for a large portion of the Southern mountains at least, men from outside the region were a dominant force in determining the nature and direction of industrial growth” (Eller 1977:196-197). Historians like Eller are frequently careful to not present industrialization in Appalachia as purely a movement of outside forces oppressing locals (though for a good counterargument, see Dunaway 1996). However, I have found many locals and activists, through my interviews, who find this outside oppression model favorable.

Appalachians (2001 [1963]:75). This class was further complicated by the group of prominent locals—individuals from older Appalachian families who exerted a certain amount of social influence over the other residents. Through their allegiances to the owners and managers, these individuals frequently found themselves in positions of greater authority, either as business owners or political appointees (Gaventa 1980:59). A subsection of this class could also include the “check men” and other account managers who measured each miner’s daily production at the tipple (or the structure made for loading coal onto train cars). Because miners were most frequently paid by the weight of coal mined rather than the number of hours worked, the “check man” held a great deal of power over the miners’ livelihoods (Eller 1982:177). Occasionally, local individuals moved up in social status. For example, Betty Slaven of Oneida, Tennessee, married a miner who eventually became superintendent at a mine in Cooperative, Kentucky (Slaven 1981). There also exist several examples of local Appalachians who rose to great wealth and prominence through the process of industrialization, including James Otis Watson (the “father of the West Virginia coal industry”), John C. C. Mayo (the Kentucky-born land baron), and Don Blankenship (the former CEO of Massey Energy, one of America’s largest coal companies) (Caudill 1983; Shnayerson 2008). Each of these men represented the Horatio Alger type so beloved by Industrial Age society, and their existence shows that the social stratifications noted by Gaventa in Middlesboro should not be rigidly applied to all Appalachian contexts, though they remain generally appropriate. Excluding the examples of successful locals, mobility generally occurred along a horizontal axis: individuals from similar social standings (such as mountaineers from peripheral valleys who had recently lost their land to company land agents) met together at the core of the coal camps, where they often found similar work (Gaventa 1980:57).

At the third tier of the coal camp class structure sat the “entrepreneurs, merchants, and professionals,” including shop owners and doctors. Many of these individuals moved to the coal camps from outside of the region, and in order to hold their positions often had to have positive relationships with the upper classes. These individuals frequently stood at the boundary between owners and laborers—as merchants and doctors they served the needs of the poor majority, and they could occasionally side with the workers during periods of labor unrest, but at the same time they were often beholden to the owners for their social positions and, as keepers of company stores, they could become tools of social control by the owners over the laborers.⁴² Gaventa’s lowest class was made up of “laborers,” a group including miners and construction workers (1980:57). In Middlesboro, this class consisted mainly of local Appalachians, but in other towns this population consisted of significant numbers of immigrants and African Americans drawn from elsewhere in the South (Eller 1982:165). At least at the beginning of the 20th century, most foreign-born miners worked outside of Central Appalachia, in places like Pennsylvania and Illinois. Indeed, in 1890, 58.1% of Pennsylvania miners and 57.3% of Illinois miners were foreign-born, compared to only 14% in West Virginia. However, West Virginia drew more African American miners. At the same time, in 1890, 21.5% of miners were native-born African Americans, compared to only 0.8% in Pennsylvania and 2.5% in Illinois. John Laslett argued that this difference was due to the lower wages of West Virginia mines in the late 19th century (Laslett 1996a:33-34). These stratifications became much clearer in the event of a strike, where those who controlled material goods (the owners) and those who managed them (managers, shopkeepers, and security) could withhold them from the lower class workers and union organizers.

⁴² Of course, not all stores were company owned and not all shopkeepers were directly employed by coal companies.

The social and racial stratification of coal towns was also marked in the physical arrangement of the space itself. Initially, town managers placed their employees in the first available houses, but as the years progressed and the town's population grew, managers intentionally segregated housing by race, employment, and country of origin (Lawrence 1983:179-180). Racial and labor characteristics became the most significant distinguishing factors in the towns (Shifflett 1991:60-66).⁴³ Edwin Adams, for example, born in the coal town of Benham, Kentucky in 1918, remembered distinct areas of the town: Hungarians, Italians, and Polish lived together, and black families in another section. Robert Armstead (2002), a black miner who grew up in a segregated company town in West Virginia, remembered occasional tensions between blacks from his section of town and whites from the other side. While Armstead may have remembered generally peaceful times, historian Joe William Trotter, Jr., provided a detailed account of segregation and racial violence in the Southern West Virginia company towns of the early 20th century. Racial tensions (including lynching) increased in Appalachia around World War I as more African Americans left the Deep South for employment opportunities in the North (Trotter 1990). African Americans (who made up over 13% of Southern West Virginia residents in 1930) frequently faced sub-standard living conditions and segregated services and facilities, including churches (Trotter 1990:64). While racial tensions existed, there is significant historical evidence of union leaders intentionally challenging segregation in order to strengthen the union across racial lines, particularly in the Alabama coal

⁴³ Historians differ on the impact of racial, ethnic, and class divisions in coal towns. For Ronald Eller, the physical, social, and economic space of coal towns themselves fostered animosity among different groups. This was an intentional design by company bosses, who preferred miners fight among themselves than with the company (Eller 1982:170-172). For David Corbin, though, the physical orientation of towns fostered interracial cooperation. Individuals understood themselves more as members of an economic class than an ethnic caste (Corbin 1981:61). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to adjudicate which author's description is more accurate.

fields (see Letwin 1998; Kelly 2001; Woodrum 2007). Sometimes different races worked efficiently together toward common ends.

Coal towns were also stratified along economic lines. Towns such as Van Lear and Lynch, both in Kentucky, had “silk stocking roads” where the wealthier superintendents lived (Butcher 1982). Betty Slaven, whose husband was a mine superintendent, remembered that the best housing sat nearer amenities like stores and offices. “Pretty good people lived around the store,” she recalled to an interviewer in 1981, while the “tougher” people lived more toward the outskirts of the town (Slaven 1981). Jan Curls, of Cooperative, Kentucky, similarly reported spatial social divisions in her town. Poorer people lived in unpainted houses in the “upper camp,” located further from the business district, while company executives, the doctor, and other professionals lived in the “middle camp.” Those in the upper camp were less likely to have running water. They used communal outside pumps and privies, instead (Curls 1981). For David Corbin, a historian of Appalachian labor movements, class divisions proved more important than racial/ethnic divisions in coal towns. He argued, “the nature of the company town focused the workers’ discontent, not on each other nor on a racial or ethnic group, but upon the employer—the coal operator—enabling the miners to develop that sense of group oppression necessary for class feeling and behavior” (Corbin 1981:61). Corbin downplayed racial divisions (especially as compared to Northern industrial cities), but his emphasis upon the formation of class consciousness could be connected to his interest in Marxist analysis of labor and resistance in the coalfields.

Beyond the tiers among different social classes, the numerous accounts of coal town residents and miners reveal that there existed levels of stratification among laborers based on age and skill as well. Younger miners frequently hauled the coal, while more experienced miners did

the actual digging and loading.⁴⁴ Bill Viras of Pike County, Kentucky entered the mines in 1916 at 15 years old. He started as a “choke eye,” manually controlling the system of vents in the mine, before moving on to shoveling coal. Viras also remembered that, in his mine, African American miners were not given dynamite like the white miners but were forced to dig the coal directly from the walls with picks. This racial division made their work much harder and significantly reduced the amount of money they could potentially make from their daily hauls (Viras 1977). As mining became more mechanized through the 20th century, it created another distinction between those who worked the machines and those who dug the coal. Eventually, deep miners who were not trained in machinery operation were forced out of the industry as traditional hand loading jobs became increasingly rare. Animosity toward mechanization persists today, where some older workers refuse to apply the honorific title of “miner” to strip miners. Jim Lewis, for example, an Episcopal priest in West Virginia and long-time activist, stated, “you can operate a heavy vehicle, but that doesn’t make you a miner” (Lewis 2009).

Along with their social status, women faced unique struggles in coal towns as well. According to historian Crandall Shifflett, gender and work distinctions gained more significance as families moved to coal towns. Whereas farm work required the entire family for its various components (planting, harvesting, handling animals), only men and older male children worked in the mines. Women and younger children were left outside of the mining economy (Shifflett 1991:101). There were few jobs in company towns for women, and those that did exist, either as secretaries, store attendants, or teachers, were often highly competitive. Edwin Adams, a former miner and resident of Benham, Kentucky (located in Harlan County), noted that it was rare for women to work in coal camps. Only “big shots” in town could find jobs for their wives and

⁴⁴ For a detailed description of the process of non-mechanized mining, see Dix’s *What is a Coal Miner to Do?* (1988:1-27).

daughters (Adams 1981). Some women, however, such as Sophia Conley from Van Lear, Kentucky, were able to find work outside of company towns despite the difficulties of travelling to and from work (Conley 1982). With fewer opportunities for employment within the company controlled communities, many women felt trapped. Jan Curls, the daughter of a superintendent from Cooperative, Kentucky, who later moved to the much smaller community at Blue Heron, Kentucky, married a teacher at the age of 17 largely due to a lack of other options and out of obligation to the community gender norms. Even as a superintendent's daughter, Curls recalled that women were "reared up to believe, such as my mother told me, that...when you get old enough, which is 17 or 18, no later than 18, you get married and you have a husband that takes care of you and you don't work you take care of the house and you cook and you have his kids and that's your responsibility. You don't have to worry about anything else" (Curls 1983). Though she admitted not wanting to marry at 17 (she and her husband were later divorced, after leaving Blue Heron), marriage represented a rare chance for Curls to leave the coal fields and explore opportunities elsewhere.

Miners' wives, who generally lacked sufficient social standing to acquire jobs in town, experienced tensions specific to their social station.⁴⁵ Working at home with children or in the garden left miners' wives plenty of time to worry about the safety of their husbands. In a 1977 interview with Kentucky miner Charley Crawford, the interviewer turned to his wife to ask about her feelings about her husband's job. She responded, "it was miserable. Not knowing what would happen to him. I never wanted him to work in the mines, but he did. He had to. It's about the only thing he could do. And it's miserable. Not knowing when they're coming in.

⁴⁵ It is important to note that there have been women miners in Central Appalachia, though mainly after 1970, placing them outside of the historical purview of this particular section. For more on women miners see Moore 1996 and Tallichet 2006.

When you see them leave, whether they'll come back or not" (Crawford 1977). While Mrs. Crawford's fears never came true, other miner wives were not so fortunate. While researching and interviewing for a book on the mining industry in the late 1960s, West Virginia reporter Jeanne M. Rasmussen met a woman named Alice Law. Law recounted, "I am one of those ladies that rattled that old coal stove, made biscuits, fried white meat,...packed the dinner pail, topping those biscuits with homemade jelly. I did this for 17 years. One evening he didn't make it back. I got a smashed bucket, a pair of torn gloves, and a dirty jacket. My youngest child was not yet six years old" (Jean M. Rasmussen Collection: Acc. 352, Box 1, Folder 24). Feeding children in company towns was difficult enough with a male monetary provider. Poor women like Alice Law, when faced with their husbands' mortality, generally required the support of broader family networks to survive.

Georgia Ivy Keen presents another example of the difficulties faced by poor mothers and children in the coalfields. Keen, born in 1930, was one of 15 children in a "very poor" family in Perry County, Kentucky. While her father worked as a miner, they family lived outside of company housing in their own small house on land they rented. Keen's mother married her father when she was only 13 years old, and both were illiterate.⁴⁶ When Keen was 7, her father died in the mine. Left with no source of income to support her children, Keen's mother moved the family to Buckhorn, Kentucky, where they stayed initially with other family members. Eventually, many of the children were given away in adoptions. Despite such tragic circumstances, Keen was adopted by a preacher in Buckhorn and later graduated from Berea College, becoming a nurse (Keen 1979).

⁴⁶ Another famous Kentuckian from Van Lear—Loretta Lynn—married at the age of 13 (see "Loretta Lynn," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loretta_Lynn). While most women married young, Lynn and Georgia Keen's mother were certainly on an extreme end of the spectrum.

With so many sad stories of loss, hardship, and social divisions, there seems ample evidence for the unpleasantness of coal camps, especially when compared to an idealized agrarian past. Leading Appalachian historians (particularly those interested in supporting a colonial model of industrial development) often portray life in the coal camps as oppressive and constituted by complete dependence upon the company. For Ronald Eller, coal camps provided an essential tool for capitalist exploitation of Appalachia and its people. He argued,

by monopolizing almost every aspect of community life, company towns effectively blocked the growth of local retail enterprises and diversified or supporting industries that might have accompanied coal mining. Since the profits from mining went to nonresident owners, the only benefit that might have accrued to the region itself was the miners' wages. But, under the closed company town system, these too flowed largely out of the mountains (Eller 1982:198).

As a result, mountaineers grew more dependent upon outside property owners, the coal industry, and market fluctuation.

It may be true that control of local Appalachian economies moved from mountaineer families to outside businesses and that the coal camps served as necessary control mechanisms to perpetuate that shift. Such a claim requires extensive economic evidence. However, it is clear that coal town residents did not always understand themselves as exploited. There were several instances for celebration and relaxation in the towns. Some larger towns had movie theaters, generally owned by the company but staffed by volunteers (for example, Frances Turner, of Price, Kentucky, remembered her sister playing the piano for the silent movies shown during the summer). As with other parts of the nation, Hollywood films revealed new values and ambitions to mountaineers; as Turner remembered, "people were exposed to other cultures, who had been somewhat isolated in our creeks and hollows up to that time" (1970). Musicians and small circuses also made regular trips through many areas. For those who could afford it, like many places elsewhere in the United States in the first half of the 20th century, coal camp residents

enjoyed popular music on the radio, including the regular programming of the Grand Ol' Opry, based in Nashville, Tennessee (Perry 1981). Perhaps the most popular form of entertainment, though, was baseball, “the miner’s sport” (Shifflett 1991:162). Workers themselves organized pick-up games and company teams on off days, while professional teams travelled the region, playing exhibition games and challenging the best local players. Whether as players or observers, baseball games provided welcome breaks from the regular work day.

To summarize, the social and economic situation in coal towns was ambiguous. It is true that, within a few decades, scattered, agriculture-based communities transitioned to more centralized, employment-based communities. This change impacted social and economic interactions between mountaineers and landowners, and between Appalachians themselves. It also corresponded with the ascension of “King Coal” into political, economic, and cultural dominance in the region. Still, these changes remain open to interpretation by historians. For some historians (particularly those influenced by the internal colonialism perspective introduced in Chapter 2), “company towns ... functioned to limit the growth of social freedom and self-determination and to heighten social tensions and insecurities within the region” (Eller 1982:198). Mountaineers ceded their political autonomy to coal company bosses and their officials, whose power extended “over almost every facet of village affairs” (Eller 1982:193).⁴⁷ This exploitative view is shared by many contemporary activists, who see the era of coal towns as representing the complete domination of traditional mountaineers by outside, capitalist forces. A detail from “The True Cost of Coal,” a massive educational poster created by the Beehive Design Collective,⁴⁸ provides an excellent example of this contemporary attitude (Figure 3-1).

⁴⁷ David Corbin also supports this view of coal towns and company influence over miners’ lives (1981: 8-10).

⁴⁸ The Beehive Design Collective is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

In the image, miners' houses are chained and locked to the gated, fortified mansion of the coal company boss. Even the store and church become part of the looming dominance of the company. The coal train forms a final border to their community, fully engulfing them in company power, from which they cannot escape. Of course, not all contemporary activists share this perception of coal towns, but it is pervasive.

For others, coal towns provided answers for growing problems with the older agrarian system. In this perspective, the 19th century was “not a golden age of untrammled yeomanry but a period of crisis on the land, agricultural decline, advancing tenantry, and a darkening future for the next generation. It is this perspective that...mining families brought to their social situation in the company towns” (Shifflett 1991:10). Crandall Shifflett challenged what he saw as historical simplification in the accounts of historians such as Eller and Corbin. He argued, “coal towns were the product of a variety of forces, despite historians' tendency to see them as little more than the creations of industrial capitalists....The history of coal towns was indeed a history of paternalism, more or less, but paternalism was not some reductionist force operating independently of other forces. Age, sex, marital status, and generation were structural features that had a profound impact upon town life” (Shifflett 1991:3).

Such scholarly disagreements reflect ambivalences among Appalachians themselves, including among contemporary opponents of mountaintop removal. As Eller and Corbin argued, company towns represented a significant cultural transition among mountaineers. At the same time, some remember the age of deep mining fondly, particularly as compared to the current era dominated by strip mining and mountaintop removal. Those who lived and worked in coal camps share this ambivalence. Edwin Adams, who was born in Benham, Kentucky in 1918 and later worked as a security guard in Lynch, Kentucky, remembered the social and economic

benefits of coal town life. Coal towns also offered opportunities for individual advancement, whereas in the mountains, Adams reflected, “you’re just stuck up in them hollers and there you sit” (1981). For others, coal towns transplanted a more ideal previous lifestyle, free from dependence upon coal companies. Marvin Gullett, a Kentucky miner, remembered stories of times before the advancement of coal companies:

People can’t imagine. But the old timers I’ve talked with, my grandfather and people, said that never was a freer life ever known at that time. It was, everybody was self sufficient. They didn’t depend on stores. They used to have everything they need, and they made their own clothes and everything. They had their sheep and their spinning wheels and their, and their looms, and they made their clothes and quilts, whatever they needed. Everything else, they raised on the farm (1977).

Though he did not live in that time, Gullett longed for the economic independence of pre-industrial Appalachia. Of course, the accounts of Gullett and Adams need not be exclusive; in different ways they were probably both correct. Their evidence reveals, however, that the changes both brought by and instrumental to coal camp life were complicated and preserved in the memories of those who lived them.

Religion and Coal in Appalachia in the 20th Century

Following the Civil War and advancement of coal company control in Appalachia, religious expressions in the region likewise changed. After the horrors of the war, Americans turned to Protestant denominations in great numbers: major denominations such as Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others more than tripled their memberships from 1860 to 1900 (Marsden 1991:12). In the same time, many Southern evangelicals broke with their Northern counterparts. Initially abolitionist and critical of mainstream social divisions, evangelicals in the South gradually changed their positions through the 19th century. By the time of the civil war, evangelicals had influenced wealthy and powerful Southerners, and thus took positions of political and social power through the region. These changes distinguished Southern

evangelicals from those in the North (Heyrman 1997). By the beginning of the 20th century the religious landscape of Appalachia and the South was becoming more distinct from the rest of the nation.

Along with these national changes, theological debates led to denominational transitions, such as the development of Holiness and Pentecostal groups, and further fragmentation of Appalachian groups into new sub-denominations, such as the Missionary Baptists (Dorgan 1987; McCauley 1999; Wacker 2001). The Holiness movement emerged out of the camp meetings and revivals of the 19th century. Many Methodist preachers emphasized John Wesley's teachings on "Christian perfection." Wesley argued that, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, Christians could undergo a rebirth and cleanse their souls of sin (to a degree), and thus live a fully sanctified life. Later proponents of Holiness emphasized the place of the Holy Spirit in this work, and so visible signs of the Holy Spirit's presence, such as healing, physical gestures, and glossolalia, entered into Holiness worship practices (Dieter 1996). New groups such as the Church of God and Church of the Nazarene, along with numerous Methodist groups, emerged from the Holiness milieu. The Holiness movement led directly to the formation of Pentecostalism around the beginning of the 20th century. Pentecostals (named after the moment in Acts 2:1-6, on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus' disciples and caused them to speak in tongues) emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit, healing, and "Holy Ghost baptism," or the redemptive importance of the individual touch of the Holy Spirit during worship. The Azusa Street Revival of 1906 and the work of popular promoters such as Aimee Semple McPherson helped spread the Pentecostal movement around the nation (Wacker 2001). The Holiness and Pentecostal movements led to the formation of numerous independent churches throughout Appalachia and the rest of the nation. What tied these diverse groups

together was a continued focus upon the physical manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit in believers. In Appalachia, some members of these groups began searching for Biblical precedents for how the presence of the Holy Spirit during worship should appear. One important source was the Gospel of Mark. According to one passage (which is possibly a later addition to the original gospel), following his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples. Among other messages, Jesus said to them, “and these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (Mark 16:17-18).⁴⁹ Small groups of believers took this passage quite literally and began handling rattle snakes, drinking small amounts of poisons, and laying hands upon the sick during worship services. While “snake handlers” have never been numerically strong, they represent a uniquely Appalachian religious development of the early 20th century (Kimbrough 1995). The Holiness movement in all of its permutations had a significant impact upon religion in the region.

The publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859 generated further reactions among North American evangelicals, contributing to the rise of Christian fundamentalism at the end of the 19th century. With roots in the revivals that spawned the evangelical and Holiness movements, the push toward fundamentalism was largely a response to fears among conservative Christians about liberal theology and what they saw as the moral decline of the United States and erosion of its Christian foundations.⁵⁰ Taking their name from a series of pamphlets called *The Fundamentals* published between 1910 and 1915 and funded by a

⁴⁹ All Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁰ It is important to remember, as George Marsden notes, that “fundamentalist” is not synonymous with “evangelical.” Instead, fundamentalists are a specific group within the broader evangelical category (2006).

wealthy California oil baron, fundamentalists generally questioned the intellectualism and humanism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Fundamentalists supported a literal reading of the Bible (including narratives of creation) and looked for signs of the impending millennium, based on interpretations of the teachings of the prophets and the Book of Revelations (Marsden 2006:118-119).

Perhaps the greatest test for fundamentalism in the national spotlight was the Scopes Trial, held in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. John Scopes, a high school teacher, intentionally violated the Tennessee state law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public schools. The trial and media circus that followed, including debates between evangelical hero William Jennings Bryan and humanist Clarence Darrow, typified the cultural clashes between Christian fundamentalists and secular America. The trial, thanks in great part to the coverage by the critic H. L. Mencken, contributed to negative views of Appalachian religion among non-Appalachian observers that persisted well into the 20th century.⁵¹

Mencken covered the trial for the *Baltimore Evening Sun* and in his reports presented the residents and their religious beliefs as disturbingly retrogressive to mainstream North American intellectual traditions. He portrayed the trial as a grotesque carnival, populated by fundamentalist Christians who, but for their modern clothing, resembled medieval peasants at a witch trial. Mencken levied his acerbic criticisms most directly at the fundamentalist leaders who preached for a literalist reading of the Biblical story of creation. Fundamentalists, he argued, were cognitively inferior to rational humanists such as himself. He said, “the so-called religious organizations which now lead the war against the teaching of evolution are nothing

⁵¹ Indeed, one of my interview subjects, an evangelical environmental activist, cited the Scopes Trial as the central moment defining negative stereotypes of religious people among secular activists. As he said, “the secular left has hurt relations with the religious community in a huge way during the Scopes Monkey Trial, and the whole evolution/creation debate, because after that they said, anybody that believes this is just a backwards idiot. And they continue to ridicule them” (Russo 2009).

more, at bottom, than conspiracies of the inferior man against his betters” (Mencken 1991:563). These inferior men were defined by the absurdity and extremity of their views. In a later article, Mencken continued, “it may seem fabulous, but it is a sober fact that a sound Episcopalian or even a Northern Methodist would be regarded as virtually an atheist in Dayton” (Mencken 1991:572-573). In his next report he said, “the Book of Revelation has all the authority, in these theological uplands, of military orders in time of war. The people turn to it for light upon all their problems, spiritual and secular” (Mencken 1991:577). Though to some degree accurate of fundamentalist beliefs, Mencken’s condescending and scornful writings about the Christians of Dayton left lasting impressions among his national readership on Appalachian religion.⁵²

Among his harsh critiques of fundamentalists, Mencken also provided an account of a prayer meeting of “Holy Rollers” in the hills near Dayton. In “Yearning Mountaineers’ Souls Need Reconversion Nightly, Mencken Finds,” he recounted a clandestine visit to an outdoor meeting of Christians identified only as Church of God Holy Rollers. The “sacred grove” was lit only by torches, making the scene appear particularly primitive to the reader (Mencken 1991:578). At this meeting, Mencken witnessed one woman denounce the reading of any book but the Bible to the cheers of those around her. After more announcements, the preacher condemned the satanic forces present in Dayton. Later, a young woman entered the middle of the circle and asked for prayers. The group descended upon her, and “what followed quickly reached such heights of barbaric grotesquerie that it was hard to believe it real” (Mencken 1991:580). Many of the participants began speaking in tongues and several entered into convulsions on the ground. Mencken commented, “a comic scene? Somehow, no. The poor

⁵² See pages 184-189 of George M. Marsden’s *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (2006). Mencken did not apply these sharp critiques to all southerners and Appalachian residents. He found many of the residents of Dayton to be welcoming and kind despite their stubborn dedication to what he saw as an irrational and socially dangerous doctrine. See Mencken 1991:570, for example.

half wits were too horribly in earnest. It was like peeping through a knothole at the writhings of a people in pain” (1991:580). Horrified, Mencken did not stay at the scene any longer. Sifting through Mencken’s interpretation, the reader witnessed real evangelical religion in action, though many probably only found support for their beliefs that Appalachian religion was profoundly abnormal.

Mencken’s accounts revealed much about national perceptions of Appalachian religion. Pentecostals and snake handlers made for exciting reading, but accounts such as Mencken’s also helped promote a mistaken vision of Appalachian religious demographics. While in the 19th century, Baptist and Methodist traveling preachers worked to gain converts through extensive traveling and preaching, by the early 20th century, their denominations had come to dominate Appalachian religious demographics. Based on surveys from 1926, researcher Elizabeth Hooker found that, of religiously affiliated mountaineers, 39.8% belonged to Baptist churches and 33.4% belonged to Methodist churches.⁵³ Put another way, over 73% of Appalachians were Baptist or Methodist at the end of the first quarter of the 20th century.⁵⁴ The next 25%, from Hooker’s survey, were other forms of Protestants, including mainline churches such as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Holiness/Pentecostal groups. Finally, 2% were Catholic or Jewish (Hooker 1935:182). While the influence of Baptist and Methodist denominations across Appalachia should not be diminished, Hooker’s statistics could be inflated. With more modern methods, Hooker may have found a greater number of Holiness and Pentecostal groups. Because of the emphasis placed upon denominational structure by early researchers of American religions,

⁵³ Hooker did not include figures for those claiming no religious affiliation.

⁵⁴ Hooker surveyed 17 representative counties from West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. The numbers have not remained the same, though. According to the 2000 census, Baptists make up nearly half of religious observers in Kentucky and Tennessee, while they only make up a quarter of adherents in West Virginia and Virginia (Ownby 2005:50-55).

including Hooker, independent and ad-hoc meetings often went unnoticed. Richard Callahan explained that “Holiness activities were nearly invisible to census-takers and surveyors and therefore also to later historians,” because, “like much of Appalachian religious culture, Holiness worship tended to be unorganized” (2009:131).

While Appalachian church-goers were distinct compared to the rest of the nation, so too were Appalachian church institutions and officials. Hooker found that there were 3.25 churches for every 1,000 individuals throughout the central and Southern Appalachian regions. These churches were generally quite simple. Seventy percent consisted of only a one-room building, while another 11% of congregations had no official building at all, but instead used public spaces such as schools and meeting rooms. While the number of churches per resident exceeded the national average, only 1 in 50 churches had permanent resident ministers, compared to 1 in 4 nationally. Distinct from the rest of the nation, the majority of Appalachian preachers either traveled great distances to serve numerous congregations (much like the original circuit riders and itinerants of the 19th century), or were lay congregants of the churches designated by their communities to preach. About 63% of Appalachian preachers had “some other bread-winning occupation” besides their service to the church (Hooker 1935:168-175).

Unlike some contemporary portrayals (Figure 3-1), churches in coal towns were not always entirely controlled and dominated by the company, though of course, nor were they sites of great resistance to mine bosses.⁵⁵ Somewhat surprisingly, coal towns generally reported less religious adherence than elsewhere in Appalachia. As Crandall Shifflett explained, “the

⁵⁵ Statements such as Curtis Seltzer’s seem someone exaggerated: “the official God of the coal camp was the company’s God, and the prescripts of His church dovetailed with those who risked their capital” (1985:19). Of course, plenty of examples of official religious support of coal bosses exist. Following the outbreak of World War I, Bishop P.J. Donahue of the Catholic diocese of Wheeling, West Virginia, exclaimed to miners, “your country calls you as never before. Coal is King. You are his willing subjects. Today he is the greatest power of all” (quoted in Corbin 1981:178). Bishop Donahue’s statement was tied to broader issues of national patriotism, though, and cannot be held as completely supporting claims like those of Seltzer.

institutional church, not to say Christianity itself, seems to have had surprisingly small influence upon mining families in coal towns. Nevertheless, nonchurchgoing miners still might describe themselves as religious and express their belief in God” (1991:196).⁵⁶ Nonetheless, companies generally supported the construction of churches as both a recruitment tool for workers and a way to satisfy their needs within town boundaries. As Shifflett again explained, according to economic logic, company-funded churches were “part of the ideal of contentment sociology, predicated upon the belief that a satisfied laboring population would be stable and productive” (1991:191). Some churches were funded and built by town residents. Reflecting religious demographics of the time, most churches were either Baptist or Methodist, though in larger towns such as Lynch, Kentucky, there were also Catholic churches (Perry 1981; Adams 1981). Again, reflecting the statistics reported by Hooker, many coal camp churches did not have full time preachers. Instead, preachers would often travel regular circuits through many different towns, or if the congregation supported it, lay members would rotate preaching duties. Like other public areas, churches in coal towns were generally segregated until well into the 20th century (Shifflett 1991:194; Adams 1981). Of course, residents were never forced to stay in coal towns, so they could travel outside of the area to attend churches as well. Janet Butcher’s family, for example, regularly travelled from Van Lear, Kentucky (where there were only Baptist and Methodist churches) to a nearby town to attend the Church of Christ (Butcher 1982).

Beyond its influence upon the physical structures of religious expression (such as churches in company towns), coal mining had a more subtle influence upon the religious lives of individuals as well. Richard Callahan charted the internalization of work, coal, and religious

⁵⁶ Richard Callahan makes a similar point: “whether they attended church or not, many eastern Kentuckians still lived in a world patterned by an overarching sense of order, power, and mystery that had roots in both the Bible and their daily routines and experiences” (2009: 96).

expectations among miners and mountaineers in his book on the early mining industry. For Callahan, coal, work, and the environment had reciprocal relationships with Appalachian religiosity. Cultural attitudes led mountaineers toward the hard work of the mines, and in return for their suffering, miners gained a certain unquantifiable degree of pride. Miners' comments from the late 20th century supported Callahan's argument and revealed a deep ambivalence about coal and mining. Marvin Gullett, for example, of Kentucky, explained in an oral history "you can't imagine, unless you go in a coal mine, how dark it is in there. How gruesome" (1977). He and others only entered the mines because of absolute necessity. Charley Crawford, a Kentucky miner who loaded coal by hand in the 1920s and 30s and who worked such long hours he often went days without seeing the sun, explained, "I'd rather done anything else. But that was the only industry there was in this part of the country" (1977). Henry Scarburry, a Kentucky miner who first entered the mines at the age of 17, explained "the younger miners now have got it, well, the younger miners don't know what really hard work is in the mines" (1977).

Advancements in technology after World War II greatly reduced the suffering of working miners, for Scarbury. The difficulties of mining held value, however, and Scarburry continued about his work, "and I liked it, and that's all I'd ever do" (1977). Though difficult, mining was an acquired skill, and as Callahan argued, this shared skill led to social group formation.

"Miners, therefore, shared a common bond, built out of their work experiences, that separated them from nonminers. ... To become a miner, then, was also to be initiated into a community" (Callahan 2009:103). Rather than simply tedious labor, miners understood deep complexities within the craft itself and learned to read subtle signs in the air and on the coal face to help avoid disaster (Fishback 1992; Callahan 2009). As coal industry historian Keith Dix explained,

coal mining was basically a craft job, with a skill level of its workers similar to that of iron molders, glassblowers, typographers and others who exercised broad

discretion in the direction of their work. These independent craftsmen learned their job during an apprenticeship period and, once having mastered the requisite skills, worked largely without supervision and at their own pace. The early pick miner was not only in control of his job but also in control of his own time on the job (1977:105).

Evidence from oral histories generally supports Dix's evaluation. Miners often spoke of having the "slight" or "art" of mining efficiently—of the ability to perform great amounts of work with seemingly little effort. Marvin Gullett, for example, told the following story about a miner from the early 20th century, famous in his company for his work: "I knew a man, and the old man's been dead for years, his name was Bob Linden. He loaded fifty tons a day...as much as three men could load. But he had some art about it; he never stopped. He kept his shovel in a steady rhythm" (1977). When miners' pay almost always depended upon tons of coal loaded ("tonnage men"), as opposed to hours worked ("daymen"), this ability to load efficiently was highly desirable (Fishback 1992:42-44).

Envisioning deep mining experience as a craft has influenced more recent perceptions of strip miners. The work of mining itself has led to important self-identification markers since the explosion of the industry in the late 19th century. Of course, issues of race and gender played significantly into the construction of this miner identity. As Callahan noted, "the mine was a resolutely gendered space, and mining was a masculine labor....To be a miner in eastern Kentucky, therefore, was to be a man" (2009:103). As Rebecca Scott has revealed, though, this was a "dependent masculinity" (2010:96). Mining masculinity was (and remains) tied to "a gendered understanding of work, embodied in the heterosexual white male breadwinner, [that] gives shape to a specific configuration of masculinity that gains moral worth from family wage employment" (Scott 2010 96). To be a miner, then, is not only to be a man, as Callahan put it, but to be tied into an economic and political concept of citizenship and identity that stretches

beyond the coalfields. Adding this dimension to work helps explain why people continue to suffer through difficult working conditions and what they gain beyond simple economic benefits. This becomes even more relevant in arguments supporting mountaintop removal among contemporary miners and their families.

Racial distinctions also contributed to miner identity. In contrast to many other industries of the early 20th century, African Americans were allowed to take positions of greater skill within deep mines. Historians offer different reasons for this unique working situation during the era of segregation. The absence of women in the mines, for one, precluded fears among white leaders of improper contact between black men and white women. As opposed to the textile industry, for example, where black workers could potentially work side by side with white women if labor segregation was not enforced (Woodrum 2007:13). Interracial solidarity during strikes (especially in the Alabama coal fields before 1920) further showed how race played a less significant dividing factor among deep miners than elsewhere in the nation (Letwin 1998; Kelly 2001). Of course, discrimination persisted in the mining industry. Through the first decades of the 20th century, the extension classes necessary for mine supervisor certification (along with other leadership roles) were limited to only white participants in West Virginia. Some segregated classes were offered later in the 1930s, but this situation still revealed racial barriers to advancement within the coal industry (Trotter 1990:103).

Callahan argued that this coal ambivalence (along with its racial and gender complexities) is essentially tied to Appalachian religious worldviews and cultural norms. Whereas many historians have neglected religion from their accounts of early 20th century miners, for Callahan, work and faith are inextricably tied to the cultural, economic, and environmental conditions of the specific Appalachian place, and “material concerns always

connect to spiritual concerns,” he argued (Callahan 2009:189). Cultural preferences for labor and a certain type of gender relationships, along with the demands of the environment, led to the development of distinctly Appalachian forms of religiosity. According to Callahan, “Holiness religion in Eastern Kentucky appears not simply as a local expression of a national trend, but more concretely and specifically as an example of an ongoing process of religious work in a place” (Callahan 2006:145).

Callahan’s innovative argument concerning the connections between work and faith in the Appalachian coal industry is supported by oral histories of miners from the era of his research. Georgia Ivy Keen, who grew up impoverished in the Kentucky mountains, stated bluntly that “work builds character...country living builds character” (1979). Doing a job well was not merely a matter meeting economic needs, but a question of values and becoming a good person. Former deep miner Marvin Gullet likewise connected Appalachian culture and attitudes toward work: “the people that worked in the Appalachian Mountains was always...a hearty breed, you know. You couldn’t get them down with work....They weren’t afraid to face death, it meant...a livelihood for the family. So they went in these mines” (1977). Again, Gullet’s comment revealed certain ambivalences about mines and mining. Appalachians had to enter the mines to provide for their families, but fortunately, they already had the necessary fortitude to survive and thrive in the work.⁵⁷

While Gullet and Keen do not definitively prove Callahan’s argument, they do show that miners of the early 20th century and their families wrestled with the connections between cultural and religious values and work. Extending Callahan’s thought from the context of early 20th

⁵⁷ Kentuckian Joe Begley expressed a unique form of this value of work in an interview conducted in 1994. Begley remembered visiting the Smithsonian Museum and seeing an old locomotive engine in pristine condition. For Begley, that great machine sitting in a museum was a complete waste. For a machine to not be working was a complete misuse of its purpose. In a different way, this shows the high value placed upon work among some Appalachians—the need to function is ingrained in its very existence (Begley 1994).

century miners to the proponents of strip mining and mountaintop removal today helps explain why people continue to support a practice in spite of the evidence of its danger to mountaineers and their ecosystems.

Conclusion

Between the Revolutionary War and World War II, Appalachia and its people acquired their distinctive reputations. A remote, relatively un-religious agrarian culture transitioned, due in large part to economic pressures from outside of the region, into a more centralized, industrial, and religious one. Throughout the industrialization process, however, and especially as economic pressures and depressions hit in the early 20th century, some mountaineers and miners began resisting political and economic forces that challenged their autonomy. Through unionization, Appalachian miners first organized in collective resistance against what they saw as oppressive forces. When mechanization and surface mining increased after World War II, costing the majority of deep miners their jobs, former miners and other Appalachian residents continued to oppose the industry. Social, political, economic, and religious relationships established in the coal towns of the late 19th and early 20th centuries influenced later resistance movements against surface mining and mountaintop removal.

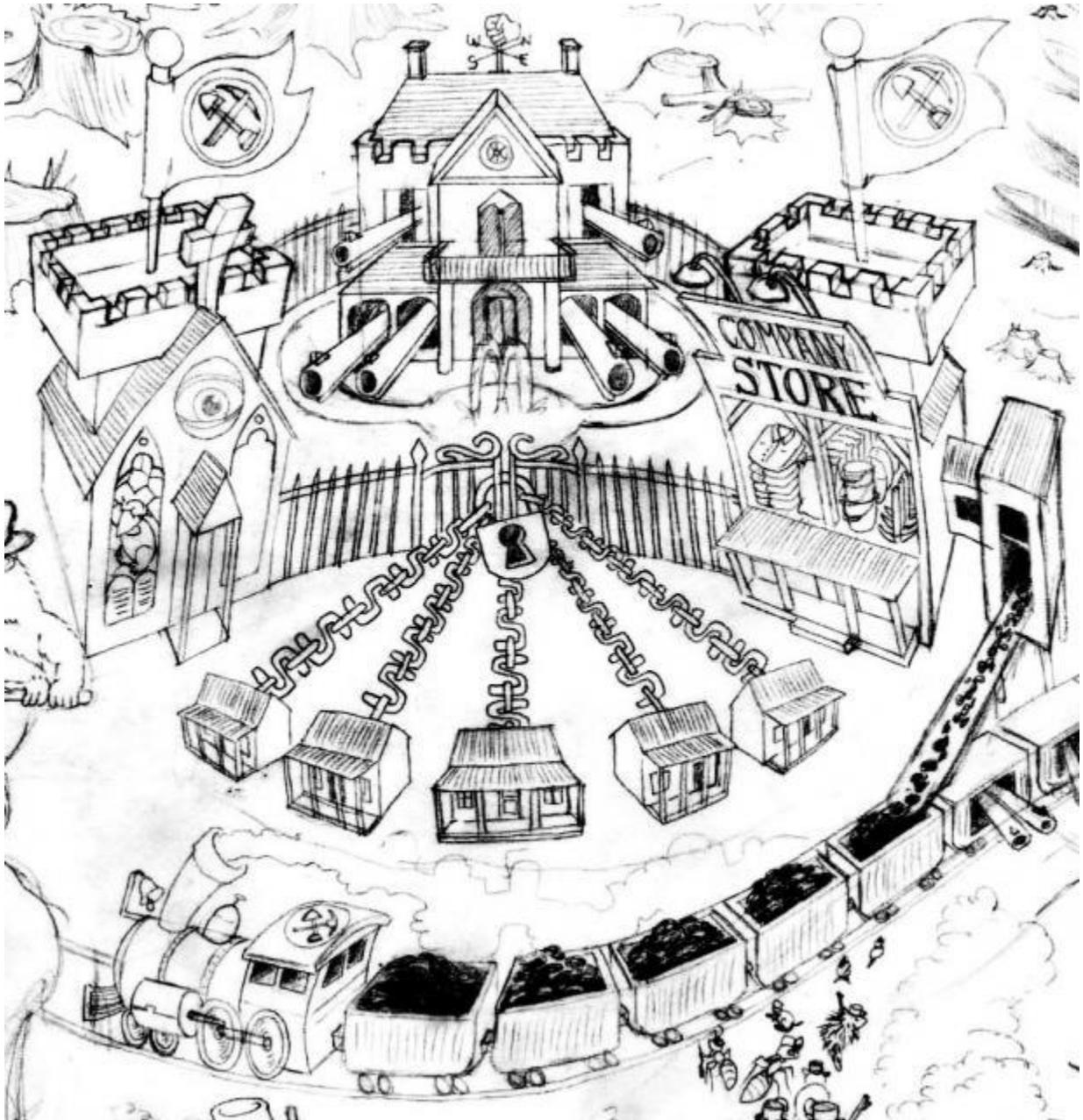


Figure 3-1. "Coal Boss Town," detail from Beehive Design Collective's "True Cost of Coal" poster. This image shows a typical view of coal boss exploitation. Beehive Design Collective, <http://www.beehivecollective.org/imagegallery/main.php>. Image not copyrighted, available for free use.

CHAPTER 4
MOUNTAINEERS FIGHT BACK: UNIONS, MINING, MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL AND
RESISTANCE, 1930 TO 2011

In 1971, Illinois native John Prine scored a minor hit on the U.S. Country Music charts with his song “Paradise.” The song marked Prine’s entrance into an esteemed crowd of country song-writers, especially with its catchy refrain:

And daddy won’t you take me back to Muhlenberg County,
Down by the Green River, where Paradise lay.
Well I’m sorry my son, but you’re too late in asking,
Mr. Peabody’s coal train has hauled it away (Prine 1971).

Most likely, few who heard the semi-autobiographical tale realized it recounted a true story. A town called Paradise actually existed in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky. Situated near the Green River, Paradise became the site of numerous open-pit strip mines and a Tennessee Valley Authority coal-fired power plant. The devastation and pollution in the area forced the relocation of all of Paradise’s citizens, and by the early 1960s, the community existed only in history books (Caudill 1966; Walsh 1965). Though situated in Western Kentucky (a coal region distinct from Appalachian Eastern Kentucky), the story of Paradise portended significant changes for Appalachia. Similar mines in the flatter regions of Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio helped the development of major new technologies that made possible the mass recovery of coal. The easy availability of explosives after World War II likewise helped the growth of large scale surface mining. Within only a few decades, mining companies transferred these new technologies to the hills of Appalachia, resulting in the massive job-loss of deep miners and substantial environmental devastation.

This chapter charts the transition of mining in Appalachia from the deep mining associated with the coal town era to the machine era, mainly around World War II. The development of new technologies and increased demand for cheap coal, along with favorable

political circumstances, led directly to the development of mountaintop removal in Appalachia. These changes did not occur without resistance: as deep miners lost their jobs to machines, union activism increased. Famous events like those at Matewan, West Virginia, and the long stand-off at Blair Mountain emerged from local tensions between miners, their bosses, and the heavy-handed political tactics of coal companies. As strip mining spread through the region in the 1960s, more and more locals stood in resistance, sometimes putting their bodies between their homes and the bulldozers that threatened to take them. This grassroots resistance of the 1960s led directly to the formation of the first environmental and social justice groups in Appalachia. These groups, in turn, provided necessary foundations for the formation of new groups organized in the early 21st century against mountaintop removal.

Fighting the Machines: Unions, Mechanization, and Resistance in the Coalfields

The movement for unionization in Appalachian mines started in the late 19th century, but many of the most infamous moments of Appalachian unionization occurred in the 20th century. Largely due to popular films and documentaries such as *Matewan* and *Harlan County U.S.A.*⁵⁸ and famous figures such as “Mother” Jones, many are aware of the violence and activism surrounding unionization in the mines across Appalachia. While the violence of this period derived in part from corporate laws, the specific processes of industrialization, and fears of Communist infiltration in the United States working class, some of the methods, memories, organizations, and policies from this period carried into later strip mining opposition. Excellent histories on union activism in Appalachia already exist, so it is not necessary to review the period in great depth (Corbin 1981; Eller 1982; Hevener 1978; Laslett 1996a; Shiflett 1991;

⁵⁸ *Matewan*, Dir. John Sayles, Cinecom Entertainment Group, 1987; *Harlan County U.S.A.*, Dir. Barbara Kopple, Cabin Creek, 1976.

Taylor 1990).⁵⁹ However, a brief survey will help identify important continuities between early union activists and contemporary anti-mountaintop removal activists.

Poor Miners and Union Maids: The Rise and Fall of Unions in Central Appalachia

The movement toward unionization in North American mines derived in large part from the Western European immigrant miners of the late 19th century, where the mining industry had been longer established. The earliest unions included the American Miners' Association (formed in the Mid-Western coal fields in late 1860), the Knights of Labor (which was not solely a miner's union, but accepted miners as members in the late 1870s), the National Federation of Miners and Mine Laborers (formed in 1885), and the United Mine Workers of America (formed in 1890) (Long 1989:85, 141-151).⁶⁰ These Unions borrowed heavily from similar British organizations.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, as in the rest of industrial America, miners increasingly turned to strikes to negotiate with frequently heavy-handed owners. Because mechanization did not pose a significant threat to employment in this era (the machines that existed at the time mainly replaced picks and shovels, not the workers themselves), most early strikes focused on quality of life in coal towns, debt, and the official measurements of pay. In individual mining communities, strikes could be long lasting and conducted with little external support. The collective similarity of miner demands and the relative safety in numbers led to national union organizations. As Amsden and Brier argued, "the idea of a national union came

⁵⁹ Though as political scientist and Appalachian scholar Stephen L. Fisher notes, "A number of studies describe how and why Appalachian coal miners emerged in the 1920s and 1930s as one of the most militant and class-conscious workforces in the United States. But except for this long and bitter union campaign, we know little about collective resistance efforts in the Appalachian region prior to 1960" (1993b:3). In other words, focusing on unionization neglects other, less obvious features of resistance in Appalachia such as "gossip, backtalk, holding on to one's dialect, moonshining, open violation of game and fencing laws, and migration" (Fisher 1993b:4). New research, he concluded, is necessary to fully appreciate the impacts of collective resistance to exploitation before 1960.

⁶⁰ According to Curtis Seltzer, the short-lived Bates Union, organized in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania in 1848, was the first coal miner's union in the United States (Seltzer 1985:25).

to represent the prospect of overcoming the isolation and defeat of the lengthy local struggles” (1977:608). Changes in the U.S. coalfields generally mirrored developments in the United Kingdom, where unions likewise initially preferred negotiations to work-ending strikes.⁶¹ By the turn of the 20th century, though, the UMWA developed its own organizational and managerial strategies and emerged as one of the most powerful unions in the United States (Laslett 1996b).

The UMWA rose to national prominence due in large part to the work of its charismatic leader, John L. Lewis. Lewis was born in Iowa to Welsh immigrant parents in 1880. He rose quickly through the ranks of union leadership in Illinois and became head of the UMWA in 1919. Through numerous controversies, charges of illegal tactics, and conflicts with miners across the U.S. coalfields, Lewis held his position with the UMWA until 1960 and his influence extended far beyond Appalachian coal towns. Lewis led North American workers through some of the most serious economic and social troubles of the 20th century, including the depression of the 1920s and 30s and the relative industrial boom following World War II (Dubofsky and Van Tine 1977).⁶² Together with activists like “Mother” Jones, the famous union organizer and radical who rallied workers to “pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living,”⁶³ John L. Lewis was a central figure in the 20th century union movement (Gorn 2001:3).

⁶¹ Many early union leaders were originally from Europe. John Laslett points out that, of the original eight members of the UMWA Executive Board, one was Scottish, one Irish, and three English (Laslett 1996b:29). Coal companies in Pennsylvania began encouraging Welsh immigrants before the Civil War because of their experience in the British mines. As union conflicts escalated, many operators continued encouraging immigration from Central and Eastern Europe (Lewis 2008).

⁶² Another interesting contemporary account of Lewis and his life is Saul Alinsky’s *John L. Lewis: An Unauthorized Biography* (1949).

⁶³ Elliot Gorn’s *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (2001) is an excellent source for more information on Mother Jones, focusing especially on the development of her larger-than-life character. Though it is meant more as a political treatise than exact history, see also *The Autobiography of Mother Jones*, edited by Mary Field Parton (1925).

Unionization efforts, though, often met significant barriers from mine owners and their hired security agents (such as the famous Pinkerton Detective Agency). This occasionally led to violent incidents. One of the earliest and most influential stories of coal town violence occurred in the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania in the 1860s and 70s where the Molly Maguires, as they were later dubbed, emerged from secretive Irish labor organizations. As they moved into the coal towns of Pennsylvania, the Molly Maguires carried with them some of the internal feuds and political dynamics from the home country. Through the 1860s, these Irish groups were increasingly blamed for violence against non-Irish workers and mine officials. By 1876, popular magazines, mine owners, private security forces such as the Pinkertons had elevated the story of the Molly Maguires to one of an epic battle between evil, terroristic miners and the patriotic captains of industry. In 1878, after a lengthy trial, twenty men were hanged for crimes associated with the Molly Maguires. Though modern historians have shown that at least some of these men were innocent of the crimes for which they had been convicted, the cases revealed the great power held by coal company owners and Pinkerton agents over the justice system of the Pennsylvania coal region (Kenny 1998). The case of the Molly Maguires provided an early example of popular perceptions of the coalfield labor movement. The mine owners largely had the means to control the narrative in the popular media, and so many labor organizers, whether true or not, were frequently labeled as terrorists. This condition persisted well into the twentieth century, culminating in 1969 when United Mine Workers of America presidential candidate Joseph Yablonski was murdered at the request of Tony Boyle, then standing UMWA president. Though shocked by the murders of Yablonski, his wife, and daughter, many Americans could nonetheless easily fit the case within their standard views of coalfield life (see Gaventa 1980).

Skepticism about unions and their alleged violence persists through pro-mountaintop removal discourse today.

A second important moment associated with miner unionism came with the May 19, 1920 massacre at Matewan, West Virginia. During this battle, the miner-friendly police chief Sid Hatfield and others were killed by aggressive Baldwin-Felts agents in a brief shootout in the streets of Matewan.⁶⁴ The murders provided a tipping point for the tensions between workers, mine officials, and the Baldwin-Felts agents.⁶⁵ Within days, union miners from Matewan and surrounding communities gathered seeking justice for the community. City leaders called the U.S. National Guard to Matewan to help prevent violence, but on August 31, 1921, a massive firefight ensued on Blair Mountain between miners, Baldwin-Felts agents, and other mountaineers mustered for defense. In his history of the fight, Lon Savage explained the significance of the battle: “fully ten thousand men—and some estimates go to twice that number—were involved as the two armies began exchanging shots along a ten-mile front. George Washington had fewer soldiers at the Battle of Trenton, the engagement which changed the course of the American Revolution” (1990:120). Fighting continued over the next week, leading to an estimated sixteen deaths—primarily of miners (Savage 1990:161). While many factors led to the easing of hostilities, the Battle of Blair Mountain ended largely because of the entry of National Guard troops into the region. As Lon Savage explained, miners—many of

⁶⁴ Like the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency was a private company, based in Virginia, that provided armed guards and spies for industry leaders in the 19th and early 20th centuries. For more information, see Weiss (1986) and Morn (1982).

⁶⁵ Rebecca Bailey provides a compelling argument against the more labor-focused histories of Matewan in her *Matewan: Before the Massacre* (2008). Bailey argued that Matewan, in Mingo County, was a stepping stone for unions to the greater objectives of unionizing in Logan and McDowell Counties. The violence exploded in large part because coal industry interests recognized the threat of unionism in Mingo to larger mines elsewhere. The work of the Baldwin-Felts, then, was preemptive in nature. Moreover, Bailey followed the world systems theory of Emmanuel Wallerstein, arguing that Matewan was a “periphery” to the mining core of Logan and McDowell counties. As such, it was more primed for conflict than other more established areas.

whom had served in World War I—would not take up arms against their government. Their targets were only the coal bosses and Baldwin-Felts agents. Though it was the second largest armed uprising in American history, behind only the Civil War, the Battle of Blair Mountain was largely ignored by history books. In 2009, the site of the Battle of Blair Mountain was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Only months later, though, in 2010, this status was revoked and the Aracoma Coal Company, a subsidiary of Massey Energy, announced plans to begin surface mining operations at the site. Once a battleground between miners and coal companies, Blair Mountain now stands as a site of the resistance against mountaintop removal. In June 2011, a coalition of Appalachian environmental and social justice groups led a week-long march and rally at Blair Mountain to raise awareness both about mountaintop removal and the contemporary political resistance to unions.⁶⁶

Union-related violence continued in the coalfields through the depression of the 1930s. Harlan County, Kentucky, provided perhaps the most extreme example of unrest in this period. Local legal and political structures were almost entirely controlled by pro-industry officials. Private and public police forces worked to stifle most union activities in the county, and local mine operators openly defied national safety policies. At the same time, pro-union miners struck at strike breakers and other temporary workers imported by companies to supplant striking miners (called “scabs” in union terminology). On several occasions the U.S. National Guard entered Harlan County to prevent violence and ensure legal elections (though their efforts were not always successful). Social tensions mirrored the economic conditions at the time. All of Appalachia suffered greatly during the depression of the 1930s, but the coal industry was especially impacted. Due to the national depression and increased competition from Northern

⁶⁶ Information about the current status of Blair Mountain and the resistance against Aracoma’s strip mine is available from the Friends of Blair Mountain, www.friendsofblairmountain.org (accessed May 23, 2011).

and Western mines, Appalachian mines were forced to cut costs and lower production, which resulted in massive layoffs and the cancellation of worker benefits such as retirement and injury funds. Average yearly earnings for Harlan County miners dropped from \$1,235 in 1929 to \$749 in 1931 (Hevener 1978:10). Interpersonal struggles and tensions spilled into the streets of Harlan County's towns, and the county became a model for both pro- and anti-union national commentators who supported the struggle of the workers against the obvious oppression of capitalist forces or condemned the violence of "communist" union thugs.⁶⁷ The decades of the 1920s and 30s also revealed how dependent Appalachia had become upon the coal industry since the 1860s. Whereas, in the 19th century, many miners could turn to agriculture to support themselves in times of hardship, few miners of the early 20th century (with the widespread shift of land from local to corporate ownership) retained that option. Many left the region, seeking employment in the industrial Mid-West, but those who stayed became enmeshed in a difficult, long-term, and ambiguous relationship between Appalachians and coal companies.⁶⁸

The tensions of Depression-era Appalachia were expressed not only in violence and protest but through protest music. Aunt Molly Jackson and Florence Reece, who penned some of the most famous union protest songs, both rose to prominence in Kentucky at this time. Jackson (born Mary Magdalene Garland in Clay County, Kentucky, in 1880) was the child of a miner, midwife, and miner's widow. She worked closely with miners' families and union activists and her experiences helped her pen popular songs such as "I am a Union Woman" and

⁶⁷ Of course, the situation was not as simple as unions versus coal companies. Local politics played out differently from county to county and state by state. Not all miners belonged to the UMWA. Indeed, many opposed unions in efforts to preserve their own employment at the mines. Others, who resisted UMWA policies, formed new unions to compete with John L. Lewis' organization. Some, like the National Miners' Union, were expressly communist in their politics. These differences led to numerous conflicts among miners themselves. Good sources for further reference include Callahan 2009, Corbin 1981, and Hevener 1978.

⁶⁸ Good histories of Harlan County in the 1930s include Hevener's *Which Side are you On?* (1978) and Taylor's *Bloody Harlan* (1990). Another interesting collection of first-hand accounts is *Harlan Miners Speak*, prepared by miner-friendly Dreiser Committee in 1932.

“Poor Miner’s Farewell.” The success of these songs in Appalachia and beyond led Aunt Molly to New York City where she performed with emerging folk music stars and social activists Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. Following a raid of her house by anti-union agents in 1931, Florence Reece, the wife of a union organizer in Harlan County, composed one of the most famous protest songs, “Which Side are You on?,” to express the injustices faced by hers and other families in Harlan County. Like the songs of Aunt Molly Jackson, Reece’s music was spread to national audiences through popular musicians such as Guthrie and Seeger (Hevener 1978:60-67). One of the most important achievements of popular protest songs like those of Aunt Molly Jackson and Florence Reece was to “force the discourse of power away from economic and political abstractions into a commentary on the effects of exchanges on individual human bodies” (Callahan 2009:176). The songs made real, in an era before live broadcast television, the struggles of miners in a region that had been long ignored by the rest of the nation. Richard Callahan argued that the songs fit within local religious structures as well; they were “a cultural performance of a familiar religious idiom that transformed the struggles of everyday life into a ritualized structure that ideally progressed through crisis to healing and salvation” (Callahan 2009:177). In other words, part of the strength of protest songs derived from their connection to broader religious narratives in Appalachia. These religious and expressive themes were reinvigorated in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, when mountaintop removal protestors turned to the protest songs of Jackson, Reece, and others to express their opposition to a newer form of company exploitation.

In 1939, global events dramatically altered the trajectory of industrial development in Appalachia and the rest of the United States. Though the United States did not enter the war until 1941, the outbreak of World War II provided a new market for the slumping coal industry

and a new mission for many young, unemployed Appalachians. Along with economic changes, World War II brought technological changes to the coalfields. Easy access to military-grade explosives and a renewed national focus on industrial development made possible for the first time widespread strip mining throughout Appalachia. While the ambivalent relationship between miners, mountaineers, and the coal industry persisted, World War II marked the beginning of a substantial period of change in the Appalachian mining industry—one that made possible the future development of mountaintop removal mining.

Mechanization and the Emergence of Strip Mining: 1945 to 1977

The increased mechanization of mining occurred in a slow process over the course of several decades. British investors developed mechanized cutting machines to replace the picks and dynamite of miners in the late 1800s. These undercutting machines were soon followed by loading machines and conveyor systems to replace the shovels and mules of previous generations. In the 1930s, digging and loading machines were combined into new models of continuous miners (sometimes called “Joy loaders” after their inventor, Joseph Joy) (Dix 1988:44). Following the economic boom of World War I, large Appalachian coal companies quickly transitioned to primarily mechanized production. The total percentage of coal mined by cutting machines (as opposed to hand dug) in West Virginia rose from 45% in 1910 to 80% in 1930 (Trotter 1990:65). Only small, generally non-union mines retained hand diggers and loaders. Each machine required a human operator, but because machines could operate continuously, they replaced numerous hand loaders. By the late 1940s, ten men working digging and loading machines could well exceed the daily production of a crew of 86 hand-loading miners (Eller 2008:20).

Along with taking jobs, mining machines introduced new health and safety hazards in the mines. Digging coal by hand produced relatively little dust. Most dust was created from

blasting, though during blasts miners would move to other parts of the mine, distancing themselves from the blast and allowing some time for the dust to settle. In the case of Joy loaders and continuous miners, though, operators worked with the machines as they dug coal, exposing them to the higher levels of coal dust that they could previously avoid. Increased exposure to dust in the mines led to a widespread increase in cases of black lung (or pneumoconiosis). Harvey Boyatt of Stearns, Kentucky, for example, blamed his black lung disease on his time spent working a Joy loader (1984). Black lung disease was first officially noticed by a Scottish doctor in 1831, but mine companies and their doctors downplayed his findings and failed to connect the disease to exposure to coal dust. In the late 1950s, U.S. doctors re-examined miners' conditions, focusing on tissue damage, airway obstruction, and vascular problems. Despite mounting evidence for black lung, mine companies and the UMWA resisted recognizing black lung as a mining-created disease and blocked illness compensation claims through the 1960s. In 1968, UMWA delegates forced recognition of the issue of black lung disease at the national conference. Miners then formed the Black Lung Association and eventually won national legislation for black lung compensation and disability benefits (Judkins 1993; Seltzer 1985; Smith 1987).

The adoption of mechanization in Appalachian mines continued after World War II when economic conditions forced mine companies to lower production costs. Following the war, the United States began its massive transition away from coal and toward oil as a primary fuel source. John L. Lewis, still the head of the UMWA, called for changes in the North American mine industry to ensure the long-term competitiveness and viability of the industry in light of this massive cultural and economic restructuring. In 1950, the UMWA and the nation's largest coal producers agreed to the National Bituminous Coal Wage Agreement which effectively

avored large-scale producers in the Northern Appalachian fields (such as Pennsylvania) and promoted cost-saving measures including mechanization. As Ronald Eller explained,

Lewis recognized that the agreement would result in the displacement of thousands of coal miners, but he believed that high wages for actively employed miners and good benefits for retired workers were the long-term priorities for the union....Unfortunately, the Lewis strategy worked to the disadvantage of southern producers, whose smaller operations and distance from markets made them more susceptible to rising labor costs (2008:19).

While John L. Lewis had supported increased mechanization since the early 1920s, Appalachian miners, understandably, were not so ready to sacrifice their own wages for the benefit of the national industry (Dix 1988:161-164). Marvin Gullett, a Kentucky miner who began his career loading coal by hand and hauling it with the aid of a mule, remembered the significant changes following mechanization. Gullett recalled, "A lot of the old men...after the big mines quit the hand loading, they, they just lost heart....They used to say it took a strong back and a weak mind and number four redhead shovel to make a good miner" (1977). With the introduction of Joy loaders and continuous miners, that culture of work was lost.

While the UMWA's actions may have helped preserve union membership nationally, it marked the beginning of a massive decline of unionism in Appalachia. What numerous men and women had fought and died for only two or three decades earlier was rapidly forgotten. Nationally, UMWA membership declined from nearly 350,000 members in 1951 to slightly over 20,000 in 2000 (Burns 2007:26). While some of this decline mirrored the general reduction of mining jobs due to mechanization, it derived in large part as well from the failure of the UMWA to hold members in spite of increasingly anti-union policies of coal industries and the national government. In the 1980s, the leader of anti-unionism was E. Morgan Massey, the president of A.T. Massey Coal Group (later to become Massey Energy Company). Massey pioneered the technique of creating subsidiary companies for nearly every active mine, the so-called "Massey

Doctrine” (Shnayerson 2008:32). The company then required miners to negotiate separate contracts with each subsidiary, a daunting task that often pitted miners from different subsidiaries against each other. Don Blankenship, who would rise to lead Massey Energy in the 1990s and become one of the most controversial proponents of mountaintop removal, emerged as a company leader during the union-breaking era of the 1980s. Following Massey’s efforts, the Pittston Coal Company likewise openly defied former union agreements. In 1989 and 1990 a massive strike broke out throughout Appalachia and other mining states against Pittston’s wage-reducing activities (Couto 1993:172-174).⁶⁹ Though they gained international recognition, the miners ultimately failed and “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 non-union mines proliferated” (Eller 2008:226). By removing unions as effective negotiation structures, a major source for the expression of dissent among miners was lost, and increasingly miners turned to direct action to air their grievances.

Changes in technology above ground followed changes below ground. While surface mining had existed long before the 20th century (indeed, surface mining was one of the earliest methods of mining coal)⁷⁰, the method saw increased use in the Midwestern coal fields of Indiana, Illinois, and Western Kentucky in the 1930s and 40s, and later Appalachia. Following the policy changes of the UMWA and the technological advances of post-World War II industry surface mining methods improved in efficiency and gained greater acceptance among cost-conscious mining companies. After World War II, strip mining in Central Appalachia

⁶⁹ See also Sessions and Ansley 1993 for primary accounts from the Pittston strike.

⁷⁰ People often found coal seams exposed along river beds, and then with draft animals and hand tools, exposed the shallow seam to access the coal. One of the first references to coal in the United States occurred in 1783 near Richmond, Virginia, when residents discovered a coal seam beneath an upturned tree (Montrie 2003:17-18).

dramatically increased, instituting many of the economic and policy changes that would eventually lead to mountaintop removal. This period also witnessed the emergence of widespread grassroots activism against unregulated surface mining. Borrowing from protest traditions established during the days of union struggles, many locals in Kentucky and West Virginia resisted the entrance of strip mine operations onto their lands. The tactics and perspectives deployed by these local activists directly impacted later anti-mountaintop removal activists.

Large-scale strip mining began in the Western Kentucky and Northern West Virginia coal field in the 1920s and 30s, where the flat land allowed for easy access to coal seams by large earth-moving machines (see Figure 4-1).⁷¹ Because of the terrain differences, strip mining techniques moved slowly into Eastern Kentucky and Southern West Virginia, the region most known for mountaintop removal today (Burns 2007:12-13). By 1947, fully 74% of Kentucky's 10.5 million tons of stripped coal came from Hopkins and Muhlenberg counties, both located in the western coal field (Legislative Research Commission 1949:v). Within a few decades, however, more major strip mines developed in the East. Early strip mines in Appalachia were generally small, legally questionable operations. Just a few workers with bulldozers and a few tons of explosives could reach coal seams quickly, remove as much coal as possible, and move on, abandoning the mine site without any attempts at reclamation within a matter of weeks. Initially, strip miners practiced contour and auger mining. This entailed cutting a level platform along the contour of a mountain—much like grading a hill for a road. Using large auger

⁷¹ Throughout this dissertation I am using “strip mining” and “surface mining” interchangeably, though technically “surface mine” is the more inclusive term. There are several different forms of “surface mining,” including auger mining, open pit mining, and area mining, differing in the ways they approach the terrain and the tools used. As defined by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, a surface mine is “a coal mine that is usually within a few hundred feet of the surface. Earth and rock above or around the coal (overburden) is removed to expose the coalbed, which is then mined with surface excavation equipment such as draglines, power shovels, bulldozers, loaders, and augers. Surface mines include, area, contour, open-pit, strip, or auger mine” (EIA 2009:78).

machines (which worked like a giant screw), miners then bored directly into the side of the hill, removing the coal and other material within. This practice produced marketable coal much more quickly than older deep mine methods, but it was also highly wasteful, as augers left columns of un-drilled coal to preserve the structural integrity of the mine. When the miners had removed as much coal as possible, they simply left the mine, leaving a high percentage of the coal in the hill and un-collectible. For several decades following World War II, this method generally defined strip mining in Appalachia. Because strip mining was much cheaper than deep mining, strip mine operations began winning large contracts, thus increasing the practice and further damaging older deep mine companies. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), in the mid-20th century the greatest supplier of electricity to Appalachian states and thus able to control energy prices in the region, forced coal costs down by supporting unregulated strip mines (Caudill 1973:69). These economic incentives led to the explosion of strip mining through the remainder of the century.

The Stirrings of Resistance: Grassroots Opposition to Surface Mining and the Phases of Appalachian Environmentalism

While contour and auger mining wasted great amounts of coal and employed significantly fewer workers, it was the social and environmental costs that led to the first incidents of local resistance. Many of the strip miners exploited broad for deed rights to open their mines. In numerous instances, miners and deed-holders simply drove onto properties and began clearing trees and grading land without warning local residents. When locals complained, mine officials simply produced broad form deeds (issued sixty to eighty years before) allocating the right to access all mineral wealth on the property by any means necessary. Beyond the shocking methods of acquiring the land, in the 1940s and 1950s there were essentially no regulations on strip mining in Appalachian counties. The few local mandates that existed were generally ignored by fly by-night operators. Open strip mines on mountainous terrain led to dramatically

increased erosion and flooding, often inundating farmland with mud and damaging houses. Residents who lost productive land, forests, and experienced damage to their homes found no avenues for reparation, and frustrations mounted. The 21st century resistance movement to mountaintop removal can be seen as the third stage of the historical development of surface mining activism in Appalachia. The first began in the 1960s, as locals took direct action against strip mine companies.

The First Phase: Grassroots Resistance to Surface Mining, 1965 to 1977

Historian Chad Montrie noted that “the movement to abolish surface coal mining had its deepest roots in eastern Kentucky” (Montrie 2003:61). Despite grassroots resistance, though, Kentucky was among the slowest of the coal states to institute surface mining regulations. In 1948 a general proposal to develop strip mine regulations was considered but rejected by Kentucky legislators. In the following years, Ohio and Pennsylvania passed strip mine regulations, but such policies were slow to reach Central Appalachia. By the 1960s, widespread frustration at strip miners and the lack of government oversight led to the emergence of grassroots resistance movements.⁷² In 1965, the Caperton Coal and Kentucky Oak Mining Companies began clearing trees on private land for a future mine site. Dan Gibson, an elderly resident whose stepson owned property abutting the mine, approached the workers with a rifle. Gibson did not want the bulldozers to cross his stepson’s property and accused the miners of damaging fences and other structures. A police standoff ensued, ending only when Gibson was promised that the machines would not enter his relative’s property. Having received the promise, Gibson turned himself over the authorities but stayed only briefly in jail. The next morning, Gibson returned to defend his property line along with other locals, “nearly all of them

⁷² See Montrie 2003 for a detailed account of the many bills related to strip mine regulation proposed in Appalachian states from the 1940s to 1970s.

elderly, some of them women, and a number of them armed” (Montrie:73), who supported his actions against strip miners. Facing this larger group, the mining companies agreed to abandon the project (Montrie 2003:72-73). In a 1971 hearing on strip mining, Gibson explained his actions to Kentucky legislators. He said, “they [the strip miners] came in there and said we didn’t own nothing, but I told them different. They did not come back and bother me anymore. They put me in jail forty-five minutes. I had no trouble and paid two dollars. I would do it again if they bother me. If we can’t get help from the General Assembly in Frankfort, Kentucky, we are going to stop it—that’s it” (Anne and Harry Caudill Collection, Box 22, Folder 4). Gibson affirmed that, if state legislators would not enforce stripe mine regulations, the residents of Appalachia would see to it instead.

Gibson became a regional hero for his actions, and with a small band of relatives, he formed a support group that aided families whose land was threatened by mining incursions. As Gurney Norman’s ballad concluded, “Dan’s fighting them now, with a thousand others/ Who in this war are all blood-brothers,/ Bound to defend each other’s land/ From the ruin of the greedy strip-mine band” (Norman 2005:152). In 1966, an Eastern Kentucky widow named Ollie Combs called upon Gibson to protect her land from mine company bulldozers. Another short standoff ensued that ended only when the 61-year-old Combs was arrested for refusing to move from in front of a bulldozer on Thanksgiving Day. A photograph of Combs eating her Thanksgiving meal in a jail cell inspired national support for the poor woman who was unjustly removed from her home. The actions of Gibson and Combs forced the issue of local resistance to surface mining into state media and greatly increased sympathy around the region for a surface mining ban (Caudill 1973:78-80; Montrie 2003:79). As public debate over strip mining intensified, the excesses of mine companies became more widely known outside of Appalachia. Newspaper

readers throughout the region became more and more aware of the numerous home-destroying floods, deemed “acts of God” by insurance agencies, but clearly tied to nearby stripping operations. Individual stories of suffering proliferated. In one especially heartbreaking account during 1966 testimonies on strip mine regulations, Edna Ritchie of Sassafras Hollow, Kentucky, recounted watching her dead child’s coffin pushed over a mountain by strip miners who showed no regard for her family cemetery (Robert D. Bell Collection, 1927-1990, Box 4, Folder 3). More Gibson-like standoffs between residents and strip mine companies continued through the 1960s. In June 1967, Jink Ray and a small group of relatives resisted Puritan Coal Company bulldozers at his home in Island Creek, Kentucky. The Puritan workers brought a broad form deed to Ray’s land, but Ray refused to allow them to enter his property. The standoff lasted until October, when Puritan Coal simply gave up their claim (Morris 1967).

Beyond local activists like Dan Gibson and “Widow” Combs, other influential leaders of the inchoate Appalachian environmental and social justice movement emerged in the 1960s. One such figure was Joe Begley, a shopkeeper and sheriff’s deputy from Floyd County, Kentucky. Begley, who Wendell Berry called “a great patriot and an indomitable foe of strip mining,” was a long-time supporter of mountaineers and opponent of coal companies, which he saw as exploiting his people and land (Berry 2005:160). In one infamous incident, Begley held a coal train at gunpoint and demanded that the engineers unload enough coal to help the poor people of Blackey survive a particularly harsh winter (Begley and Bates 1998). For Begley, the people of Blackey had already paid for the coal through their years of suffering. Jeff Chapman-Crane, a Kentucky artist and friend of Begley’s, confirmed this story and added, “someone asked him afterwards, they said, ‘Joe, would you really have shot any of those people,’ and he said, ‘well, they thought I would.’ He never said yes or no. I mean, that was the kind of person he

was; he just did what needed to be done” (Chapman-Crane 2010). For outside companies to gain great wealth off of the suffering of Appalachians, Begley argued, was morally wrong. In an interview in the year 1999, Begley explained, “people here live on top of a gold mine, and they’re starving to death. They live on top of a coal mine, and they’re freezing to death” (1999).

In 1965, while working in West Virginia, Begley encountered his first strip mine and immediately felt that the practice was wrong and exploitative of Appalachian people. In 1966 Begley moved to Blackey, Kentucky, in Letcher County, where he operated a general store and continued his involvement with anti-strip mining and poverty work. Through the remainder of his life, Begley emphasized the importance of grassroots activism and the need for impacted communities to stand together against exploitation. In a 1987 interview, for example, Begley reflected on the positive changes brought by activism of the 1960s and 70s, saying “this has all come through a handful of goddamned radical people that get things done. The pillars in the community, they don’t get anything done” (1987). In a later interview, he continued to express his community emphasis: “if anything’s going to be done, it’s going to be done by the people in the community” (Begley and Bates 1998). Begley was inspired in his work largely by Dan Gibson, who once explained to him, “It’s no disgrace to go to jail for a good reason, for a good cause” (Begley 1999). Joe Begley inspired an entire generation of Kentucky activists and provided a model for resistance that others would follow. As Jeff Chapman-Crane explained, “he realized the most powerful tool for the activist was simply the spoken word. He said, you don’t have to be eloquent, you don’t have to have this huge vocabulary, you just have to tell the truth out loud, there’s power in that....I think that’s a message for all of us—there’s power in the truth being told” (Chapman-Crane 2010).

Joe Begley has been inspirational for many Kentucky activists, but perhaps the most influential advocate for Appalachian people and nature in the 1960s was the lawyer, politician, and writer Harry Caudill. As one journalist noted, Caudill was “a sort of Kentucky-style combination of John Muir, Mark Twain, and Don Quixote who does battle in his own particular way, on his own terms, and is hands down the most eloquent and effective voice for conservation in all Appalachia” (McCullough 1969:104). Caudill was the direct descendent of one of the first white homesteaders in Letcher County, Kentucky, who settled in the area in 1792. Beginning in 1948, Caudill practiced law in Whitesburg, Kentucky, where he dealt with many of the poorest local families (Caudill 2001 [1963]). These experiences inspired Caudill to write his highly influential *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* in 1963. In the work, Caudill charted the history of Appalachia and argued that contemporary poverty was the result of colonial exploitation by outside economic interests, such as the coal companies. Though controversial among scholars for its lack of citation (see Fisher 1984), *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* was widely read and very influential for social activists in the region. For Caudill, the people and land of Appalachia were intimately tied together. As fellow Kentucky author Wendell Berry explained,

Harry’s interest in conservation really begins with people. He doesn’t think of conservation, or any issue, as an abstraction, the way so many do. He sees his country as being destroyed every day and he sees what that does to human beings. The other thing about Harry, maybe the most important thing, is that he lives with the evil he is fighting, and that makes him a rather unique kind of crusader. He doesn’t have to read about environmental troubles in the newspapers, he just looks up at the hillsides (quoted in McCullough 1969:98).

Journalist David McCullough likewise wrote about Caudill, “he is not simply dedicated to saving scenery. For him the scenic wonders, the ecology, the people and their stories, are all part of the land and in total represent a heritage only a vandal would degrade or destroy” (1969:104). Like Joe Begley, Caudill argued through his writing and public activism that economic,

environmental, cultural, and religious ideas were intimately intertwined. Saving both the land and the people were equivalent goals. This social emphasis, linking poverty with environmental destruction, continued into the anti-mountaintop removal movement.

Much like Joe Begley, Caudill first witnessed strip mining in Appalachia upon returning from service in World War II. Working as a lawyer in mountainous Letcher County, Kentucky, Caudill received many accounts from other residents of the damages caused by unregulated strip miners. For example, H.D. Caudill, from Carcassonne, Kentucky, wrote on October 8, 1960, “those coal auger mine fellows are coming my way and sure don’t want to have my home place destroyed, yet I don’t have an awful lot of money to spend to protect myself by law. In this old home I was born and raised and for that reason there is no place on earth so dear to me, our family cemetery is also here, and place where my body will rest with the loved ones who have gone on before until the second coming of our Lord” (Anne and Harry Caudill Collection, Box 19, Folder 1). Such accounts moved Caudill to take a public stand on strip mine regulations. He was elected to the Kentucky state legislature and continued to publish books related to poverty and environmental destruction in Appalachia. In *My Land is Dying* (1973), Caudill presented stories and images of the devastation caused by strip mining in Kentucky, and with *Theirs be the Power* (1983), Caudill laid most of the blame for Appalachia’s poverty on the efforts of 19th and 20th century land barons.

Caudill spoke directly about his feelings on strip mining and poverty in Appalachia—a characteristic that both won him respect among activists and scorn among businessmen and public officials—and always pointed blame directly. In a speech delivered to the Annual Convention of Tennessee Soil and Water Conservation Districts in 1967, Caudill said bluntly, “mighty firms—rich powerful, arrogant, swollen with self conceit and immense profits—have to

be taught by little people like you and me that they are no longer free to go on murdering the land. It is our land they are destroying. It is our posterity they are robbing” (Anne and Harry Caudill Collection, Box 20, Folder 3, p. 16). While coal barons and coal-friendly politicians received much of Caudill’s attention, some of his harshest critiques were directed at the Tennessee Valley Authority, the largest purchaser of strip-mined coal in the 1960s and 70s.⁷³ After criticizing the TVA’s statements about their strip mine reclamation practices, director Frank E. Smith decided to write Caudill directly. In a letter dated October 1, 1970, Smith wrote to Caudill, “you are drowning in your own irresponsible rhetoric....I think the first standard of responsibility is to speak the truth, and you don’t pass that test.” Rather than apologize, though, Caudill responded, in a letter dated October 14, “on the morrow we will visit Kentucky Oak Mining Company and its lands reclaimed per TVA guidelines. There we will observe all. If we find bees buzzing amid clover and sweet pea, new forests springing up on smoothly graded and stable spoil banks, the land ungullied and in repose, the streams trickling through it all pure and unsullied—then and there I will apologize to you and your high office.” To this, Smith simply responded, “there is no point in continuing a correspondence as long as you are not willing to do so on a rational basis” (all letters in Anne and Harry Caudill Collection, Box 21, Folder 2). Clearly, Caudill’s public position on strip mining and those most responsible for its perpetuation burned as many bridges as it built. Such rhetorical tactics on Caudill’s part led one of his harshest academic critics, Steve Fisher, to write, “his crusade must be judged in terms of how much it empowers people; does it tell us what we need to know to build the world we want to

⁷³ The Tennessee Valley Authority was initiated by Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. Originally, the organization was meant to provide jobs through the impoverished south, build dams to help agriculture and flood control, and provide hydroelectric power to the more remote areas of the south. Later, in the 1950s, the TVA became a general provider of coal-based electricity to the region, as well. As the largest local power producer, the TVA thus exerted a great amount of influence over regional coal prices and promoted cost-saving measures such as strip mining (Caudill 2001 [1963]:318-321; Morgan 1974).

live in, or does it merely satiate our search for villains?” (1984:273). Though Fisher’s point is good—as the above correspondence shows, fiery rhetoric can impede constructive communication between disagreeing parties—Caudill’s legacy remains much more complex than Fisher acknowledged, and it extends beyond his literary career.⁷⁴ Caudill, Begley, Dan Gibson, “Widow” Combs, and many others operated from a particular Appalachian cultural tradition of speaking directly to the agents most likely to blame for personal wrongs. Much like the union activists decades before, Caudill and others worked from a fiercely independent cultural background, where “straight talk” was valued over polite deference to authority. This tradition can still be clearly seen in the speech of modern activists such as Larry Gibson, Maria Gunnoe, and Judy Bonds.

Despite the criticism of academics and his political opponents, Caudill insisted, most likely with tongue in cheek, “I’m just a poor mountain lawyer ... trying to scratch out a living and stay out of trouble” (Pearce 1976:11). Though he was instrumental in the eventual passage of surface mine regulations and his work inspired many to continue the struggles against Appalachian poverty and coal company excesses, contrary to Fisher’s fears, Caudill preserved his humility about his own role in the anti-strip mining movement. He remained an active public figure, author, and teacher until his death. Suffering from Parkinson’s disease, Caudill took his own life in 1990 (Smith 1991).⁷⁵ It was an inglorious end to the man credited by many as popularizing the Appalachian environmental justice movement, but also perhaps fitting for a man who fought until the end for what he considered to be best.

⁷⁴ Dwight Billings provided an excellent summary of the scholarly criticisms of Caudill’s work and Caudill’s connection to the continuation of Appalachian stereotypes in his “Introduction” to *Back Talk from Appalachia* (1999).

⁷⁵ See also his obituary in the *New York Times* from December 1, 1990. Available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/01/obituaries/harry-m-caudill-68-who-told-of-appalachian-poverty.html> (accessed May 23, 2011).

While not all Appalachians took strong activist stances against strip mining, like Caudill, Begley, and others, oral histories reveal that opposition to strip mining and support of regulations were common among locals, though local opinions also retained ambivalence about the industry. As Callahan (2009) identified, mountaineers greatly valued the skilled work of miners and supported the industry despite continued grievances. Strip mining was defined by many as an entirely different type of work, outside of the spiritual value of hand loading and deep mining. For Joe Begley, strip mining and coal mining were clearly two different occupations. In one interview, Begley stated, “strippers is not coal people, they’re construction—highway people” (1987). Because it entailed making profit off of the suffering of local communities, Begley said, “strip mining is an indecent way to make a living” (1994). Though he sharply critiqued strip mining, Begley was not opposed to deep miners and the small scale, deep mining industry. He said, “I’m for the industry. I’m for the deep mining of coal. That’s an honest way to make a living; I know it’s extremely violent, it’s dangerous, but it’s not dirty, it’s not abusing anybody. It’s jobs for people” (Begley 1987). For Begley, like numerous mountaineers before, deep mining was honest, necessary work. Despite its problems, it was a critical part of Appalachian cultural history, and Begley, on one of the most vocal opponents of strip mining, did not want to see it end. Marvin Gullett, a retired miner from Kentucky, likewise opposed strip mining, but hoped to preserve the deep mining industry, saying, “if we use the coal in the right way, there’s still always be work for the miners. We’d always have the, the coal mine culture” (1977). For Gullett and Begley, deep mining remained an honorable tradition precisely for its connection to deeply held cultural values. This attitude—that strip mining presents only an unnecessary excess of the mining industry; if done differently, the industry could be sustainable—persists among some anti-mountaintop removal activists today. It is particularly important to note as many of

the industry representatives who seek to vilify activists often present the issue as a clear dichotomy between those who support the coal industry and those who seek its end. The issue has always been much more complicated.

Contributing to local nostalgia for older deep mining days was the continued movement by the UMWA away from the Appalachian coal fields and miners. By the 1960s, the locus of American coal mining was beginning its shift toward the western coal fields of Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana—a region that did not have the lengthy unionization history of Appalachia.⁷⁶ Furthermore, due to the relative lack of population in western regions and interest in cost-saving measures by investors, much of western mining was surface mining. Finally, many of the western mines were owned and operated by large oil and mineral companies, not the East Coast coal companies of the past who had more experience dealing with the UMWA (Seltzer 1985:126). To preserve membership, and despite the opinions of many Appalachian deep miners, the UMWA moved toward accepting strip miners. In 1971, UMWA president Tony Boyle stated to the *Wall Street Journal*, “the UMWA views strip mining as vital to the national welfare, but it must be rigidly regulated” (Anne and Harry Caudill Collection, Box 22, Folder 1). As the amount of coal produced by strip mining increased through the 1970s and 80s and general mine employment declined, the UMWA grew less ambivalent about its support of the strip mining industry. Chad Montrie explained, “at least for the leadership of the UMW, the health of the strip coal industry and the preservation of strip miners’ jobs took precedence over protection of deep miners jobs and the environment” (Montrie 2003:58-59).

Along with influential individual actions to preserve property, Appalachians began organizing through the 1960s to specifically address the social and environmental damages of the

⁷⁶ Indeed, Wyoming now produces more coal than any other state.

mining industry, and by 1977, the first wave of Appalachian grassroots environmental groups forms. Though few would last into the 1980s, these new groups lobbied local politicians for surface mine reform and formed the basis out of which many later environmental and social justice groups would form.

In 1965, shortly after Dan Gibson's standoff, citizens of Eastern Kentucky formed the Appalachian Group to Save the Land and People (AGSLP). AGSLP was composed mainly of poor Eastern Kentucky residents, including Dan Gibson and Ollie Combs. In one of the first strikes against Kentucky strip mine companies, the group gathered \$3,000 to file suit against a large surface mining firm. In *Martin v. Kentucky Oak Mining Co.*, the AGSLP and its representation argued against the legality of broad form deeds which enabled mining companies to purchase mineral rights to private property lands without buying the land itself. In 1967, a Kentucky Circuit Court ruled that the mineral contracts used by Kentucky Oak Mining Co. were legal, but that firms owed compensation for damages directly related to mining. This decision was reversed in the Kentucky Court of Appeals in 1968, and mining companies were free to continue mining on private land without compensating the owners (Caudill 1973:81-84; Montrie 2003:83-84).

Beyond litigation, the newly formed AGSLP petitioned Kentucky's governor, Edward Breathitt, for a ban on surface mining. Breathitt agreed to consider the subject and in 1966 proposed a bill to restrict surface mining and compensate damages suffered by Kentucky residents. These discussions concerning strip mine legislation brought diverse organizations and interest groups together on the same issue for the first time. Coalitions formed between regional anti-poverty workers such as the Appalachian Volunteers and national labor and environmental groups, and this provided a model for future cooperation between organizations as debates over

strip mining continued (Kiffmeyer 2008:173-175). AGSLP promoted the ban on surface mining to preserve locals' property rights against coal industry incursions. The Southern Labor Union, a small union of local miners, supported the measure because of the job losses and decreases in coal prices caused by surface mining. The Kentucky League of Sportsmen supported Breathitt's bill because of the damages caused by surface mining to hunting grounds and rivers. The Kentucky Civil Liberties Union also supported the bill, arguing that surface mining operations "violate the basic rights of the property owners and the owners of adjoining properties" (quoted in Montrie 2003:81). The proposed bill led to public debate on the issue of strip mining, but despite passionate testimony on the damages caused by surface mining, the measure failed in the Kentucky Senate. Instead, the Senate passed a weakened bill that, while not banning surface mining, allowed for future litigation and possible compensation for damages directly caused by surface mining (Montrie 2003:74-84).

Between 1966 and 1972, individual incidents of damage to mine property increased. Expensive mining equipment was damaged and machinery operators reported gunfire in their vicinities. In 1967, unidentified saboteurs destroyed \$300,000 worth of mining equipment at a Tarheels Coal mine site in Kentucky, and similar actions led to \$750,000 worth of damage at a strip mine in Leslie County, Kentucky. In both instances, mining equipment was destroyed with the company's own explosives (Montrie 2003:1; Robert D. Bell Collection, 1927-1990, Box 5, Folder 6). Because mine officials blamed newly formed environmental groups for the damages, these acts generated a congressional backlash against AGSLP and Breathitt, who lost his gubernatorial campaign in 1967 (Montrie 2003:87-88). In 1972, representatives from many national environmental protection groups, such as the Sierra Club, the Izaak Walton League, and the Audubon Society, along with local groups and individuals such as AGSLP, met to discuss the

future of surface mining resistance in Kentucky. Several individuals present at this meeting, many with organizational experience in national groups, decided to form Save Our Kentucky to continue the work of AGSLP and promote surface mining regulations. Some members of Save Our Kentucky inaugurated the new organization by occupying a strip mine in Knott County. They stopped mine operations for fifteen hours, but eventually succumbed to police and miner harassment. While the occupiers provided a good media event, mining in Knott County continued immediately after their arrests (Montrie 2003:101-105).

Resistance to surface mining also spread through West Virginia and Tennessee. The grassroots group Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM), formed in Eastern Tennessee in 1972, focused on rejecting mining intrusions onto family lands and protecting traditional jobs from new corporate cost-cutting techniques. Like AGSLP and Save Our Kentucky, SOCM did not advocate an end to mining, just a return to a traditional lifestyle that was threatened by new technologies. In 1976, SOCM successfully litigated against AMAX, Inc., a large mining firm that intended to open large surface mining operations in Eastern Tennessee. In 2008, the board of SOCM voted to change the organizations' name to Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment in order to better reflect their broadening social focus. SOCM remained a thriving grassroots organization into the 21st century, working on several campaigns, including protecting areas of Tennessee from surface mining (Allen 1993; SOCM 2011). In West Virginia, local groups such as the Citizens' Task Force on Surface Mining and Citizens to Abolish Strip Mining worked with other older organized groups, such as those working on miners' rights and health, to propose state-wide bans on surface mining in the 1970s. Like Breathitt in Kentucky, West Virginia's Governor John D. Rockefeller initially supported the anti-surface mining interests. Although no official ban on surface mining was passed, West Virginia legislators

approved a two-year moratorium on surface coal mining in half of the state's counties in 1971 to study its impacts. Many of the included counties did not have active surface mines, however, and Rockefeller lost his bid for re-election in 1972 (Montrie 2003:107-126).

The push for strip mining reform made modest advances through the 1960s, and as calls for reform increased and the waste associated with mines grew, local politicians were forced to address the issue. Two problematic forms of mine waste were slurry (the liquid byproduct of washing coal to remove impurities and prepare the mineral for markets) and slag (various non-coal products that sit near coal deposits in the ground). As the size and number of mines grew, companies were faced with new challenges in disposing of slag and slurry. The most common approach was to put the waste into storage reservoirs, often created by pushing other mine waste into a make-shift dam with little internal support. One such impoundment was owned by Pittston Coal Company in Logan County, West Virginia. In the winter of 1971-72, seasonal rains and snow had filled the Pittston impoundment nearly to its limit, and on the morning of February 26, the earthen dam collapsed. Within minutes, 132 million gallons of sludge poured into the narrow Buffalo Creek valley, leveling forests, engulfing communities while tearing houses from their foundations (leaving over 4,000 individuals without homes) and killing 125 people (Burns 2007:135-136; Erikson 1976:27-28).⁷⁷ To many, the devastation of Buffalo Creek revealed the desperate need for surface mine regulations. Like other coal-related disasters, however, the flood was understood by mine safety officials as a weather-related act of God, not related to slurry impoundment safety. Consequently, reform was slow even following such a disaster.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ The best history and analysis of the Buffalo Creek flood is Kai Erikson's *Everything in Its Path* (1976). In his work, Erikson provided a very detailed analysis of the social and environmental devastation wrought by the flood.

⁷⁸ Deadly and damaging floods and slurry spills have continued across the coal fields. For example, in 2000 a Massey Energy slurry impoundment leaked 300 million gallons of slurry into the Tug Fork River in Martin County, Kentucky (Eller 2008:250). In 2008, 1.1 billion gallons of coal ash slurry from a TVA coal processing plant in Roane County, Tennessee (See "TVA Ash Disaster," Appalachian Voices, <http://ilovemountains.org/tva-spill/>). In

With only modest success at the regional level through the 1960s, Appalachian activists and pro-regulation politicians moved to the national level to seek surface mining reform. Generally, the 1970s was a busy decade for U.S. environmental policy. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), became law on January 1, 1970. Along with generally setting the stage for national environmental protection policy, NEPA required environmental impact statements (EISs) on the potential environmental costs and benefits of any federally approved environmental change. Shortly after approving NEPA, Nixon also extended the Clean Air Act, giving the national government greater authority over air quality issues, and the Environmental Protection Agency began operating at the end of the year. National policies reflected growing public interest in environmental protection—1970 also witnessed the first organized Earth Day. In 1972, congress approved the Federal Water Pollution Control Amendments, a law which following significant amendments in 1977 became known as the Clean Water Act (Gottlieb 2005:139, 175-180). Each of these early policies influenced surface mine practices, including the requirement for EISs and regulations on water quality maintenance (particularly given the damages caused by slurry impoundments).⁷⁹ Still, activists and politicians pushed for specific surface mine regulations.

In 1977, Appalachian opponents to surface mining finally received their national policy. Though similar bills had been previously vetoed by Presidents Nixon and Ford, President Jimmy Carter finally signed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) into law.

each of these incidents, official government channels masked public dangers and offered only minor penalties to Massey and the TVA (see Eller 2008:251; House and Howard 2009:181-184; <http://www.unitedmountaindefense.org/>).

⁷⁹ President George W. Bush made two controversial changes to the Clean Water Act, limiting its ability to govern surface mining damages. In 2002, Congress and the President amended Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, redefining “fill material” to include “rock, sand, clay, plastics, construction debris, wood chips [and] overburden from mining”. In 2004, the administration reduced the buffer zone required between streams and surface mining. These changes favored surface mine operators, allowing them to operate closer to open water sources (Warrick 2004).

Reflecting decades of policy debates, SMCRA was intended to be the overarching regulatory mechanism for all surface mining in the United States. The law established the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement to oversee elements of surface mining and recovery. In an attempt to address one of the major concerns of surface mine opponents, the law included the mandate for mining companies to “restore the land affected to a condition capable of supporting the uses which it was capable of supporting prior to any mining” (SMCRA 1977:76).⁸⁰

Previously, surface mine companies in Appalachia often left the mines open after the coal was recovered, leaving massive scars in the landscape, exposing toxins such as mine spoil to the environment, and dramatically increasing erosion. The coal industry balked at restoration requirements, arguing that the cost of restoration would effectively drive the Appalachian coal industry out of business, despite studies that concluded that “federal reclamation legislation...is unlikely to be a major disruptive influence in the coal industry, or a substantial impediment to the long-run national goal of increased utilization of coal” (Randall et al. 1978:472). The reclamation clause meant companies had to restore the land to a usable, relatively stable state (see Figures 4-4 to 4-8). In mountainous areas such as Appalachia, this meant restoring the “approximate original contour” (SMCRA 1977:76). While the approximate original contour (AOC) clause was intended to remediate erosion and ensure highwalls and slag hills would not be left after mining, critics pointed to the ambiguity of the term. Further complicating the perhaps well-intentioned restoration mandate, lawmakers allowed some exceptions to the AOC requirement, including “in cases where an industrial, commercial, agricultural, residential or public facility (including recreational facilities) use is proposed [f]or the postmining use of the

⁸⁰ The copy of SMCRA cited here is a PDF reproduction of the law, retrieved from the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement website. Page numbers refer to this specific PDF copy, not necessarily the law as entered into the public record.

affected land” (SMCRA 1977:83). In other words, mine companies could avoid restoring the landscape if they could offer proof of intention to develop the area. While some viewed this provision as encouraging economic development in the struggling coalfields, opponents viewed it as a giveaway to mine companies, effectively negating the mandate for restoration.

The Second Phase: Organized Activism and the Emergence of Mountaintop Removal, 1977 to 2004

While SMCRA was groundbreaking, providing a national standard for surface mine regulation, many local opponents of surface mining were very disappointed by the final product. Montrie concluded, “by most measures ... the movement in Kentucky was not very successful” (2003:107). Local activists such as Joe Begley, Harry Caudill, and others, while they generally supported the continuation of deep mining, sought an entire ban of strip mining in Appalachia, not simply regulation. To them, instituting national regulatory standards would effectively legitimate the practice of surface mining, ensuring it would continue into the future. Where some local activists and politicians thought SMCRA ceded too much to coal companies, others, especially national environmental lobby groups who tended to make compromises on local issues in favor of broader national policies, argued that regulation was a sufficient goal. Chad Montrie argued that lobbyists for national groups like the Sierra Club, Izaak Walton League, and Wilderness Society undermined regional efforts and “played traditional beltway politics, engaging in compromise long before any sort of decline in the movement required it” (Montrie 2003:204). The debates around SMCRA revealed important dynamics between local and national activists and policymakers. Opponents were not unified in a single vision on the future of coal and mining in Appalachia—some called for the complete phase out of coal mining in the region, others believed deep mining could continue though surface mining should be banned. Still others sought only tighter regulations on surface mining, arguing that, if the law were

followed, the negative environmental and social impacts of the practice would be sufficiently minimized. Ultimately, in 1977, none of these three positions won the day. Montrie noted, “the law has proven to be too reliant on oversight by citizens (who cannot match coal operators’ resources and access to lawmakers), too lenient to prevent or rectify various sorts of environmental destruction, and too complex to be applied consistently and effectively” (2003:181-182). While SMCRA changed the way surface mining unfolded in Appalachia and elsewhere, it did nothing to limit the practice’s growth, and following 1977, the nation witnessed a gradual increase in surface mine operations.

With SMCRA passed, groups such as AGSLP and Save Our Kentucky gradually disbanded as their members moved to other important issues or to focus on other measures for challenging strip mining. Many of the members of Kentucky environmental groups formed Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) in 1981. As a “citizen social justice group,” KFTC emphasized all areas related to poverty, property rights, education reform, and environmental policy (Szakos 1993:102). Focusing on grassroots, democratic community organizing, KFTC sought to empower Appalachians to work toward their local goals. Through local victories, more widespread changes could occur. By 1988, KFTC and others successfully challenged the legality of broad form deeds in Kentucky. Surface mine companies could no longer invoke broad form deed rights without the express permission of the current landowner. Through the early 1990s, KFTC successfully changed local tax structures that placed much of the economic burden on residents, rather than the companies that profited from coal extraction. While these measures did not stop surface mining in Kentucky, KFTC’s work helped remediate some of the most severe public economic burdens of the practice (Schwab 1994: 290-299; Szakos 1993).

In West Virginia, new organizations also formed as surface mining and other coal-related environmental problems proliferated through the 1980s. Originally formed in 1965, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy worked on environmental conservation throughout the state. The group became involved in strip mining in the 1960s during the local regulation debates that eventually led to SMCRA. Following the passage of SMCRA, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy continued its work remediating environmental problems associated with surface mining.⁸¹ Ten years after the passage of SMCRA, in 1987, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OHVEC) was formed in Huntington, West Virginia, in opposition to a hazardous waste incinerator nearby in Ohio (Burns 2007:17). Following SMCRA's first decade, as the coal industry continued to change (with smaller, independent mines purchased by larger corporations such as Peabody, Massey, and Arch) and demands for cheap, local energy grew, surface mining continued to develop throughout Appalachia. In the 1980s and early 1990s, larger coal companies with sufficient investment capital turned increasingly toward a more dramatic form of surface mining to access increasingly marginal coal seams. Gradually, bolstered by provisions from SMCRA and under the perceptual radars of non-Appalachian environmentalists, the coal industry shifted to mountaintop removal mining.

Beyond standardizing surface mine practices, SMCRA included a provision for mountaintop removal. SMCRA defined "surface coal mining operations" as "activities conducted on the surface of lands in connection with a surface coal mine....Such activities include excavation for the purpose of obtaining coal including such common methods as contour, strip, auger, mountaintop removal, box cut, open pit, and area mining" (SMCRA 1977:116). Before 1977, mountaintop removal was a relatively rare form of surface mining, behind contour

⁸¹ See the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy website: <http://www.wvhighlands.org/index.html> (accessed May 23, 2011).

and auger mining (see Figure 4-1). The term itself was rarely used by either proponents or opponents of surface mining. By including the practice as a form of surface mining, SMCRA ensured that, like other forms of mining, it would not be banned. As small coal companies were subsumed under larger corporations during the 1980s and 90s, large-scale mountaintop removal operations proliferated in Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia (Burns 2007:5-6; Montrie 2003:197). Just as World War II marked the shift in the coal industry from deep mining to surface mining, SMCRA marked the beginning of the mountaintop removal era, when the practice would become the most prominent form of surface mining in the region. Local responses and national discourse, too, shifted away from “surface mining” and toward “mountaintop removal” as an all-encompassing term for the social, economic, and environmental devastation caused by the practice.

Specific statistics on the extent of mountaintop removal are difficult to find, given the fragmented nature of surface mining operations and questionable reporting, though Epstein et al. (2011) presented a reasonable estimate of 500 active mines across Central Appalachia. A 2005 EPA environmental impact statement (EIS), conducted over 12 million acres of Eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee, found that 6.8% of the study area (816,000 acres, or 1,275 square miles) had been directly impacted by mountaintop removal (either directly mined or impacted by valley fills and deforestation). The EIS likewise concluded that over 1,200 total miles of streams in the study area had been impacted by mountaintop removal between 1992 and 2002, including 724 miles of stream that had been completely covered by valley fills (EPA 2005:4). While President Obama and the EPA called into question several mountaintop removal permits in early 2009, many more permits were issued after the EIS was released in 2005 (Ward, Jr. 2009). Thus, statistics on the extent of mountaintop removal impacts

after 2005 would inevitably be higher. Most controversially, on January 13, 2011, the EPA vetoed a permit request from the Spruce No. 1 Mine in Logan County, West Virginia. If allowed, the permit would have made Spruce No. 1 the largest mountaintop removal mine in Appalachia, at 2,300 acres (Biggers 2011). Though condemned by coal officials as showing “reckless disregard for the impact on our people, on future investment in our region and even for basic fairness” (Raney 2010:n.p.), the 2011 decision marked an important milestone in U.S. surface mine policy (see Figures 4-2 and 4-3).

Although the area and impact of mountaintop removal is difficult to quantify, clearer records exist for the process’s total production. In March 2010, coal-fueled power plants generated 47.7% of all electric power in the United States (EIA 2010:1). Mine production continued to expand to meet such high demand. Total 2009 U.S. coal production was 1,074,900,000 short tons, with 341,400,000 short tons coming from the Appalachian Region (EIA 2009:1-2).⁸² Despite the attention paid to Appalachian coal, active mines exist in 25 states, and the vast majority of the nation’s coal comes from Wyoming.⁸³ Nonetheless, West Virginia and Kentucky remain the second- and third-greatest coal producing states, so their contributions and the impacts of local collection techniques remain consequential. In 2009, the regions of Eastern Kentucky, Southern West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee produced 196,466,000 short tons of coal.⁸⁴ Of that, 97,777,000 short tons (or about 50% of total production) came from

⁸² A “short ton” is equivalent to 2,000 pounds (EIA 2009:72). According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the Appalachian Region is one of three distinct coal-producing areas in the country, along with the Western and Interior regions. The Appalachian Region is much broader than the area considered here, including Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, and Alabama, along with eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee (EIA 2009:68).

⁸³ In fact, in 2009 Wyoming produced 431,100 short tons of coal, out-producing the entire Appalachian region during the same year (EIA 2009:4).

⁸⁴ The EIA differentiates between southern and northern West Virginia, and eastern and western Kentucky. The numbers here use the more specific measurements from southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, the regions most known for mountaintop removal mine. To include the statewide numbers would make this total higher, but it

surface mines. While the total Appalachian region experienced a 12.5% reduction in coal production between 2008 and 2009, the percentage of coal produced by surface methods has increased over the years (EIA 2009:1, 12-13). In 1950, for example, slightly less than 25% of all U.S. coal came from surface mines; by the year 2000, over 65% originated from surface mines (Bonskowski, Freme, and Watson 2007:145). The most productive single surface mine was the Twilight MTR Surface Mine, owned by Progress Energy, in Boone County, West Virginia, producing nearly 5 million short tons of coal in 2009 (EIA 2009:24).

Many Americans benefit from coal produced by mountaintop removal, but the sources of that coal remain largely off limits to public observation. Because mountaintop mines remain guarded private property, citizens are not generally allowed onto mine sites and viewing a mountaintop removal operation up close can be very difficult. To actually see an active mine, the best spot remains activist Larry Gibson's property on Kayford Mountain, West Virginia. Gibson hosts numerous tour groups and events throughout the year.⁸⁵ He keeps a log of visitors and claims to have shown the area to over 14,000 people since the 1990s. Visiting Kayford does come with one condition, though. As Larry tells all visitors, "if you don't do something [about mountaintop removal], you waste my time" (author's field notes, June 19, 2009). To visit Kayford is to become involved in the struggle against mountaintop removal; and Gibson does not simply show the destruction to curious gawkers, but to those who will commit in some way to help the people of Appalachia in their struggles against the process. While physically visiting mountaintop removal sites remains difficult, computer technology provides alternatives. The website www.ilovemountains.org, maintained by the long-time Appalachian advocacy group,

would also slightly misrepresent the total production from mountaintop removal specifically, rather than surface mining more generally.

⁸⁵ See the Keeper of the Mountains Foundation website for information about scheduled tour dates: <http://mountainkeeper.blogspot.com/> (accessed May 23, 2011).

Appalachian Voices, is an accessible source for information on the extent of mountaintop removal. The website offers several presentations based on the Google Earth program, providing satellite images of specific mountaintop removal sites along with extensive information and photographs of the mining process. The website also offers a “What’s My Connection?” tool, where visitors enter their zip codes to find specific links between their local energy providers and mountaintop removal mining. This unprecedented project uses the best information on coal purchasing available, but given the fluctuations inherent in energy markets, ambiguity remains.⁸⁶ Finally, interested readers may simply explore the Appalachian region through the satellite view of Google Maps to see the extent of mountaintop mining. Mountaintop sites appear as grayish-brown spots in the midst of green forest, though care is needed since other non-mine sites, including construction projects, have a similar appearance.

By the early 1990s, Appalachians increasingly spoke against the negative environmental and social impacts of the growing mountaintop removal practice. Whereas, following SMCRA, many earlier anti-surface mine groups disintegrated or shifted their focuses to other issues, more grassroots groups organized through the 1980s and 1990s to, at first, challenge local problems associated with mountaintop removal, and later, challenge the practice itself on a larger, political level. Numerous individuals throughout Appalachia contested coal industry practices through the 1990s; public meetings, inquiries, and rallies were held throughout the states to both challenge governmental environmental policies and raise awareness about suffering in Appalachia. While each action, however small, contributed significantly to the growing, grassroots movement against mountaintop removal mining, two important milestones stood out

⁸⁶ See <http://www.ilovemountains.org/my-connection> for a complete explanation of the metrics used in the process (accessed May 23, 2011).

from the decade, namely: the *Bragg v. Robertson* case and the growing awareness of conditions around Marsh Fork Elementary School, in West Virginia.⁸⁷

In 1998, West Virginia lawyer Joe Lovett brought a lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on behalf of Patricia Bragg and other residents of Blair, West Virginia. In the lawsuit, Lovett argued, first, that the Corps' and DEP's practice of issuing Nationwide 21 and 26 Permits (allowing fill dumping in navigable and headwaters) violated the Clean Water Act, second, that the DEP failed to adequately conduct environmental impact statements for an approved mountaintop mining permit for Arch Coal, and third, that the Environmental Protection Agency improperly allowed Section 404 Permits for valley fills (essentially, legal exemptions to the Clean Water Act). While *Bragg v. Robertson* was directed specifically at Arch Coal's Spruce No. 1 surface mine, the case called into question the entire permitting process for mountaintop removal. If Lovett and others won, coal industry officials worried, it would undermine the legality of valley fills (essential components of mountaintop removal mining) across Appalachia. To the surprise of many politicians and coal industry officials, Chief Judge of the Southern District Court, Charles Haden II, ruled in favor of Lovett and the plaintiffs in 1999. Haden almost immediately suspended his ruling, however, pending an appeal by Arch Coal to higher courts, and in 2001, the Fourth Circuit Court overturned Haden's ruling because the Southern District Court did not technically have jurisdiction to try the case. In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear further appeals. Despite the initial victory, mountaintop removal mining continued. *Bragg v. Robertson* did, however, reveal to the wider public many of the legal irregularities surrounding mountaintop mining and environmental protection. Appalachian environmentalists finally

⁸⁷ For a more detailed account of anti-mountaintop removal litigation through the 1990s, see Burns 2007, Loeb 2007, and Shnayerson 2008.

reached a national audience with evidence of what they considered corruption on the parts of coal companies and local governments. The case resulted in the eventual production of the EPA environmental impact statement on mountaintop removal (EPA 2005) and provided tools for future challenges to Nationwide 21 and Section 404 permits throughout Appalachia (Baller and Pantilat 2007:641-644; Burns 2007:101-104; Loeb 2007; Shnayerson 2008).

The focus of *Bragg v. Robertson* extended from Arch's Logan County mine to the practice of mountaintop removal in general; but through the 1990s, many community activists stood in opposition to the environmental and social impacts of other mines specifically threatening their homes and families. One especially troubling site for anti-mountaintop removal activists was the Marsh Fork Elementary School, along a tributary of the Coal River near Sundial, Raleigh County, West Virginia. Surface mining existed along the Coal River for decades, but by the early 1990s, its extent had increased dramatically. In 1985, the Brushy Fork slurry impoundment was built to hold coal waste from nearby mining operations. This impoundment was followed by a coal preparation plant, a coal silo, and in 2003, extensions to a nearby surface mine, pushing it dangerously close to the Brushy Fork impoundment (Webb and Stockman 2005:P5A). While the mine complex shifted ownership through the years, by 1994, it was owned by Massey Energy, the coal company most targeted by anti-mountaintop removal activists. Marsh Fork Elementary, sitting only 400 yards below the impoundment dam and even closer to the coal preparation plant and storage silo, became a focal point for many anti-mountaintop removal activists. Citing the health dangers of coal dust (such as that inevitably coming from the nearby processing plant) and the memory of impoundment disasters such as Buffalo Creek, locals increasingly worried about the safety of the approximately 240 children at the school (Burns 2007:42; Shapiro 2010:75; Shnayerson 2008:128). In 1998, Raleigh County

residents Freda Williams and Randy Sprouse founded Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW), a grassroots organization meant to give voice to local people who apparently suffered environmental and health injuries from the surrounding mountaintop mines. Named for Coal River Mountain, one of the few major mountains without major surface mine activity in Raleigh County, the organizers and members of CRMW challenged new mountaintop permits in the area, called for help protecting the children of Marsh Fork Elementary School, and promoted alternative wind energy investment in Southern West Virginia.⁸⁸

Following CRMW's formation, much of the grassroots, anti-mountaintop removal activism began solidifying around Southern West Virginia and more locals began involving themselves in the movement. One such person was Julia "Judy" Bonds, of Marfork Hollow, in the Coal River Valley. In 1999, Bonds volunteered as the outreach coordinator for CRMW. She was moved to join the group when she noticed her grandson playing in a creek full of dead fish, apparently polluted by a strange white substance. Bonds pulled her grandson from the creek, and later found that the substance was polyacrylamide, a possible carcinogen and nerve toxin used by coal preparation plants (House and Howard 2009:142-143). Following this experience, Bonds became a tireless spokesperson for the people and environment of Appalachia. Before her death from cancer at age 58 on January 3, 2011, Bonds was an unquestioned spiritual leader of the anti-mountaintop removal movement (Ward, Jr. 2011). Her work in the first decade of the 21st century inspired many locals and others from around the world to get involved with the fight against mountaintop removal mining, and along with dozens of other local activists, she helped usher in the third phase of surface mining resistance in Appalachia. Among its many campaigns, Coal River Mountain Watch and Ed Wiley, a former Massey contractor whose granddaughter

⁸⁸ See CRMW's website for more on CRMW's history and current campaigns: <http://www.crmw.net/crmw/> (accessed May 23, 2011).

attended Marsh Fork Elementary, lobbied for a new elementary school and the cessation of new construction projects on the site. The “Pennies for Promise” campaign sought to gather funds to build a new school. In 2006, Wiley marched from West Virginia to Washington D.C. to raise awareness and funds for the campaign (Shapiro 2010:283). The work of Wiley, CRMW, and many others finally paid off in October, 2010, when the Raleigh County Board of Education, with financial support from the Annenberg Foundation, purchased land for a new school to be completed in 2012 (Plummer 2010).⁸⁹

By 2004, the grassroots movement against surface mining, that had somewhat faded after 1977, was regaining influence. Nonetheless, many outside of Appalachia remained entirely unaware of the issue, which received very little national media attention. The media watchdog group, Project Censored, called mountaintop removal one of the top 25 censored stories of 2006.⁹⁰ Soon afterward, mountaintop removal and resistance to it gained increasing attention in and beyond the United States.

The Third Phase: Mountaintop Removal and the Contemporary Movement, 2004 to Present

Early in the morning of August 20, 2004, a boulder rolled down from an A&G Coal surface mine in Wise County, Virginia. Though boulders falling from surface mines had been a regular occurrence since the early days of surface mining, this boulder landed in the Davidson home, killing 3-year old Jeremy Davidson in his sleep. A&G was fined \$15,000 for the accident

⁸⁹ This is only a brief introduction to some of the actions in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The efforts of CRMW and other groups are charted at length in Burns 2007; Kennedy, Jr. 2004; Loeb 2007; and Shnayerson 2008. Of course, many more individuals and groups have been instrumental in the fight against mountaintop removal. It should be remembered, though, that while some like Judy Bonds have served as important figureheads of the movement, they are not exactly leaders in a hierarchical, institutional sense. Numerous others work behind the scenes, often with little public recognition, to keep the current anti-mountaintop removal movement going. For a more detailed account of individuals and groups involved, see Osha 2010 and Shapiro 2010.

⁹⁰ See <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/10-mountaintop-removal-threatens-ecosystem-and-economy/> (accessed April 1, 2011).

(Thornton 2006). Appalachians were well aware of the many tragedies linked to surface mining, but this event, for many, unleashed a new phase of resistance to mountaintop removal.

Shortly after the Jeremy Davidson tragedy, several Appalachian activists organized a public memorial. This event both called for justice in the Davidson case and hoped to reveal the extreme dangers of mountaintop mining to others throughout Appalachia and America who had not yet been convinced. The rally drew together several long-time local activists and concerned citizens, significantly, including members of nearby, more radically oriented environmental groups, including Katuah Earth First! (a Southern Appalachian branch of the broader environmental action group, Earth First!), which had been involved in efforts to halt deforestation in the region since the 1980s. While non-violent direct action tactics had been reappearing among activists throughout Appalachia in the early 2000s (such as a 2003 mine blockade on Zeb Mountain, Tennessee), many of those present at the 2004 rally felt the need for a more concerted effort of locals and other long-time activists to permanently stop mountaintop removal (Russo 2009; Shapiro 2010).

In subsequent months, Appalachian activists worked to organize regular meetings and begin planning for an activist body meant to gather information about mountaintop removal, spread that information to local communities and national audiences, and directly impact the continued processes of surface mining. The result was the first Mountain Justice Summer in 2005. The summer of organizing and mobilization was initiated with a May 24 rally in front of the Goals Processing Plant, part of the Massey complex situated near Marsh Fork Elementary School. According to journalist Tricia Shapiro, approximately sixty activists, including Judy Bonds, Larry Gibson, Bo Webb, and some of the initial planners of Mountain Justice Summer, gathered at the entrance of the plant to present demands to Massey. Bonds and Webb were

arrested for trespassing after walking up the plant's driveway to present the demands (Shapiro 2010:72-80). Bonds' and Webb's act of civil disobedience helped move the anti-surface mining movement into a new phase, marked by increased involvement from individuals from both inside and outside of Appalachia. The increased use of direct action generated greater media attention to the movement.⁹¹

Mountain Justice Summer continued through the following months, drawing together local and non-local activists of all ages and experience to engage in various aspects of community work throughout the region, "force[ing] the corporate media to start covering this issue" (Landon 2010). Kentucky native Dave Cooper, and other volunteers later, continued presenting the mountaintop removal road show (a presentation and strategy reminiscent of the Earth First! road shows of past decades) throughout the country, promoting awareness about the issue and urging support for local activists.⁹² The name "Mountain Justice Summer" was chosen specifically to reference both Freedom Summer, the 1964 voter registration drive through Southern states during the struggle for civil rights, and Redwood Summer, a series of Earth First!-sponsored protests against deforestation throughout the Pacific Northwest in 1990 (Zakin 1993:378-382). The Appalachian movement was thus consciously tied to previous North American social justice and environmental movements employing non-violent civil disobedience. Many of the organizers of 2005 Mountain Justice Summer continued their work in following years, establishing Mountain Justice as an activist collective in its own right.

Mountain Justice continues to sponsor educational work, community organization, and activist

⁹¹ Tricia Shapiro's *Mountain Justice* (2010) charts in great detail the 21st century direct action campaign against mountaintop removal. While her work dealt much more with the interpersonal relationships between activists, it generally confirmed the evidence I have gathered through interviews on the basic history and founding motivations of Mountain Justice and related groups.

⁹² See <http://www.mountainroadshow.com/> (accessed May 23, 2011).

trainings through regular meetings and camps, including summer, spring, and winter retreats directed at college students. Between 2005 and 2009, several more regional groups developed out of Mountain Justice meetings, including United Mountain Defense (based in Tennessee), Kentucky Mountain Justice (in Kentucky), Rrenew Collective and Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (in Virginia). These Appalachian activists, many of whom began their activist careers with other groups, continued networking with broader national groups such as the Rainforest Action Network, Rising Tide North America, and Greenpeace, who provided material and training support. In 2005 activists also established Climate Ground Zero (CG0) in the Coal River Valley of West Virginia. While several of the original Mountain Justice organizers had extensive experience with more radical direct action groups such as Earth First!, CG0 was initiated in part by Mike Roselle, one of the four activists who co-founded Earth First! in 1980. Methods and principles honed in the forest campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s and from the Buffalo Field Campaign (a campaign to protect wild bison herds in Montana and Wyoming) have continued to influence contemporary activists in Appalachia.⁹³

Following the 2005 rally at Marsh Fork Elementary, activists continued to turn toward more non-violent direct action tactics to both raise awareness about the issue of mountaintop removal and physically stall or halt the continued production of coal in specific sites. 2005 continued with a protest led by Mountain Justice Summer activists at a National Coal Corporation shareholder's meeting in Nashville. Some protests led to arrests when activists peacefully trespassed on mine property or refused to leave when commanded by police. Other smaller events, organized by members of Mountain Justice, Climate Ground Zero, and other

⁹³ This chronology is derived in large part from my field notes, working and discussing with Appalachian activists, specifically, a panel of Mountain Justice organizers at the 2010 Mountain Justice Summer Camp in Kentucky. These details are easy to confirm, though, through the different groups' websites.

associated groups, involved more controversial tactics. On May 23, 2009, six activists locked themselves with chains to mining equipment at the Massey mine on Kayford Mountain. On June 19 of the same year, others attempted to scale a drag line on another Massey mine and release a banner, and in August, members of Climate Ground Zero and Mountain Justice conducted a tree sit at a mine in Raleigh County, West Virginia, temporarily halting all blasting in the area (Nace 2010:207-212).⁹⁴ Lock downs, tree sits, and banner hangings (tactics developed among earlier radical environmentalists) are employed by activists in Appalachia to temporarily stop mining activity and provide media events to raise awareness about the issue.

Direct action events brought new attention to the movement in Appalachia, but other activists in the region remained skeptical of tactics like lock downs that could potentially damage property, fearing increased violent retribution from miners. Concerns over direct action tactics were addressed on the weekend of September 25-26, when hundreds of activists, citizens, and scholars came together for the “Voices from the Mountains” conference, held at Georgetown University, in Washington D.C. This weekend event included numerous presentations from coal-field residents, activist trainings, and informational panels and the various components of mountaintop removal mining and other environmental threats in Appalachia. On September 27, hundreds of participants conducted a legally permitted march through downtown Washington D.C., pausing at the offices of the EPA, a local PNC Bank branch (a bank that at the time was a substantial financier for mountaintop mines), and finally in front of the White House, where over 100 peaceful demonstrators were arrested for blocking the sidewalk (see Figure 4-9). Despite this strict commitment to total non-violence, some groups such as the Alliance for Appalachia, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, and the Sierra Club endorsed only the “Voices from the

⁹⁴ For a detailed account of the many coal-focused direct actions conducted around the world, including Appalachia, between 2003 and 2009, see Nace 2010:183-212.

Mountains” weekend event, and not the march.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, Appalachia Rising represented a cooperative future for the diverse groups involved with the challenge to mountaintop removal mining. Though differences in motivations and expectations persisted, Appalachia Rising nonetheless revealed the potential for all voices to ultimately be heard.

Conclusion

By the middle of 2011, the opposition movement to mountaintop removal had become one of the most well-documented environmental and social justice movements in the United States. Contemporary groups have direct connections to the anti-surface mining campaigns of the 1960s, and even to union activism of the early 20th century. These periods of activism corresponded to political and technological changes within Appalachia and the coal mining industry as it shifted from deep mining to large-scale surface mining and mountaintop removal. Although the groups that emerged through the 20th century shared a commitment to end surface mining practices, they made different arguments against the practice, conflicted over appropriate tactics for resistance, and offered contrasting visions for the future of Appalachia after mountaintop removal ended.

⁹⁵ From the Voices from the Mountains “Program Guide.” Paper copy in author’s possession.

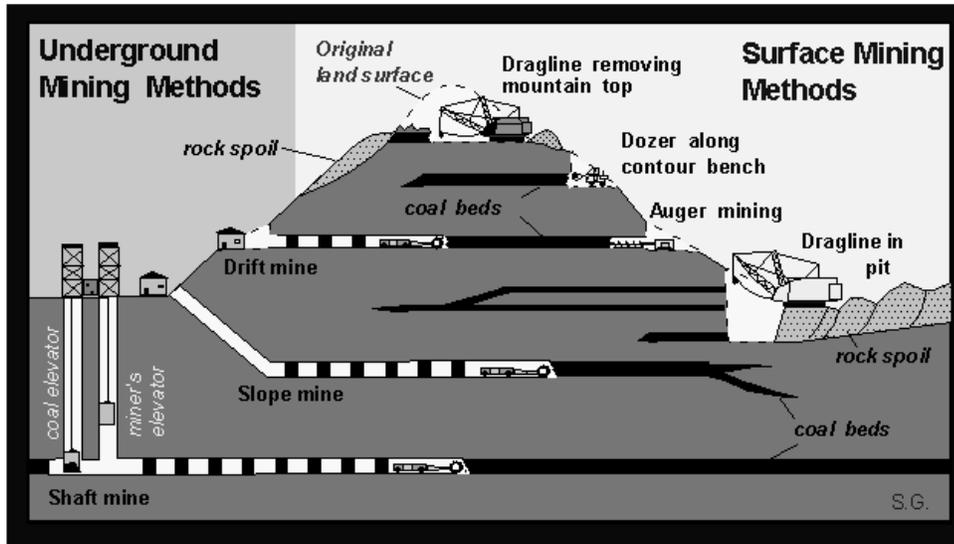


Figure 4-1. Depiction of various forms of deep and surface mining. Source: Kentucky Geological Survey, University of Kentucky, “Methods of Mining,” 2006, http://www.uky.edu/KGS/coal/coal_mining.htm (accessed March 21, 2011).



Figure 4-2. Active mountaintop mine on Kayford Mountain, West Virginia. Photo by author, July 4, 2010.



Figure 4-3. Active mountaintop removal mine on Black Mountain, at the border of Kentucky and Virginia. Photo by author, May 30, 2010.



Figure 4-4. A section of the Hobet #21 mine in Logan County, West Virginia. This section is in the process of reclamation. Photo by author, July 16, 2010.



Figure 4-5. A section of partially reclaimed mountaintop removal land on Kayford Mountain, West Virginia. Photo by author, July 3, 2009.



Figure 4-6. A reclaimed section of Hobet #21 in Logan County, West Virginia. The rocky path is a reclaimed creek, and the pond is to hold back runoff to prevent flooding the house that sits a few hundred yards below this site. Photo by author, July 16, 2010.



Figure 4-7. Reclaimed surface mine land near Hazard, Kentucky. Note the attempt to restore natural looking hills. Photo by author, July 12, 2009.



Figure 4-8. The line between original forest and reclaimed mountaintop removal site on Kayford Mountain, West Virginia. While the restoration here is only a few years old, the extent of ecosystem change is obvious. Photo by author, July 3, 2009.



Figure 4-9. Activists stand outside the EPA offices in Washington D.C. as part of the Appalachia Rising March. Standing under the banner are (from left to right) West Virginia activists Chuck Nelson (with hands in pockets), Larry Gibson (with fist raised), Maria Gunnoe (holding poster), and Lorelei Scarbro (with megaphone). Photo by author, September 29, 2010.

CHAPTER 5
OF VALUES AND MOUNTAINS: IDENTITY POLITICS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE
LAND IN MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL DISCOURSE

On the night of January 18, 2010, comedian Stephen Colbert had Margaret Palmer, the lead author of a *Science* study on the impacts of mountaintop removal, as a guest on his popular political satire show (Palmer et al. 2010). Introducing Palmer, Colbert noted (in his normal satirical tone, pretending to support a position he detests as a means of ironic critique), “it’s great! You start with some boring, tree-covered mountain and you turn it into an exciting, lifeless moon base. Plus, [mountaintop removal] is the most efficient way to get the coal inside [the mountain]. That’s why, when I go to the dentist, I have him remove my teeth through the top of my head” (Colbert 2010). For five minutes, Colbert lampooned mountaintop removal with Palmer as a foil. He concluded his argument, “if we didn’t blow up these mountains, don’t you think these mountains would just as easily blow us up? Have you heard of Vesuvius, or Pinatubo, or Mount St. Helens? Payback is a bitch, baby. This is our turn” (Colbert 2010). Colbert’s satire presented to mass audiences what many consider to be some of the more egregious excesses of the mining industry. His commentary revealed that by 2010, criticism of mountaintop removal had gained pop-culture power. For anti-mountaintop removal activists, this was truly a high point for spreading information about the issue. Arguments both for and against mountaintop removal had become mainstream—an especially significant change given how activists like Larry Gibson fought for years without much recognition even from local media.

Contemporary discourse surrounding mountaintop removal focuses on several important themes: supporters argue for the need of supporting the jobs of hard working locals against the uninformed, privileged outsider environmentalists who seek only personal gain; opponents, on the other hand, cite environmental, social, and cultural damages to the practice, occasionally

even reclaiming former negative “hillbilly” stereotypes as positive identities. It is not only material conditions that drive these different arguments both for and against mountaintop removal, but broader value claims, deeply tied to historical conditions and religious expressions in the coal fields.

Arguments for and Against Mountaintop Removal: Values in Action

Mountaintop removal is directly related to the longer history of mining in Appalachia, so its persistence in the region is due to many subtle factors. Mountaintop removal supporters most frequently argue that benefits including employment and land development necessitate the continuation of the practice. Opponents to mountaintop removal argue directly against supporters’ arguments, pointing to environmental, economic, and cultural damages done by the practice. All arguments combine material evidence (in the form of scientific or economic data) with normative claims regarding the proper place of humans in nature. Examining these different claims reveals the divergent assumptions underlying the views of mountaintop removal supporters and opponents.

Arguments Supporting Mountaintop Removal

One of the most frequently used arguments in favor of mountaintop removal is that the process provides employment to the depressed region. In 2009, the coal industry in Eastern Kentucky, Southern West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee employed 37,336 individuals, including “all employees engaged in production, preparation, processing, development, maintenance, repair shop, or yard work at mining operations, including office workers.” Of those, 14,234 (or about 38%) worked in association to surface mines (EIA 2009:44).⁹⁶ While

⁹⁶ This number does not include all employment for Kentucky and West Virginia, but just numbers from the areas most impacted by mountaintop removal. Statistics that include all of Kentucky and West Virginia, or the Appalachian region more generally, would inevitably be higher. Employment data is only kept for mines offering at least 5,000 employee hours per year.

this number includes many non-mining jobs, the West Virginia Coal Association (WVCA), a coal industry lobby and advocacy group, argued that “every mining job creates another five to eight jobs somewhere in the economy” (WVCA 2010:4), including service industry jobs and employment produced by other economic investments. If the WVCA’s high-end estimate is true for the entire survey area, the coal industry is responsible for nearly 300,000 jobs in West Virginia.⁹⁷ Of course, such a statistic is difficult to evaluate. Furthermore, miners’ average salaries make coal jobs attractive to many Appalachians. According to the West Virginia Coal Association, the average West Virginia miner salary in 2009 as \$68,500 per year, significantly higher than the 2009 national household average of \$49,777 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2010:4; WVCA 2010:6). This figure includes both underground and surface miners, but it is easy to see how one individual employed by the coal industry can support an extended family, especially in Appalachia where cost of living is lower than the nation’s other urban areas. This creates large groups of coal supporters who may only indirectly benefit from mine employment.

Among supporters, proposed regulations on surface mining mean fewer jobs. In a message posted on the West Virginia Coal Association website shortly after the Obama administration announced a review of new mountaintop removal permits in 2009, association president Bill Raney wrote, “the EPA has declared war on Appalachian coal....We call upon our Congressional representatives, our local and state elected officials and everyone concerned about the future of our state and our region to let the EPA and the Obama Administration know this effort to destroy the Eastern coal industry must come to a stop. We call upon the EPA and the Obama Administration to LEGALIZE COAL!” (Raney 2010). Raney argued that the value of jobs in Appalachia trumped the environmental concerns of policymakers or total ecosystem

⁹⁷ The Kentucky Coal Association makes a similar argument for Kentucky mining. See Kentucky Coal Association 2008.

health. This is a version of the well-worn “jobs versus environment” argument, or the idea that environmental regulations necessitate a net loss in jobs, infusing much contemporary debate surrounding environmental issues (Goodstein 1994). Raney is not the only coal industry supporter to make this claim. A report prepared by analysts at West Virginia University and Marshall University and partially funded by the West Virginia Coal Association argued that “a major threat to the coal industry comes from the potential limitations on surface mining permits currently imposed by EPA” (Bureau of Business and Economic Research 2010:7). The report concluded,

Probably there is not another industry more vital to West Virginia’s economy than is coal. This report documents that statement. As it spread throughout the state, the loss of coal production or even its substantial reduction in use would have serious consequences.

West Virginia is a low income state. Reduction in the use of coal would worsen an already bad situation particularly in those areas which are most in need of jobs and income. At the same time the demands placed on State government would accelerate for public assistance, support of schools and medical services. But the reduced income received by the State would leave it without the fiscal resources to respond.

The benefits from coal in this report have been conservatively stated...It was not our intention to make the coal industry appear to be more important than it is. But its value to the state should not be underestimated (Bureau of Business and Economic Research 2010:53).

In essence, the report argued that surface mining must continue because, despite environmental problems, West Virginians need the jobs the industry provides.

Raney remains a spokesman for the West Virginia coal industry and his rhetoric emphasizes the core value claims of his industry. Similarly, while the authors of “West Virginia Coal Economy: 2008” claimed to present conservative results and to have had no undue influence from the coal industry, that Raney’s own organization partially funded the report opens the door for skepticism about their claims of neutrality. As some economists have already shown, the “jobs versus environment” argument, rather than reflecting quantifiable realities,

represents more a rhetorical tool for opponents of environmental regulations to influence popular audiences (Goodstein 1994; Morgenstern, Pizer, and Shih 2002). Rebecca Scott convincingly showed that “jobs versus environment” arguments uncritically assume a simplistic model of economic progress and are tied to broader issues of race and masculinity in Appalachia. She argued, “the jobs-versus-the-environment aphorism has become common sense and reflects the well-worn articulations between a particular conception of the human relationship to nature and a unilinear notion of progress and development” (Scott 2010:10). In other words, those who employ this dualism fail to acknowledge either alternative modes of production or alternative relationships to the land. The “jobs” in the dichotomy tend to only be wage labor within the larger capitalist market, excluding other work such as subsistence farming or unpaid, local labor. This can be seen in the “West Virginia Coal Economy: 2008” report, where the authors conclude that reducing mountaintop removal can only hurt Appalachian employment, entirely neglecting the possibility, cited by mountaintop removal opponents, that stopping mountaintop removal could help diversify local economies by promoting employment in alternative energies, tourism, and related industries. The arguments of Raney and others, then, reflect deeper assumptions about working individuals, the economy, and local environments than the simple “jobs versus environment” phrase appears to reflect.

Scott went further with her critiques, showing that such assumptions are tied to broader constructions of race and masculinity. She said, “as soon as MTR [mountaintop removal] is placed within a jobs-versus-the-environment framework, it becomes articulated with ‘masculine’ things like providing for a family, technological development, and rationality” (Scott 2010:90). In Appalachian mining culture, supported by mountaintop removal proponents, the working man is tough, modern, and thoroughly masculine (Scott 2010:67). Perceived threats to this source of

employment challenged deeply seeded values, shared throughout U.S. culture. Scott continued, “support for MTR arises in the context of certain values: a particular definition of freedom, a masculinity of providership, and moral citizenship. The importance of white breadwinning masculinity to ideals of American citizenship makes a mine closure a morally threatening event and a danger to a particular kind of community” (2010:97). In conclusion, seemingly simple statements such as Raney’s contained significant normative assumptions related to values of masculinity, labor, and American identity. For supporters of mountaintop removal, these remain some of the core values to protect the industry from environmentalists and politicians who they believe threaten their security.

While supporting miners and their families, mountaintop removal advocates argue that the practice boosts regional economies as well, generating new business, providing local tax revenues, and generally promoting development. These arguments are intimately tied to implicit environmental values and conceptions of human/nature relationships. Though severance taxes on coal were only approved in the late 20th century in Appalachian states, following the long debates over strip mining (see Montrie 2003), the West Virginia Coal Association positively touted the \$379 million paid in severance tax to the state in 2009 (WVCA 2010:15). The Kentucky Coal Association (a group similar to the WVCA) likewise cited \$221.4 million in severance tax to the state of Kentucky in 2006 (KCA 2008:i). According to supporters, these payments directly support community development in the coalfields and across Appalachia.

Beyond these more quantifiable benefits, mountaintop removal supporters also argue that the practice improves the economic value of the land. Following the AOC provision from SMCRA, surface mine operators may avoid reclaiming post-mine land if they provide projects for the economic development of the area. This has resulted in numerous development projects

throughout Appalachia (see Figure 5-1), and according to mountaintop removal supporters, these changes ultimately benefit mountaineers by raising property values and providing flat land for businesses, housing developments, and public facilities. Contrary to critics, mountaintop removal supporters argue that surface mining is only a “temporary land use,” leading to valuable improvements long afterward (WVCA 2010:40). A Kentucky Coal Association pamphlet claimed that “coal mining creates valuable lands such as wildlife habitats, gently rolling mountaintops, wetlands, and industrial sites where only steep, unproductive hillsides had once existed” (2008:i). According to the association, mountaintop mining offers a marked improvement, ecologically, economically, and aesthetically, over the “unproductive” original landscape. This sentiment was expressed years earlier by the controversial Secretary of the Interior, James Watt. Visiting a reclaimed strip mine in the Kanawha Valley of West Virginia in 1982, Watt reportedly said, “it seems to me if I were living in this area, I’d want flattened land. I think that’s the way to do it” (quoted in *CORAspondent*, June 1982, Appalachian Alliance Records, Box 5, Folder 9). For some mountaintop removal supporters, the value of nature is fundamentally tied to its economic productivity for some mountaintop removal supporters.

These arguments express value judgments about the proper relationships between humans and nature. Like the beautiful statue lying potentially within a block of marble, invisible until revealed by the hand of a sculptor, mountaintop removal, in the eyes of some supporters, represents an opening of the unproductive landscape to its true potential. Rebecca Scott noted, “this flat land is an affirmation that nature is always already property waiting to be improved” (2010:177). This utilitarian and anthropocentric view of nature—the idea that nature’s value lies solely in its ability to benefit humans—has infused U.S. environmental history, as noted by numerous scholars (Nash 1989, 2001). In his groundbreaking history of environmental thought,

Clarence Glacken showed that these anthropocentric perceptions of “man as geographic agent” trace back to the origins of Western history, to the ancient Greeks and their medieval Christian intellectual descendants (1967:vii). Within the medieval Christian context, religious concepts of humans as distinct from the rest of nature led to increased “human exceptionalism” (Peterson 2001:38). In the minds of many European thinkers (who provided much of the background for environmental thought in the United States), humans stood morally above the remainder of nature, allowing any use of the natural world that in some way benefited human needs.

According to influential environmental historian Caroline Merchant, European Renaissance emphasis upon rationality led to a general shift toward a more mechanistic conceptualization of humans and the world, where the natural world was no longer a moral subject but a collection of objects (Merchant 1983:192; Peterson 2001:42-46). Moreover, this conceptual shift reflected a co-devaluation of both women and the environment. Domination of nature was directly connected to the domination of all things feminine.⁹⁸ These utilitarian visions of nature, combined with a related devaluation of the feminine, have influenced U.S. history.

Given the prevalence of utilitarian anthropocentrism, it is understandable why mountaintop removal enjoys strong support among many. The practice fits within a worldview promoting a capitalist vision of economic progress, a male-centered vision of work and family, and a unified vision of ideal American citizenship. Supporters of mountaintop removal, then, do not just cite purely material reasons for continuing to support the practice. Instead, arguments based on local economic benefits, employment, and duty to provide energy to the U.S. public are necessarily tied to normative assumptions, valuing specific social and economic conditions.

These values have long histories in Appalachian culture, and their articulation in support of

⁹⁸ Rebecca Scott noted as much in reference to mountaintop removal: “MTR is constructed as a masculine technology of control against irrational and feminine-coded Appalachian nature” (2010:80).

mountaintop removal is in many ways a modern continuation of similar economic and social arguments dating back to the establishment of the coal industry in Appalachia, when family life largely shifted from agrarian to wage-labor based, and when extractive industries claimed control of Appalachian economic and political futures.⁹⁹ Recognizing this long history is necessary to understand why some contemporary Appalachians continue to support mountaintop removal, despite opponents' arguments that it devastates the region economically, ecologically, and culturally.

Arguments Opposing Mountaintop Removal

Opponents to mountaintop removal cite numerous reasons necessitating the end of the practice. Many of the arguments made against the practice are rearticulations of earlier discussions on the subject, dating back to the 1960s. However, mountaintop removal occurs on a scale much greater than surface mining of the 1960s, it feeds an American energy economy that has only become more demanding, and the resistance movement has incorporated methods and approaches derived from other radical environmental and social justice movements around the world. Though based in arguments from the 1960s era of resistance, modern anti-mountaintop removal action remains distinct.

Evidence of the damages of mountaintop removal is easy to find. Most popular books and reports on the subject, such as Burns 2007, Shnayerson 2008, Loeb 2008, contain at least basic accounts of the problems with the practice. Rob Perks' report, "Appalachian Heartbreak" (2009), prepared for the National Resources Defense Council, summarizes scientific and economic evidence for the negative impacts of mountaintop mining. Environmental websites

⁹⁹ Though such an exploitative view of the natural world was not necessarily a permanent feature of Appalachian culture. In his important study of early mine disasters, Paul Rakes shows that "the concept of miners as acceptable casualties in war with Mother Nature" developed in large part from industry and government responses to mine disasters as inevitable, much like war-time deaths (2009:77). As Merchant and other would note, the concept of miners being "at war" with nature is a significant marker for the underlying anthropocentric environmental values.

also contain valuable details about the damages of mountaintop removal.¹⁰⁰ The damages of mountaintop removal cited by opponents can be divided into three major categories: ecological, economic, and cultural. Just as with practice supporters, some of the underlying values of opponents emerge through analysis of the arguments made against mountaintop removal. The ecological impacts of mountaintop removal have been well-documented in scientific journals, in government hearings, through popular media, and through legal testimony. One of the best sources summarizing ecological impacts is “Mountaintop Mining Consequences,” published in the esteemed journal *Science* (Palmer et al. 2010).¹⁰¹ The authors surveyed scientific literature on mountaintop removal impacts and found evidences for significant biodiversity loss and pollution surrounding mine sites. Runoff from mine sites increases levels of toxic metals such as selenium and other compounds like sulfuric acid, which can negatively impact aquatic biota. One study cited by Palmer et al. found that 73 of 78 streams in proximity to mountaintop mines contained selenium levels greater than the threshold for toxic bioaccumulation (meaning the selenium was highly likely to be toxic for fish and their predators) (Palmer et al. 2010:148; Lemly 2009). Much of the early litigation against mountaintop removal focused on water quality issues and the failure of government agencies to protect streams from valley fills, and the Sludge Safety Project, a West Virginia-based environmental group, especially focuses on water quality monitoring throughout the region.¹⁰²

Although mine companies attempt to return undeveloped mined land to its approximate original contour, humans cannot entirely replace the former geological structure, soil quality, or

¹⁰⁰ See especially www.ilovemountains.org for an extensive list of resources and updated information on current mountaintop removal policies and impacts (accessed May 23, 2011).

¹⁰¹ See also Perks 2009 for an accessible summary of mountaintop removal and recent statistics concerning damages.

¹⁰² See <http://www.sludgesafety.org/> (accessed May 23, 2011).

biotic diversity of mined land.¹⁰³ Studies cited by Palmer et al. revealed that some reclaimed mines showed almost no vegetation regrowth even 15 years after reclamation. Limited regrowth could result in reduced carbon sequestration in the region. Researchers estimated that, 60 years after reclamation, mountaintop mine sites would only reach 77% of the level of carbon sequestration of the surrounding forest (Palmer et al. 2010:149).

Beyond ecological damage, mountaintop removal may impact human health in surrounding communities. Palmer and her fellow authors said, “elevated levels of airborne, hazardous dust have been documented around surface mining operations. Adult hospitalizations for chronic pulmonary disorders and hypertension are elevated as a function of county-level coal production, as are rates of mortality; lung cancer; and chronic heart, lung, and kidney disease” (2010:148). A 2011 study based on self-reported public health statistics found markedly lower results near mountaintop removal sites than other parts of Appalachia. The report concluded, “results indicate that previously documented HRQOL [health-related quality of life] disparities in Appalachia’s coal mining areas are concentrated in MTM [mountaintop mining] zones in the central part of the region” (Zullig and Hendryx 2011:852). After controlling for socio-economic factors in the region, the report continued, “significant disparities persist after control for these risks and suggest that the environmental impacts of MTM may also play a role in the health problems of the area’s population” (Zullig and Hendryx 2011:852). Based on these adverse health impacts, some communities have taken legal actions against coal companies. In some communities, such as Prenter, West Virginia, groundwater has become undrinkable, prompting citizens to sue for clean water from coal companies (Duhigg 2009). In 2005, Pauline Canterbury and Mary Miller, the “Dustbusters” of Sylvester, West Virginia, brought a suit against Massey

¹⁰³ The 1996 *Southern Appalachian Assessment*, prepared by the Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere Cooperative, provides an accessible introduction to environmental conditions throughout Appalachia.

concerning a nearby coal preparation plant that consistently rained dust onto their community. Massey was forced to encase portions of the plant in a plastic containment area to reduce pollution (Burns 2009; Canterbury and Miller n.d; Shnayerson 2008). In 2011, lawyers brought a civil lawsuit against Massey Energy on behalf of former students of Marsh Fork Elementary School, claiming that attendance at the school resulted in adverse health impacts (Lannom 2011). The result of that lawsuit will likely have important ramifications for the total legal battle against mountaintop removal. Given evidence of reduced ecological functioning and damages to human health, Palmer and her fellow authors concluded strongly that mountaintop removal and valley fill permits “should not be granted unless new methods can be subjected to peer review and shown to remedy these problems. Regulators should no longer ignore rigorous science” (2010:149).

Health impacts are often tied to negative economic impacts and economists point to the expenses of healthcare in the region as evidence for imbalances between costs to communities and benefits enjoyed by coal companies. After ascribing worth to human lives and health, and then comparing their loss through mining impacts against economic gains made by mining industries, for example, Hendryx and Ahern concluded that “the human costs of the Appalachian coal mining economy outweighs its economic benefits” (2009:541). In early 2011, a team of researchers published a much more wide ranging report on full economic accounting for all areas of coal production, transportation, processing, and combustion, including elements generally externalized onto nearby communities including healthcare costs, pollution cleanup, and public infrastructure maintenance. The study concluded that the coal industry costs the United States \$345.3 billion annually.¹⁰⁴ Reflecting this cost in the price of coal-fueled electricity would triple

¹⁰⁴ Though given the variability in accounting externalities, the report showed that the cost could be as high as \$523.3 billion.

the consumer price, thus rendering coal-fueled electricity far less economically competitive to alternative energies (Epstein et al. 2011:73). If consumers paid this “true cost” of coal, the report concluded, it would become clear to all that coal is not a cheap source of energy.

Opponents of mountaintop removal also question the coal industry’s argument that mountaintop removal creates and maintains jobs in an economically depressed region. Coal production and employment inevitably fluctuates through the years, as international market demands dictate. However, in the first half of the 20th century, when most mining was done underground, the Appalachian coal industry generally employed well over 100,000 miners. In the first decade of the 21st century, as more production has shifted to mechanized methods, including mountaintop removal, mining only accounts for about 1% of total Appalachian employment. In 2009, the entire Appalachian region employed 20,549 surface miners, and 37,430 in underground mines. Despite this substantial reduction in employment, total coal production actually increased by 2.3% from 1973 to 2003 (Bonskowski, Freme, and Watson 2007; Perks 2009:6-7; EIA 2009:38). Surface mining provides jobs, but far fewer than the coal mining of previous generations. Moreover, given the coal industry’s recent history of anti-union policies, many opponents question the industry’s commitment to providing work in the region. Jim Lewis, a retired Episcopal priest based in West Virginia, noted the historical disconnect among contemporary mine employees. He said in an interview, “you can operate a heavy vehicle, but that doesn’t make you a miner. . . . I turn around and I see a younger group, particularly a lot of younger people—and I understand their hunger for jobs and to take care of their families I really do—but I wonder how much they really know or appreciate the struggles the mining industry has gone through or the way it has lost to these corporate giants that are taking the mountains” (Lewis 2009). Coal industry spokespersons frequently claim that

increased regulations will require wide-spread layoffs, but some mountaintop removal opponents see those claims as empty threats. Carol Warren, a director of OVEC, said that coal companies “may act for a few months like they’re going to take their toys and go home, but they aren’t. There’s no way in the world they’re gonna walk away from billions of dollars of coal reserves....They might lay people off for show and say they’re leaving West Virginia. They’ll be back” (Warren 2009). Groups such as the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) and Coal River Mountain Watch’s Sustainable Economic and Energy Diversification (SEED) project focus on shifting Appalachian economies away from coal and providing new sources of employment, such as in wind and other alternative energy development and production.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, discussions of “economic transitions” have become prominent among activists and scholars focused on Appalachian poverty and environmental sustainability.

Finally, some opponents of mountaintop removal argue that destroying the natural environment of Appalachia threatens a distinct Appalachian culture. As Kentucky writers and activists Silas House and Jason Howard noted, “mountaintop removal is not by any means just an environmental problem. It also has political, social, ethical, economic, and—most of all—cultural ramifications” (2009:10). Scholars and activists have long-viewed the entrance of the coal industry in Appalachia as an extension of colonial economic policies, oppressing local cultures in favor of resource extraction. For some activists, mountaintop removal represents the continuation of this colonial enterprise, removing the physical grounding of Appalachian cultural practice. Judy Bonds, the famous anti-mountaintop removal activist, expressed this view in many of her public addresses. In an interview, she noted how the first European settlers of Appalachia formed “a culture in harmony with nature.” The coal industry offered an escape

¹⁰⁵ See <http://www.maced.org/> and http://www.crmw.net/crmw/sustainable_energy_economic_diversification for more information (accessed May 23, 2011).

from hardships, she continued, but in so doing, “took away everything God gave us to be self-reliant people” (Bonds 2009). Rebekah Epling, a young AmeriCorps VITSA volunteer with Christians for the Mountains, similarly noted that Appalachians have relied upon forest products for subsistence, but “when you take away the forest, and the traditions that people have, it takes part of the culture with it” (Epling 2009).

Since the arrival of the coal industry, many scholars and activists argue that local citizens have been forced to give in to the demands of company officials against their own interests. Such political dynamics have created “routines of non-conflict,” where citizens do not challenge economic powers and criticize any who do (Gaventa 1980:161). For some activists, the solution to this oppressive influence lies in rearticulating a specific Appalachian culture and identity. In the 1960s, for example, the Appalachian poet Don West wrote, “it is time that we hill folk should understand and appreciate our heritage, stand up like those who were our ancestors, develop our own self-identity. It is time to realize that nobody from the outside is ever going to save us from bad conditions unless we make our own stand. We must learn to organize again, speak, plan, and act for ourselves” (2004:71). Calling back to a perceived historical tradition of self-reliance, West believed that the solution to Appalachian problems lay with the efforts of mountaineers themselves, not outside charities. Like Bonds, West argued that an Appalachian culture of self-reliance was at once threatened by and the solution to industry oppression.

While those involved with mountaintop removal discuss its impacts upon local culture, the nature of that culture in question is not self-evident. Further explanation of what mountaintop removal opponents and proponents mean by Appalachian culture is needed.

Themes in Resistance: Identity and Culture in Mountaintop Removal Discourse

Depending upon the perspective of mountaintop removal opponents and supporters, a unique mountain culture is either threatened by mountaintop removal or the environmentalists who

allegedly seek to destroy the coal industry. Behind all of these claims lie specific conceptions of Appalachian identity. In examining broadly the multiple values articulated around mountaintop removal discourse, it is necessary to analyze cultural values and identity politics. In the context of mountaintop removal debates, this mainly entails two areas: first, the problematic claims of insider privilege and differing visions of Appalachian identity, and second, the deployment of Appalachian cultural forms (such as music and dance) in support of mountaintop removal resistance.

Who Speaks for the Mountains?: Insiders and Outsiders in Mountaintop Removal Debates

One of the most common accusations made against mountaintop removal protestors is that they are all outsiders to the region who do not understand Appalachian culture and who only seek to hurt local communities without any effort at resolving the problems those communities face. This outsider vs. insider rhetoric has been prominent in environmental debates through the twentieth century. While deployed strategically by coal officials and supporters, claims that mountaintop removal opponents are “threatening outsiders” masks the diversity among activists.

Examples of the charge of “outsiders” used against activists are easy to find. At a June 2009 rally and march in support of the children at Marsh Fork Elementary School, for example, dozens of miners and their families confronted protestors with signs reading “Outsiders: Go Home!,” and chants such as “this is our state” and “where are you from” (see Figure 5-2).¹⁰⁶ The dominant message from the assembled miners and their families was that they represent true local interests, while environmentalists were “outside agitators.” Similarly, at an annual July 4th, 2009 picnic on Larry Gibson’s property on Kayford Mountain, unemployed and possibly intoxicated miners trespassed onto the land and walked into the assembled crowd of Gibson’s

¹⁰⁶ Rally for Marsh Fork Elementary School, Sundial, West Virginia, June 23, 2009. Author’s field notes.

family and supporters, cursing at all in attendance and attempting to start fights. One especially angry miner shouted, “this is our land, we were here first,” clearly assuming that all persons present at the event were out-of-state “treehuggers.”¹⁰⁷ While it is true that some of the participants at the picnic were not local inhabitants (including myself), Larry Gibson’s 50 acres of land on Kayford Mountain has been in his family for over 200 years. Despite the agitated miner’s claims, Kayford Mountain was not his land, and he surely was not there first. This individual’s actions cannot be taken as representative of all mountaintop removal supporters, of course.

Charges against meddling outsiders also frequently appear in the comments under online news reports and Youtube videos. Dave Cooper, the long-time anti-mountaintop removal activist and performer of the Mountaintop Removal Road Show, entered into a debate with a poster named “Ms Railroader” in the comments section of one of his Youtube videos. After Cooper listed statistics about the safety hazards of mountaintop removal, “Ms Railroader” replied, “I’m curious, are you a miner? How many in your family are? If you say no or none, then you really can’t make comments about mining. My 1st cousin was just injured in a mine accident. Thats the recent [sic]. My Grandpa was in Bloody Harlem [sic], thats the past. My own father left the mines so don’t try to preach mine safety to me.” When Cooper replied that he was not a miner, “Ms Railroader” replied, “You made my point, you are not a miner. You do not understand the conditions....You do realize MTM [mountaintop mining] will not stop. Only outsiders like you don’t want it” (email correspondence with Cooper, May 10, 2011). “Ms

¹⁰⁷ Author’s field notes. The threatening miner was later identified as Adam Pauley. During the event, Pauley and others wandered through the crowd, yelling obscenities, apparently seeking to provoke violence. At one point, Pauley made a throat-slicing gesture toward a man and his young daughter. More than two months later, in September 2009, Pauley was formally charged with disorderly conduct for his actions on Kayford Mountain, though the charge only resulted in a minimal fine. The incident was filmed and uploaded to various internet sites. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gjc7Jg_gMy0&feature=related (accessed 21 September 2009).

Railroader,” of course, was not a miner either, only related to miners; and given his years offering the Mountaintop Removal Road Show, there are few in Appalachia more informed about mining practices and statistics than Dave Cooper. For “Ms Railroader,” however, these details did not matter. When proven wrong on facts, she retreated to the genetic fallacy, rejecting her opponent’s argument based on his origins outside of the mining industry, rather than the focusing on the content of his argument.

Mine executives and their representatives support such divisive views and do little to promote more reasonable discussion. Following the same June 2009 protest at Marsh Fork Elementary, which was attended by the famous actress and environmental activist Daryl Hannah, Massey employee Chris Adkins told a local reporter, “the coal industry’s tough enough without people from Seattle and New York coming in for the summer and taking West Virginian’s jobs and going back home” (Ayres 2009). While some of the activists present at the event may have been from Seattle or New York, the event was organized by local groups, including Coal River Mountain Watch. Similarly, while some of the activists may have only been temporarily involved with the issue, many of the organizers, such as Judy Bonds, were permanent residents of the region and not interested in simply “taking West Virginian’s jobs and going back home.” Former Massey CEO Don Blankenship made a similar statement about the protest, “I don’t recall anyone inviting out-of-state environmental protesters from San Francisco and a Hollywood actress to Massey’s property on June 23” (Ayres 2009). The comments of both Blankenship and Adkins were made specifically to foster local animosity toward the protestors. Utilizing the “insider vs. outsiders” trope speaks to the fears of Appalachians who worry that some powerful, outside, self-interested force will remove their livelihoods.

Though many of the most prominent anti-mountaintop removal activists, including Judy Bonds, Larry Gibson, and Maria Gunnoe, have deep ancestral roots in Appalachia, painting all opponents to the practice as “outsiders” is a familiar tactic in environmental tactics. The underlying claim is that a longer history in a region and residence there gives an individual a greater right to speak for that land’s best use, even if that use is complete destruction. Portraying opponents of mountaintop removal as “outside agitators” and “treehuggers” serves to reduce their credibility in public discourse on the issue. For their parts, local opponents of mountaintop removal tend to be much more welcoming of outside interest. They realize that forces outside of the region are needed to change local mining policies and to challenge the larger fossil fuels culture, and as one opponent said, mountaintop removal “can’t be solved at local level, because it’s a national, global issue.”¹⁰⁸

Given the need for help from outside of the region and the understanding that mountaintop removal is tied to a national energy economy and thus not simply a local issue, many mountaintop removal opponents have worked to welcome participants from outside of Appalachia, fighting against the divisive “insider vs. outsider” language. Following the disturbing incident on July 4, 2009, when violence nearly erupted at his property, I asked Larry Gibson directly about this issue. Gibson responded, “you don’t have to be from here to care about the Appalachians. Appalachia belongs to the United States. You could be in California, or be in Washington State somewhere, and what happens in Appalachia is still your concern....What people do here, it affects people elsewhere, as far as the health and wellbeing of people. Yes, you have an opinion on that” (Gibson 2009). Clearly, for Gibson, mountaintop removal is truly an American issue, not only an Appalachian issue. Bo Webb, a West Virginian

¹⁰⁸ Women in Service to Appalachia meeting, Hazard, Kentucky, 12 July 2009. Author’s field notes.

and co-organizer of the first Mountain Justice Summer, made a similar point: “there’s no such thing as an outsider in America. We’re all in this together. And we’d better start standing up together, because the corporations are taking our country over” (quoted in Shapiro 2010:51). For some activists, history proves that outsiders are needed for local changes to occur. Citing the Civil Rights Movement, Bob Marshall of Christians for the Mountains said, “without people from the outside coming in to South, to demonstrate and support those people, I don’t think that change would have ever happened, or it would have been a long time. So we’re going to need people from the outside coming in” (Marshall 2009). Others pointed to the history of mine companies and coal bosses in response to industry charges against allegedly outsider environmentalists. When asked about the issue of outsiders, Kentucky artist Jeff Chapman-Crane responded, “TECO Coal Company based in Tampa, Florida¹⁰⁹; Arch Mineral based in St. Louis. You could go through the whole list of all the major coal companies and they’re all based outside this region. They are the outsiders. They have no right to be here, doing what they’re doing” (Chapman-Crane 2010). These arguments concerning industry leaders as outsiders date back to 1960s strip mine opposition, when activists such as Harry Caudill pointed to the “robber barons” of the 19th century as causes of environmental devastation and social oppression (Caudill 1983, Williams 2003).

Reverend Jim Lewis, a retired Episcopalian priest and long-time social justice activist, offered a particularly Christian perspective on the insider/outsider issue. For Lewis, like others, any local social justice movement requires outside help. He said in an interview, “there’s never been a change in this country in anything that didn’t abolish this insider/outsider routine....I know that if it isn’t community based and it doesn’t have support locally then it’s not going

¹⁰⁹ Chapman-Crane is referring to TECO Energy, the Tampa-based energy conglomerate.

anywhere. But at the same time, if it doesn't involve people outside the boundaries that we set up—these state lines and all in this great union we have—there isn't going to be a change” (Lewis 2009). Those who attack perceived outsiders, he continued, operated from deep fears. Speaking specifically about the near-violence at Larry Gibson's property on July 4, 2009, Lewis continued, “fear is at the heart of this thing, people are scared. And we do and say strange things when we are afraid....When they're saying 'go home,' they really want you to get out of their life because you scare them” (Lewis 2009). Recognizing the grounding of this division in fear, Lewis viewed it as a moment to practice compassion and follow the model of Jesus. He explained how Jesus actively reached to outsiders of his own Jewish community; he broadened his circle, and as a Christian activist, Lewis felt compelled to work toward a similar goal. He said, “wherever two or three are gathered together and speak different languages and can't talk with one another across the table, and find a way to do it, I say that's the praises of the Holy Spirit” (Lewis 2009). Lewis called other activists to recognize the fundamental fears behind threats of violence and work toward building fellowship with those who feel threatened by those who have different values.

Rather than simply pointing fingers at others, mountaintop removal opponents generally realize that the issue is tied to broader, global problems such as climate change and economic justice, and so they work to spread information about the issue and promote interest in involvement among people from outside of the region. They agree with Rebecca Scott's apt observation that mountaintop removal “is a cultural practice wrapped up in national and global histories; it cannot be adequately understood only from a local perspective” (2010:25).

Along with this work toward inclusiveness, there remain tensions within the broader anti-mountaintop removal movement between older Appalachian activists (many of whom became

involved during the earlier debates over strip mining) and newer groups, such as Mountain Justice. Some of this wariness derives from a history of mistreatment by national environmental groups. Following the passage of SMCRA in 1977, some strip mining opponents felt that their issue had been overtaken by national groups, who compromised on mine regulations rather than work for the total ban of strip mining that Appalachian activists wanted (Montrie 2003:182). This history has led to some cautiousness among Appalachian environmentalists when new groups enter the picture. As the West Virginia native, VISTA volunteer Rebekah Epling explained, “when your community is divided, and King Coal is so powerful, you need help from outside while at the same time not being taken advantage of” (Epling 2009).

Some fear that new groups perceived to come from outside of the area may redirect the focus of the anti-mountaintop removal movement. Indeed, there is something of a division among activists between those who see mountaintop removal as one of many sites through which to confront the national fossil fuels economy and its connection to climate change, and those who believe coal itself is less the problem than simply saving specific Appalachian communities from destruction. For example, James Hansen, the director of NASA’s Goddard Space Studies has been deeply involved in the movement against mountaintop removal since 2008 (even getting arrested twice at different demonstrations). Hansen viewed mountaintop removal as a focal point for U.S. energy policies. In a 2009 op-ed, Hansen argued, “coal is the linchpin in mitigating global warming, and it’s senseless to allow cheap mountaintop-removal coal while the administration is simultaneously seeking policies to boost renewable energy” (Hansen 2009). In other words, no policy of climate change remediation could be considered effective while mountaintop removal continues. He concluded, “we must make clear to Congress, to the EPA, and to the Obama administration that we the people want mountaintop removal abolished and we

want a move toward a rapid phase-out of coal emissions now” (Hansen 2009). On the other hand, there is a historical precedent for locals to oppose surface mining yet still support the coal industry in general. In the 1970s and 80s, when many aged miners were interviewed about their views on strip mine regulation, some interesting responses emerged. Marvin Gullett, a retired deep miner from Kentucky, offered the following economic solution to strip mining in 1977: “so I’ll say that what they ought to do is drop off, have light mining. Work what’s available that’s inside work. Not take the tops of the mountains off. Stop strip mining. That’s the first thing. Get into it in a way that it don’t hurt the people. Go back under the mind and tunnel mine like they used to, and it don’t hurt the environment so bad, see” (Gullett 1977). Reverend Roy Crist, an Episcopal priest from Ansted, West Virginia, expressed a similar view on the issue: “we are not opposed to coal mining, and we are not opposed to coal miners, as the coal companies would definitely like everybody to believe. But we do have a problem with blowing tops off the mountain” (Crist 2009). Today, many locals similarly speak of a general transition away from coal, rather than an immediate block to all fossil fuel usage (Bonds 2009), while other national groups and their representatives focus on mountaintop removal as a symptom of a broader fossil fuel dependency.

Some fear that the direct action tactics of groups like Mountain Justice and Climate Ground Zero may alienate locals, and repeated lock-downs and arrests ultimately burn bridges that previous organizers spent years building. In response to the emergence of Mountain Justice and Climate Ground Zero, several older Appalachian groups, including Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, and Coal River Mountain Watch, joined together into the Alliance for Appalachia in 2006 to provide a concerted environmentalist

voice, distinguishable from the newer groups.¹¹⁰ The Alliance for Appalachia continued many of the campaigns from previous decades, including legal challenges to mountaintop removal permits and promoting alternative energies throughout the region. While it is not accurate to draw strict distinctions between Mountain Justice and related groups and the groups within the Alliance for Appalachia, it is true that Alliance member organizations tend to promote rallies and non-arrest centered events (such as KFTC's regular I Love Mountains Day). The Alliance also conducts a regular Week in Washington event where participants meet policymakers and discuss the damages of mountaintop removal in person. Chris Martin, a young United Mountain Defense activist from Tennessee, also noted the possible pitfalls of direct actions. He said direct actions are "alienating for this conservative, rural community....So while I agree with the use of the tactic to stop mountaintop removal, I also know we need to come up with some sort of mechanism to avoid all the backlash in the community that it can create" (C. Martin 2010). For Martin, direct action was just one of many tactics to stop mountaintop removal, best when used alongside other methods such as community organization and listening projects.

Of course, no direct action in the contemporary anti-mountaintop removal movement (since 2004) has reached the level of violence of anti-surface mining protest of the 1960s, when gun shots and property destruction occurred. Those who fear violence may erupt from contemporary protestors may do so remembering the violence of previous generations.

This perception of radical activists was somewhat controversially reproduced in the "True Cost of Coal" project of the Beehive Design Collective. The Beehive Collective is a "committed group of mostly women...working to create holistic, accessible, and educational

¹¹⁰ See <http://www.theallianceforappalachia.org/> (accessed May 23, 2011).

images that inspire critical reflection and strategic action,” based in Machias, Maine.¹¹¹ The Bees began work on the “True Cost of Coal” in 2008, when several members travelled to Appalachia and conducted research among activists, coal lobbyists, and locals. Their goal was to create an image that best portrayed the perspectives on mountaintop removal, as will be discussed in greater detail below. Significantly to many younger Appalachian activists, the final “True Cost of Coal” project overtly reflected the perceptions of Mountain Justice and other activists as outsiders imposing themselves upon local communities. In the detail (Figure 5-3), a mortar board wearing (and thus a recent college graduate) rabbit parachutes into a much larger activist scene. The rabbit carries a sign with the clinched fist image popularized by Earth First! and a U-lock, used by some activists to lock themselves to machinery, doors, etc. Immediately behind follows a documentarian turtle, carrying the typical accoutrements of her profession, including a laptop. These activists must parachute into the local scene because they are not themselves local, they are quite literally dropping into a broader movement, and as some could interpret, imposing their methods and perspectives onto local activists. Some activists in Appalachia took issue with this portrayal. In response to these critiques, the Bees added a marshalling rabbit and moth representing longtime local activists. The radical rabbit and turtle are not simply imposing themselves upon the scene, then, but are being guided by the locals whom they intend to serve.

For their parts, Mountain Justice and other groups typically associated with young, outsider, radical activists, have worked to change the perception of their groups as disrespectful outsiders. Mountain Justice workshops and camps, which typically attract college-aged activists

¹¹¹ From a pamphlet distributed at “The True Cost of Coal” presentation, Civic Media Center, Gainesville, Florida, March 19, 2010. The Collective also maintains a website featuring more detail on their projects, www.beehivecollective.org (accessed May 23, 2010).

from outside of the Appalachian coalfields, contain several workshops on Appalachian cultural sensitivity. Young activists are informed that they should respect the opinions of locals and not pretend to be local themselves. In the planning for the 2010 Appalachia Rising march in Washington, D.C., organizers were clear that local Appalachians would lead the march and that they would determine the types of action taken. It was ultimately decided that marchers would peacefully sit outside the White House, accepting arrest if necessary but in no way resisting or risking damage to property, and the organizers of the march asked all participants to follow several behavioral guidelines: “we will promote a tone of respect, honesty, transparency, and accountability in our actions. We will use no violence (physical or verbal) towards any person. We will not destroy or damage property.”¹¹² Anybody who chose different actions, such as locking down to property or hanging banners, had to do so outside of the aegis of Appalachia Rising. If it was ever true that young, outsider, radical activists descended upon Appalachia and attempted to redirect the anti-mountaintop removal movement, it is clear now that they are working to bridge those perceived earlier divisions between groups.

The movement against mountaintop removal coal mining involves individuals both from within and without the Appalachian coalfields. While some mountaintop removal supporters attempt to use this to fragment local communities and discredit anybody who opposes the mining practice, many activists, on the other hand, have worked to break down these “local vs. outsider” divisions and create spaces of cooperation within the movement, where all who share the common goal of stopping mountaintop removal feel welcome. This does not mean, however, that sometimes problematic politics of identity are completely absent from anti-mountaintop removal discourse.

¹¹² From a pamphlet distributed to march participants. Paper copy in author’s possession.

Culture in Action: Visions of Appalachian Identity in Mountaintop Removal Opposition

While many anti-mountaintop removal activists are clear that anybody interested in helping Appalachian communities is welcome, regardless of their place of birth, claims about Appalachian distinctiveness are still made. Indeed, many activists point to the destruction of a unique culture as one of the many costs of mountaintop removal. Part of the reason mountaintop removal has been allowed to continue, some argue, is because of negative stereotypes of Appalachians as hillbillies. Activists work not only to raise awareness about the physical destruction of mountaintop removal, but also raise awareness about the dangers of cultural stereotypes of mountain people. Many in the movement celebrate visions of traditional Appalachian culture, including music, dance, and foodways. In representing Appalachian culture, though, activists as well make claims regarding its nature. The presence of banjos and “buck dancing” at rallies and among activists, for example, shows that these are considered to be standard elements of traditional Appalachian culture. More problematic, though, are competing claims about Appalachian identity, and despite some efforts to break down stereotypes, identity politics nonetheless make their way into the movement.

In the same segment of his show featuring mountaintop removal that I introduced in this chapter, Stephen Colbert concluded in his typical satirical manner, “most of the stream poisoning happens in Appalachia, and the only people it affects are the one remaining group that everybody still feels comfortable making fun of: hillbillies... Though if we keep taking away the mountains, we’re gonna just have to call them ‘billies’” (Colbert 2010). Though joking, Colbert pointed to an issue familiar to many Appalachians. For generations, Appalachian people have been stereotyped. While the history of these perceptions was discussed at depth in Chapter 2, many contemporary Appalachians with whom I talked said that stereotypes against them are just as

strong today as they were in the late 19th century, when “local color” writers helped create the popular image of the hillbilly.

In response, some activists have attempted to reclaim a positive Appalachian identity, to not let negative stereotypes mask the damages done by mountaintop removal, and institute what one activist called an “Appalachian pride movement” (Epling 2009). Judy Bonds was one of the most forceful spokespersons for this reclaimed hillbilly identity. At a 2009 fund raising concert in North Carolina, Bonds told the assembled crowd, “if you’re from Appalachia, and I know you guys are, you understand that the rest of the United States looks at us...as if we’re the red-headed bastard step child of America.”¹¹³ This negative view of the region leads to ignorance about the true costs of mountaintop removal. In the same speech, Bonds continued,

we’re stereotyped. So we have to stand up and prove to America that even though we got a twang in the way we talk, we’re smarter than they are ... and sometimes when they hear that twang, they want to turn their head and pretend like we don’t exist. And that’s when ... you say..., “let me explain to you about my history and my culture. Let me explain to you about mountain folk, and about people that can be self reliant and that can live off the land. Let me explain to you about my history and my culture. Let me tell you that I’m an Appalachian and I’m a hillbilly, but I’m not going to allow you to poison and blast my children any longer for your so-called cheap energy.”¹¹⁴

For Bonds, confronting stereotypes presents a teaching moment to others, as well as a moment for locals to take pride in their own culture and identities. Coal River Mountain Watch, the group for which Bonds worked, even released t-shirts that read “Save the Endangered Hillbilly.” In his *The United States of Appalachia*, journalist and mountaintop removal opponent Jeff Biggers similarly worked to reclaim the contributions of mountaineers and celebrate the “revolutionaries and pioneering stalwarts, abolitionists, laborers, journalists, writers, activists,

¹¹³ Judy Bonds, speech at Mountain Aid Concert, Shakori Hills, North Carolina, June 19, 2009. Author’s field notes.

¹¹⁴ Bonds, speech, June 19, 2009. Author’s field notes.

and artists overlooked among the lineup of conventional Appalachian suspects” (2006:xv). According to Bonds and Biggers, degrading the people of Appalachia is connected to the degradation of Appalachian environments.

Partly in an effort to celebrate the positive contributions of Appalachian culture, and partly because many activists are from Appalachia and raised with these cultural traditions, many 21st century activist gatherings feature lessons and performances of Appalachian music and dance. Music is ubiquitous at anti-mountaintop rallies, and as Bron Taylor noted in his work with radical environmentalists, movement songs, written directly about specific issues and performed at gatherings, are often key forms of ritualizing among activists (Taylor 2001a, 2001b). Music-making in Appalachia is particularly unique because it frequently draws upon the long history of traditional Appalachian music (often performed with banjos, fiddles, or *a capela* ballad and accompanied by traditional clogging or “buck dancing” [see Figures 5-4 and 5-5]) and union-era protest songs. One group, Here’s to the Long Haul, formed out of Mountain Justice Summer activists. They sang traditional songs and new protest songs and travelled among more radical circles to spread their message. Protest songs are not only heard at rallies, either. While introducing Judy Bonds as the keynote speaker at the 2008 Appalachian Studies Association meeting in Huntington, West Virginia, historian Shirley Stewart Burns was prodded by the audience to perform her ballad “Leave Those Mountains Down.” She did.¹¹⁵

One of the more recognizable groups of anti-mountaintop removal musicians is Public Outcry, made up of Kentucky environmental activists (including award winning author Silas House). Their music draws heavily upon the union-era protest songs of Woody Guthrie and others. The group performs at protests and meetings around Appalachia and most of their

¹¹⁵ A recorded version of this song is also available on *Coal Country Music* (Heartwood 2009), the companion compact disc to the documentary *Coal Country*.

original songs are meant to spread awareness about mountaintop removal and Appalachian culture. Songs such as “Can’t Put it Back” and “Gonna Tear Down a Mountain” speak directly to the human and environmental costs of mountaintop removal. Virginia native Jane Branham likewise speaks to the perceived greed behind mountaintop removal with her “Stop Tearing the Mountains Down.” The refrain states, “Stop tearing the mountains down,/ all for the love of the coal in the ground,/ blood money stains the rich man’s crown,/ it keeps on tearing the mountains down.” One of the more popular songs at activist camp gatherings is “Old Man Massey,” sung to the tune of “Old Man River,” and lampooning Massey Energy and its former CEO Don Blankenship. Another example is “Don’t Chop Rocky Top,” sung to the popular Tennessee song “Rocky Top” (see Figure 5-4). Many of these songs are available on compact discs produced for fundraising, including *Songs for the Mountains*, compiled by Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, and *Coal Country Music*, the companion CD to the documentary *Coal Country*. The issue has also drawn more mainstream, professional musicians to contribute their works for the benefit of mountaintop removal awareness. Famous blue-grass, country, and folk musicians such as Gillian Welch, Bonnie Raitt, Natalie Merchant, Kathy Mattea, and Willie Nelson contributed songs to *Coal Country Music*.

Music is also one of the places where religion clearly blends with environmental values. Traditional hymns combine with religious themes in many protests songs. One example is Public Outcry’s “Holy Ground,” which includes the refrain: “This is holy ground, it’s holy ground/ And nothing but the hand of God shall ever tear it down./ Take your dozers and your dynamite and head on back to town/ Get off my land, ‘cause where you stand is holy ground.”¹¹⁶ Possibly the most frequently heard song at rallies and other anti-mountaintop removal events is

¹¹⁶ Public Outcry, “Holy Ground.” The song is available for free online at the band’s website: <http://www.myspace.com/publicoutcry> (accessed April 7, 2010).

the hymn *Amazing Grace*. Judy Bonds told me this was her favorite song (Bonds 2009), and I have witnessed individuals break into singing it during tense situations. During a 2008 *Blessing of the Mountain* service near Ansted, West Virginia, for example, local miners arrived at the service to keep participants off of the mine site. When participants held the prayer service in the parking lot, the miners began heckling them. At one point, a miner began threatening and shouting directly at one of the attending preachers. In response, the participants began singing *Amazing Grace*. According to attendees, the miners eventually joined the song, and afterwards, allowed the service to continue. When the *Blessing of the Mountain* was over, participants reported peaceful conversations with the assembled miners. A potentially tense situation, then, was diffused through the song that all participants, on both sides of the barriers, recognized (Crist 2009).

Jean Ritchie's "*Now is the Cool of the Day*" is a final specifically religious song cited as a favorite by several anti-mountaintop removal activists. Written by the Kentucky-born traditional musician in 1977, the song articulates a clear vision of Christian stewardship. Each verse involves a message directly from God to the singer. The song begins, "My Lord, he said unto me,/ 'Do you like my garden so fair?/ You may live in this garden if you'll keep the grasses green/And I'll return in the cool of the day.'" Clearly, the message is that the garden (or the earth as created by God) belongs to God. Humans are allowed to live in this garden provided they "keep the grasses green," "feed my sheep," and "keep the people free," as other verses continue. This agreement lasts until God returns "in the cool of the day," a reference to the second-coming as understood by some Christian groups. Though the song understands that God will eventually return, this does not mean that God remains entirely absent from creation, as the refrain states, "Now is the cool of the day/ Now is the cool of the day/ O this earth is a garden,

the garden of my Lord/ and he walks in his garden/ In the cool of the day.” Ritchie grew up in the distinctly Appalachian Old Regular Baptist Church. While each verse may seem to profess the idea that “God will come back and fix it all,” a kind of anti-environmental view proscribed to certain evangelical Christian groups, the refrain makes it clear that “now is the cool of the day.” In other words, *now* is when Christians are accountable for the stewardship of creation, not later. In a few short verses, Ritchie’s song reflects some of the uniquely Appalachian, evangelical visions of environmental stewardship. Perhaps that is one reason why the song remains so popular among local activists (House and Howard 2009: 23-44; Chapter 6).

Traditional knowledge and crafts such as basket weaving, canning, and edible forest products are also featured among anti-mountaintop removal actions. At the 2010 Mountain Justice Summer Camp in Kentucky, Carol Judy, from the Clear Fork Community Institute, led sessions on local plants for assembled activists. The Clear Fork Community Institute, based in Eagan, Tennessee, provides educational projects for local and visiting students as a means of preserving local culture and reviving suffering community members. For many activists, this traditional Appalachian culture represents a model for future, off-the-grid practices; as such, young activists are eager to learn methods for living off of the land, making their own food, and finding their necessities from non-corporate sources. This was reflected in the Beehive Collective’s “True Cost of Coal” poster. In the section of the poster featuring representations of pre-coal Appalachian culture, a drum-wielding bear tells stories by a camp fire to basket weaving foxes and other assembled animals (Figure 5-6). It is this type of traditional knowledge and social organization that mountaintop removal opponents seek to preserve.

Because mountaintop removal opponents seek to save the cultures of Appalachia along with the ecosystems, and because many activists come from those cultural traditions themselves,

it is understandable why forms of Appalachian music, dance, and crafts feature so prominently in different events. The issue of cultural preservation, though, can be problematic if not handled carefully. Specific cultural reconstructions can sometimes mask or misrepresent other historical events and actors. For example, claims about the Scotch-Irish heritage of mountaineers, when handled improperly, can mask the long historical contributions of African Americans in the coalfields. Likewise, claims that local plant knowledge is a direct continuation of American Indian practices, while true in many respects, can also seem to legitimate the oppression and removal of native peoples from the region if they are not properly historically situated.¹¹⁷

In my experience, many people who know of positive stereotypes of Appalachia associate the culture with immigrants from the United Kingdom and Ireland. Similarly, when talking to Appalachian locals, many place their ancestral origins in that European region. While it is certainly true that specific families immigrated to Appalachia from the United Kingdom and Ireland, bringing some of their cultural practices with them, the more general perception that Appalachian culture itself provides a direct link to late medieval British, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish cultures is largely the product of late 19th and early 20th century authors. This trope connecting the cultures of the United Kingdom to Appalachia has been termed the “Anglo-Saxon Thesis,” which “held essentially that the mountain region had been settled originally by ‘pure Anglo-Saxon stock,’ which isolation had kept unmixed generation after generation” (Whisnant 1994:8). Many early commentators (and several contemporary writers as well)¹¹⁸ emphasized

¹¹⁷ Rebecca Scott made a similar point, arguing that some West Virginians express “a normative ‘white’ American identity by eternalizing the existence of Euro-American settlements and erasing the original Native inhabitants of the Appalachian Mountains” (2010:127).

¹¹⁸ Though they do not take the more extreme position of the 19th century writers, David Hackett Fischer (2001), Grady McWhiney (1989), Richard Blaustein (2003), among others, pointed to historical and cultural connections between Appalachian and the British Isles. Their work was not inaccurate, and Celtic connections in Appalachia remain popular subjects among locals, but emphasizing one cultural element hides the contributions of other

connections between mountaineers and traditional Anglo-Saxon and Celtic cultures, arguing that Appalachia presented a kind of static cultural island in the midst of national change. William Goodell Frost, the president of Berea College between 1892 and 1920, argued this point in his influential “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains” (first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1899). Frost argued that Anglo-Saxon arts such as spinning cloth (a practice that “has helped to form the character of our race”) along with distinctly Elizabethan language had been preserved in Appalachia, as if in a museum (Frost 1899 [1989]:98).

Scholars of the early 20th century attempted to support the racial theories of Frost and others. Geographer Ellen Churchill Semple, writing in a 1901 issue of *The Geographical Journal*, focused specifically on environmental conditions in explaining what she saw as a self-evidently preserved medieval Anglo-Saxon culture. She argued, “it is a law of biology that an isolating environment operates for the preservation of a type by excluding all intermixture which would obliterate distinguishing characteristics. In these isolated communities, therefore, we find the purest Anglo-Saxon stock in all the United States” (Semple 1901 [1989]:150). Others, such as James Watt Raine (a professor of English at Berea College) argued that it was not Anglo-Saxons but the Scotch-Irish, a distinctly Protestant group from Northern Ireland and southern Scotland, who immigrated to colonial America in large numbers due to their conflicts with Elizabethan, Anglo-Saxon British culture. He agreed with Semple that environmental isolation led to cultural preservation in Appalachia, though, saying, “while the rest of the nation has grown far from our revolutionary ancestors, the Mountain People have been marooned on an island of mountains, and have remained very much the same as they were at that time” (Raine 1924:x).

Cecil Sharp, a British musicologist interested in folk traditions, famously travelled to Appalachia

immigrants to the region and the numerous cultural exchanges that contributed to create contemporary Appalachian culture. See Williams 2004 for a good, brief analysis of Appalachian cultural history and folklife.

in the early 1900s and “caught” numerous English ballads, sung by the locals in more purely traditional forms than back in England (Whisnant 1983:110-127). Several others established folk schools throughout Appalachia at this time to preserve these traditional arts. Though Sharp himself eventually concluded that these racial and cultural connections were not as solid as he had initially assumed, his work contributed greatly to the commonly held perception of many outsiders that Appalachian’s were “yesterday’s people,” to use Weller’s (1965) famous term.¹¹⁹

Due in large part to Sharp’s work, the traditional music of Appalachia is thought to connect the region to late medieval Northern Europe. What counts as “traditional Appalachian,” though, has been in large part constructed by outside observers (though some of its elements do indeed reflect the practices of pre-industrial Appalachian households). The trouble comes when individuals begin to promote certain elements of a complex culture as “authentic,” generally to the neglect of other complexities. David Whisnant provides what is probably the most influential study of the 19th and 20th century “cultural interventions” in Appalachia in his *All that is Native and Fine* (1983). Discussing the many cultural preservation activities of the early 20th century, Whisnant noted, “as one looks closely at some of these cultural endeavors—especially if one attempts to understand them in the context of the region’s economic history—one becomes gradually aware that the manipulation of culture (at least, of culture construed in certain ways) inevitably reflects value and ideological differences as well as the inequalities inhering in class. Thus one must sooner or later consider the *politics* of culture” (1983:8). By promoting certain visions of traditional culture, settlement schools and other cultural preservation efforts of the early 20th century essentially locked “authentic” Appalachians into pre-industrial societies.

¹¹⁹ After continuing his work in the mountains, Sharp eventually discovered that “traditional British culture” did not exist as widely as he had thought. He wrote to a friend, “primitiveness in custom and outlook is not, I am finding, so much the result of remoteness as bad economic conditions. When there is coal and good wages to be earned, the families soon drop their old-fashioned ways and begin to ape town manners” (quoted in Whisnant 1983:121).

Unwittingly, these preservationists likely played into the hands of coal companies and culture of poverty theorists who argued that increased mining could help elevate mountaineers out of their backward states.

In the context of contemporary mountaintop removal opponents, subtle rearticulations of this “Anglo-Saxon Thesis” take attention away from other cultural influences and developments. Individual families did travel directly to Appalachia from the British Isles, inevitably bringing with them certain cultural practices, however, it was immigrants from Northern Europe, including Germany and Scandinavia, who brought log cabin home construction to the region. Likewise, the banjo, often thought of as the quintessential Appalachian instrument, is actually from Africa (Williams 2004:135-137). Bluegrass music, too, is actually a combination of European-based ballads with American blues and country music, both ultimately of African American origin (Malone 2004:125). Finally, at certain times and places, African Americans made up a significant percentage of the mine worker force. In West Virginia in 1890, for example, African Americans made up 21.5% of the mining workforce (Laslett 1996a:33; Trotter 1990). By perpetuating an old and oversimplified conception of Appalachian culture, some anti-mountaintop removal activists reinforce the damaging regional stereotypes that they already question.

A second problematic cultural claim in Appalachia concerns indigenous heritage. Many Appalachian residents cite some American Indian heritage, generally from the Cherokee, one of the largest groups represented in the area. Many Cherokees did marry Anglo-European settlers during the 18th century, creating a mixed-race ruling class within Cherokee society (Young 2002:112-114). It is thus very possible that many families with lengthy roots in Appalachia do have some American Indian heritage. Joe Begley, for example, credited much of his love of the

Appalachian environment to his grandmother, who he understood to be of American Indian heritage (Begley 1999). Problems emerge if individuals claim that certain contemporary cultural practices represent a continuous connection to pre-European indigenous culture, or equate the situation of contemporary mountaineers with that of previous American Indian regional inhabitants, without recognizing that political events of the past interrupted those indigenous traditions. The Cherokee and other tribes of the Appalachians were forcibly evacuated from their lands in 1838. The “Trail of Tears” through the Southern U.S. to Oklahoma cost thousands of lives and did great if unquantifiable damage to traditional cultural knowledge of the different peoples (Young 2002:122).

Philip Deloria has shown how issues of politics and identity lie behind Euro-American conceptions of Indian life. Deloria charted examples of “playing Indian” from the Boston Tea Party to New Age movements of the 20th century, arguing that white Americans in the modern era have “used Indian play to encounter the authentic amidst the anxiety of urban industrial and postindustrial life” (1998:7). The practice of modeling American Indian practices among Euro-Americans “evoked actual Indian people and suggested a history of conquest, resistance, and eventual dependency” (Deloria 1998:186). There remained a distinct ambiguity in these practices: people at once attempted to elevate American Indians to a status of essential American identity, while at the same time they masked the conflicts and suffering behind contemporary power dynamics. American Indian activists take prominent roles in the resistance movement to mountaintop removal, but some activists also remain wary of undue cultural appropriation in their own actions. Carol Warren, a leading member of OHVEC, once corrected a rally participant who suggested the forced removal of Appalachians due to mountaintop removal is like the forced removal of Native peoples in the 19th century. Warren did not believe that such a

comparison could accurately be made, revealing, at least on her part, an awareness of the historical damages done to Native peoples of the region (Warren 2009). Warren provides an example of activists carefully negotiating the problematic territory of cultural identity.

Issues of American Indian and Scotch-Irish cultural heritage ultimately boil down to the problems of identity politics. Most basically, “the premise of identity politics is that all members of the group have more in common than the members have with anyone outside the group, that they are oppressed in the same way, and that therefore they all belong on the same road to justice” (Anner 1996:9). For groups who have experienced oppression because of some feature of their identities—for example, African Americans or Hispanic migrant workers in the United States—bonding together by shared experiences of identity helps create the communal strength necessary to stand against overwhelming social forces. The reclamation of “hillbilly” identity, advocated by Judy Bonds and others, is an example of this type of perspective. Theoretically, hillbillies share experiences of intolerance that can help bond them together into a strong identity, working toward the common end of cultural preservation.

As activists and scholars from different justice movements have found, however, identity politics is a double-edged sword. Individuals are lumped together by an intolerant society (whether by race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). The struggle for these groups becomes accepting that identity while at the same time avoiding stereotypical portrayals from those outside of the group. Activists likewise sometimes fall into their own forms of exclusivism when claiming specific identities. For example, if a “hillbilly” is an authentic Appalachian resident, what does that say about the perspectives of newcomers to the region, or of groups not often counted within the hillbilly stereotype such as Jews or African Americans? History shows that instead, Appalachian culture has been created over many generations through diverse inputs.

Conclusion

Opponents and supporters of mountaintop removal deploy many different arguments in support of their position. Behind each of these arguments lie certain value assumptions—whether that the earth is merely a product to be made better by human interventions, or that protecting ecological resilience is a criterion for social justice, for example. It is not just material conditions that are debated in mountaintop removal discourse, but underlying value systems as well. Secular values concerning human/nature relationships and identity are not the only forms articulated in the anti-mountaintop removal movement, however. The next chapters examine multiple religious values of resistance, focusing on how they make up distinct currents within the wider anti-mountaintop removal stream.



Figure 5-1. Shopping center and parking lot on former mountaintop removal land. Note the remaining highwall in the background. Photo by author, July 12, 2009.

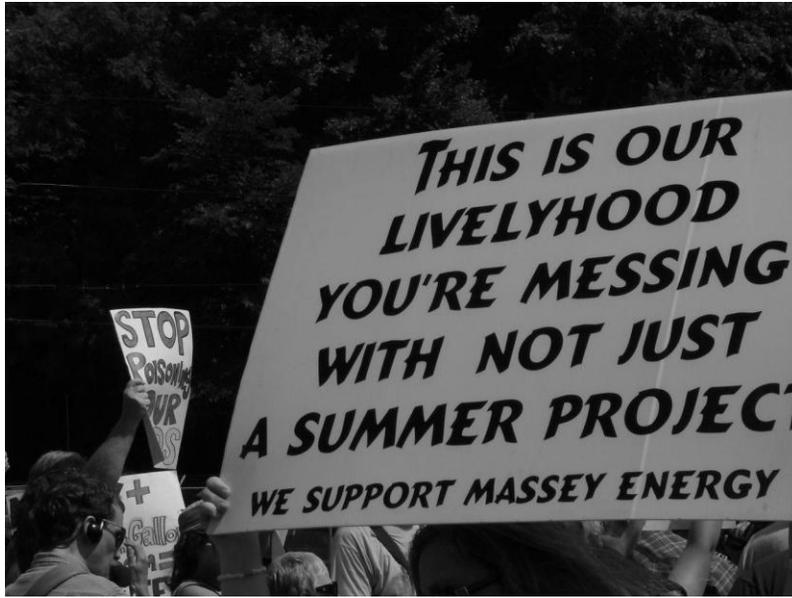


Figure 5-2. A Massey Energy supporter holds a sign in counter-protest at a rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School. The mention of a “summer project” is probably a reference to Mountain Justice Summer. Photo by author, June 23, 2009.



Figure 5-3. Detail from “True Cost of Coal” representing radical outsider activists coming to fight mountaintop removal. The Beehive Design Collective, no copyright.



Figure 5-4. Musicians and dancers performing at a rally organized by United Mountain Defense against the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, Tennessee, July 26, 2009. Note the Psalms quote on the sign in the bottom right corner. Photo by author.

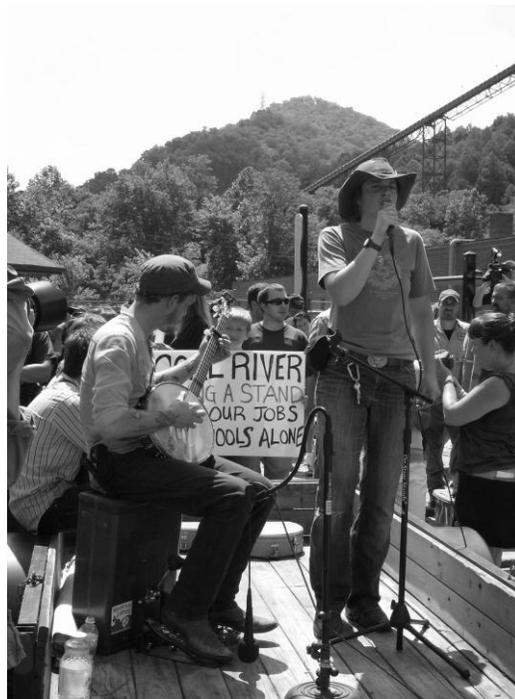


Figure 5-5. Morgan O’Kane and Jen Osha performing at a rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School, Sundial, West Virginia, June 23, 2009. Note the miners and counter-protestors in the background. Some miners blew air horns during the songs, others ridiculed O’Kane’s banjo technique, and some jokingly requested Loretta Lynn’s “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” a song positive about mining. Photo by author.



Figure 5-6. Detail from “True Cost of Coal” representing life and family in pre-industrial Appalachia. Note the story-telling bear and basket-weaving foxes. The Beehive Design Collective, no copyright.

CHAPTER 6
RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL, PART I: CHRISTIAN
ACTIVISM

In 2006, Public Broadcasting Stations around the nation aired the Bill Moyers documentary, *Is God Green?* Toward the end of the George W. Bush presidency, which had been analyzed by many as a new pinnacle of evangelical politicization in the United States, Moyers' documentary sought to provide a different picture of evangelicals in America. According to Moyers, increasing numbers of evangelicals were considering the severity of environmental issues, representing a novel change in the U.S. political climate. Significantly, *Is God Green?* featured Judy Bonds and Allen Johnson, both of whom were involved in opposition to mountaintop removal in Appalachia, as examples of modern evangelical environmentalism. The opening of the documentary featured a short clip of Judy Bonds speaking at a 2005 rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School. Speaking into a megaphone, Bonds announced, "this is a battle between good and evil and now is a time to stand up and be counted for. The earth is God's body!" (Moyers 2006). For an evangelical Christian to make such a statement, apparently citing the liberal ecotheology of Sallie McFague (1993), was truly surprising. The short quote set the tone for Moyers' documentary: these evangelicals are up to surprising things and maybe they are becoming more like liberal Christians. However, Tricia Shapiro, in her study of activism in Appalachia in the early 2000s, provided the remainder of Bonds' statement, which continued as follows: "Psalm 24 says the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof—and, amen, it belongs to God and it don't belong to Massey Energy. A man doesn't have the right to feed his family by poisoning my babies" (Shapiro 2010:105). To draw in viewers, Moyers's editors focused on the more surprising elements of Bonds' statement; but seen in its full context, Bonds returned to the Biblical foundation for her beliefs and articulated a clear stewardship view of creation. In other

words, Bonds' statement, while seemingly surprising for an evangelical, actually fit within comfortable evangelical foci.

The religious backgrounds of activists such as Judy Bonds and Allen Johnson have received some media attention since Moyers' documentary. Commentators are aware that some things are unique in the Appalachian context, and older assumptions about environmental activism based on the experiences of the "big greens" such as the Sierra Club or radical groups in the Pacific Northwest are not entirely appropriate. Religious resistance to mountaintop removal is far more complex than focusing only on evangelicals would reveal, however, as activists come from diverse religious backgrounds and their interactions produce new understandings among activists about differing religious perspectives on human/environment interactions. This chapter focuses on two major types of Christians who have become involved with mountaintop removal activism in Appalachia: "mainline Christians," and "evangelical Christians," including Baptist groups and some local, independent churches.

The first category includes liberal denominations such as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and some Methodists as well as some religious governing bodies such as the West Virginia Council of Churches and the Catholic Committee of Appalachia. Although scholars draw the distinction between Catholic and mainline Protestant groups, since those denominations have distinct theological and social histories in the United States, I will treat them together in the case of Appalachia since mainline Protestants and Catholics have more in common than they do with independent, evangelical churches which are often non-denominational. Indeed, since the emergence of the War on Poverty in the 1960s, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, Catholic and Protestant leaders have worked closely on social and environmental problems. Father John Rausch, a Catholic priest who has lived and

worked in Appalachia since 1972 noted, “I’ve probably done more ecumenical work [with mainline Protestants] than I’ve done with in-house Catholic organizations” (Rausch 2009). So while differences between Protestants and Catholics remain important, since they tend to work closely with one another on the issue of mountaintop removal, I will treat them together.

“Evangelical Christians” include in my focus national groups and religious bodies such as the Southern Baptist Convention, local, independent churches generally termed “Appalachian mountain churches” (McCauley 1995), and environmentally focused Christian groups such as Restoring Eden. In his edited survey of Christianity in Appalachia, Bill Leonard outlined four specific articulations of Christianity in Appalachia: mainline, evangelical, Pentecostal, and mountain churches (1999b:xxi). My use of “mainline” mirrors Leonard’s, though I have condensed the other three groups into one termed “evangelical.” This is appropriate because (1) each of these different groups is technically evangelical (following the definition of Noll 1994:8); (2) while evangelicals make up a significant population of Appalachian Christians, in my research they are not more represented than mainline Christian activists among mountaintop removal opponents; and finally (3), I have not personally encountered a practicing Pentecostal anti-mountaintop removal activists (though I have encountered one individual who spoke in favor of mountaintop removal from that perspective and I have met activists who had abandoned their Pentecostal upbringings).

In this chapter I analyze the differing ways these groups have interacted around the issue of mountaintop removal, including points of creative hybridity as well as points of tension. While the chapter proposes and follows basic religious categorizations, it also works to break down barriers between them and to show how, on the ground, religious values infuse anti-mountaintop removal activism in sometimes subtle and even contradictory ways. Given the

region's history and current religious demography, it is highly unlikely that any sweeping social changes such as those proposed by anti-mountaintop removal activists can succeed without the approval of local Christians. Whether and if so how activists of diverse backgrounds can forge those alliances and convince others who do not yet hold an anti-mountaintop removal position remains to be seen.

Mainline Christian Activism

In 1996, sociologist of religion Laurel Kearns identified three major sets of environmental values expressed by Christian environmentalists, namely, "Christian stewardship ethics," "eco-justice ethics," and "creation spirituality ethics." Although individuals and groups drawn to these approaches interacted with and influenced one another, Kearns found that evangelical Christians tended to promote stewardship ethics, mainline Christians promoted eco-justice ethics, and liberal Christians promoted creation spirituality (by which Kearns primarily meant the works of Thomas Berry or Matthew Fox [1996:56, 61]). This creation spirituality perspective is demonstrably present among religious groups across the nation. In her study of Catholic sustainability initiatives, for example, Sarah McFarland Taylor found that "the most visible theoretical influence on the green sisters movement has come from the work of the Passionist priest Thomas Berry" (2007:5). Few activists in Appalachia with whom I spoke expressed affinities with or knowledge of Berry's work. A 2007 edition of the Catholic letter *At Home in the Web of Life*, however, contained a footnote with references to the works of the creation theology of Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, and John Cobb, but the letter did not reference these scholars in its main text (CCA 2007:111, fn. 55). If "creation spirituality" exists elsewhere among anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia, it is subtle and is not present enough to deserve its own treatment in this specific context.

Kearns' other categories, "Christian stewardship" and "eco-justice" ethics, represent well the basic motivations and differences between mainline and evangelical activists in the region. Kearns defined the eco-justice perspective as "linking environmental concerns with church perspectives on justice issues such as the just sharing of limited resources and the real cost of environmental problems. It thus combines an already present Christian social justice framework with environmental concerns—particularly those that center on the effects of environmental degradation on peoples of color and the poor" (1996:57). Among those individuals interviewed that fit under the mainline denominations category (primarily Episcopalians and Catholics), the issue of eco-justice was most prominent. While such categorizations cannot apply universally, many of my mainline interview subjects had direct experience with social justice activism, they spoke of mountaintop removal as a continuation of oppressive and unjust policies toward the poor in North America, and they cited the model of Jesus as a social revolutionary as particularly influential for their work. For these activists, the Biblical mandate to protect and serve the poor is interconnected with the mandate to be good stewards of the earth; and for many, this inspiration is tied to other previous work on civil rights and economic justice throughout the world, thus tying the anti-mountaintop removal movement to much longer activist histories.

Catholic and Episcopalian anti-poverty workers have been active in Appalachia since the emergence of the War on Poverty in the 1960s, and sometimes earlier in the case of the "home mission movement" (Whisnant 1983). One of the first groups was the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA), formed in 1965 as an ecumenical Christian organization focused on dealing with "the religious, moral, and spiritual implications inherent in the economic, social, and cultural conditions in the Appalachian region" (1981 CORA pamphlet, Appalachian Alliance Records, Box 4, Folder 15). As a 1981 pamphlet explained, "the basic purpose is to engage the

resources of the Church and other agencies in activities designed to meet the pressing human needs of the people of Appalachia. The goals are to build community and to combat poverty in Appalachia—and through joint action in this twin mission, to help renew the church” (1981 CORA pamphlet, Appalachian Alliance Records, Box 4, Folder 15). By 1996, CORA included nineteen different regional denominations, and its work focused on the structures of poverty in Appalachia, funding research (such as Couto 1994) and providing organizing tools for local communities (Sessions 1999). Initially focused on issues of poverty, education, and health, CORA later expanded to a critique of economic globalization and related social injustices (CORA 2005). CORA disbanded in 2006 and so does not presently influence anti-mountaintop removal policies. The organization nonetheless represented a first step in mainline Christian justice activism in the region, and some of its constituent members have continued to work on environmental justice issues in Appalachia.

Beyond the work of CORA, one of the first religious statements connecting Appalachian poverty to coal practices was *This Land is Home to Me*, a pastoral letter signed by twenty five Appalachian Catholic bishops. It was first published in 1975 and distributed widely by the Catholic Committee of Appalachia, which formed in 1970 (CCA 2007). The subject of the letter generally followed post-Vatican II Catholic social teachings, focusing on the conditions of the poor as well as unrepresented industrial laborers. The bishops stated clearly, “the living God, the Lord whom we worship, is the God of the poor” (CCA 2007:24). The letter continued that Catholic duties to the poor, following the model of Jesus, involved helping Appalachians rise above their impoverished conditions. The letter noted the coal industry’s involvement in Appalachian poverty but avoided laying the full blame for poverty on it: “without judging anyone, it has become clear to us that the present economic order does not care for its people. In

fact, profit and people frequently are contradictory. Profit over people is an idol” (CCA 2007:17). While the 1975 letter emphasized the injustice of poverty, due in large part to the writings of Pope John Paul II, through the 1970s and 80s the Catholic Church began to address environmental issues as extensions of social justice issues and a general “culture of death” that threatened peace and prosperity on the planet (Gottlieb 2006:89).

In 1995, as a celebration of *This Land is Home to Me*, the regional bishops and CCA published *At Home in the Web of Life*, a second pastoral letter focusing especially on environmental issues. The authors introduced the letter, saying, “in this letter we wish to explore the new tasks which lie before us, particularly the task of creating or defending what are called ‘sustainable communities’” (CCA 2007:43). Whereas the first letter focused almost entirely on poverty and economic exploitation, *At Home in the Web of Life* specifically tied together social justice and environmental sustainability: “we believe it is important to stress both natural ecology and social ecology, that is, a sustainable community which embraces humans and all other creatures” (CCA 2007:47). Theologically, the letter focused on the creation itself a divine revelation: “all creation is itself creative, for it reveals the creative word of God. It is not itself the incarnate word like Jesus, and it is not itself God. But all creation is nonetheless a revelation of God to us” (CCA 2007:52). This perspective was shared by Carol Warren, a Catholic environmental activist from West Virginia, who said, “Creation for Catholics is as much a revelation of God as scripture is, it’s a different form, but that’s the word of God too. And if we’re not careful, there are gonna be words of God that our grandchildren are never going to hear” (Warren 2009). As commentators on religious environmentalism have noted, Catholic environmental thought emphasizes a “sacramental” view of nature, “that is, it views created reality as a sacrament that is a revelation of the presence of God” (Taylor 2007:43; Gottlieb

2006:93; Hart 2005). This sacramental perspective is certainly evident through Warren's statement and *At Home in the Web of Life*.

Finally, before listing several proposals for sustainable community development in the region, the letter noted the ultimate source of social and ecological oppression: "the deep root of the social crisis, that is, the wounding of the poor, and the deep root of the ecological crisis, that is, the wounding of the Earth, can be found in human sin" (CCA 2007:70). Thus, together, the letters laid out the basic Catholic perspective on environmental problems in Appalachia. Environmental destruction is directly tied to economic suffering and oppression of those in need. This destruction is ultimately rooted in the fallenness of humanity (and so a problem for all people, not just some), and it is a Catholic's duty to both serve the poor, in the model of Jesus, and protect the revelations of creation from destruction. The letter thus placed Appalachian Catholic responses to mountaintop removal in Kearns' mainline categories, though the sacramental view of creation challenged her border between the eco-justice of mainline Christians and stewardship models of evangelicals.

Scholarship on Catholic environmental thought shows that specific visions of environmental and social justice vary around the world. Sarah McFarland Taylor examined one specific group of Catholic activists in North America. Building off of the work of Andrew Greeley, Taylor termed general Catholic environmental perspectives the "green Catholic imagination," a hybrid of North American environmental culture and Catholic thought (2007:45). For Taylor, sacramentalism marked the most prominent point of this imagination, though, like the quote in *At Home in the Web of Life* cited above, many Catholics remained skeptical of claims connecting sacredness to nature itself (2007:46-50). Taylor noted that many of the green sisters in her study first entered environmental issues through earlier work on

poverty and social justice issues (2007:81), but for many of her interview subjects, these social issues later fell under broader environmental problems and a desire to realign human relationships with the natural world. In other words, the green sisters generally promoted biocentric orientations toward the world, as advocated by Thomas Berry and other natural theologians, over anthropocentric visions of human/nature relationships that emerged from social justice-oriented perspectives. On the other hand, in her study of intentional communities in Latin America, Anna Peterson found a broader interest in environmental sustainability as part of Catholic efforts to build stronger communities directed at the greater common good. Peterson noted that contemporary Catholic thinkers “contend that God created all of nature to serve human dignity and the common good, not individual profit. This assertion of the social purpose of created goods suggests a strong connection between environmental and social problems” (2005:81). In contrast to Taylor’s findings, among specific Latin American communities sustainable agriculture and other activities are not so much ends in themselves—methods for living out a biocentric view of the natural world—but means to achieve distributive justice within the community, where “a society’s health and success are measured not by how many people become very wealthy but by how few lack the basic requirements of life, with special attention to the least well-off” (Peterson 2005:110). Among anti-mountaintop removal activists on the ground in Appalachia, social justice retains its central place in the local “green Catholic imagination.” Sacramentalism, though present among Appalachian Catholics, seems to fall behind a duty to serve the poor as the central feature of the local environmental perspective.

Beyond corporate statements such as those from local bishops, individual Catholic anti-mountaintop removal activists share this primary interest in environmental work as an extension of social justice. One of the most influential among Catholic anti-mountaintop removal activists

is Father John Rausch, the director of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia. Rausch has worked in Appalachia since 1972 and began his work on poverty with the Glenmary Missioners, based in Ohio. For Rausch, who holds a Master's degree in economics, connecting the excesses of contemporary capitalist society to environmental problems is central. He explained, "my particular ministry is called human economic ministry, which means I try to deal with social justice questions in light of the Gospel teachings" (Rausch 2009). Much like what Peterson found in regard to progressive Latin American Catholics (2005:110), in his teachings Rausch emphasized just distribution of resources: "my motivation is not in terms of money. I see my faith as a countercultural experience. I think everyone has a right to a livelihood, but people do not have a right to amass great wealth. People have a right to work in meaningful employment; I don't think they have a right to necessarily sponge off of other people's hard work" (Rausch 2009). Speaking to Catholic audiences, Rausch recognized the need to frame mountaintop removal in terms of social justice. "To sell it to Catholics, is to say 'this is hurting the poor.' ...Anytime I talk about mountaintop removal, I will always talk about how people's homes are being flooded, the foundations of their homes are being cracked. All these things are being talked about, which is a link into human injustice" (Rausch 2009). Other Catholics shared Rausch's concern for social issues. Chris Martin, a young Tennessee activist who was raised Catholic but left the church at a young age, nevertheless expressed affinities for liberation theology and "the common good, social justice, preferential option for the poor." Though he noted he no longer believed in God or approved of the centralized, hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, Martin noted that he could still "agree with Catholicism on a social level" (C. Martin 2010).

Peterson argued that certain Latin American Catholic and Anabaptist groups emphasize the goal of attaining stable communities, rather than finding individual success (2005:110). Rausch, like many Christian anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia, shared this concern for rebuilding suffering communities. In December of 2002, Rausch organized a Prayer for the Mountaintop in Eastern Kentucky with a local Baptist minister, Steve Peake.¹²⁰ The event was meant as a way for local Christians to express their concerns through prayer, as well as a means for raising awareness about the problems of mountaintop removal. Peake said of the event, “if people can be made aware, I think a difference can be made. Our Prayer on the Mountain was a prayer that these coal operators will recognize what they’re doing” (quoted in Reece 2006:114). Rausch joked about inviting the Associated Press to the service, saying, “God hears the prayer a lot better when it’s printed [in the papers]” (Rausch 2009). The Prayer for the Mountain was thus not only a means for local Christians to express their suffering, but an outlet to media who, in 2002, paid little attention to the suffering caused by mountaintop removal. For those present, however, the service was not merely a media event but reflected a genuine outpouring of concern. Following the prayers and speeches, Rausch distributed wildflower seeds to all participants, hoping they would plant them on the treeless, reclaimed mine site. To his surprise, almost all participants spent several minutes carefully planting the different seeds around the site. When asked why she took such care in planting the seeds, one elderly woman responded, “I’m sowing my community back.” For Rausch, this was a profound moment, revealing the importance of community strength among Appalachian Christians (Rausch 2009).

¹²⁰ The event coincided with National Human Rights Day. According to Rausch, this was not an accident, since human justice was a central feature of mountaintop removal. Mallory McDuff also provided an account of a similar mountaintop “pilgrimage” (2010:123-148).

Of course, emphasizing issues of social and economic justice does not mean that Catholic activists in Appalachia understand mountaintop removal and environmental devastation as purely economic issues. Mystical connections with the natural world, sometimes extending beyond the teachings of the Catholic Church, remain important. When teaching about mountaintop removal, Father Rausch almost always framed the issue along anthropocentric, social justice lines. However, in his own spiritual practice, Rausch noted that nature had more than utilitarian value. He conducts his morning prayers, whenever possible, outside. Rausch said, “I think that my spirit gets renewed when I come out here” (Rausch 2009). In appreciating the creation as good, Rausch felt connected to the Biblical event of creation. He said, “there is another form of prayer, of just appreciation, and that’s what I understand with the notion of Sabbath. On the seventh day, God appreciated it. And anytime you [or] I appreciate it, we are affirming God’s creation, we are praising God. That’s what God does” (Rausch 2009). Personally, for Rausch, this mystical connection to the natural world was as significant as his concern for the poor. It transcended anthropocentric concerns, as he noted, “God didn’t create the world just for human beings, God delighted in creating everything, from earthworms to rocks, and also human beings.” He added, laughing, “earthworms obey God a lot better than human beings” (Rausch 2009). Seeing deeper spiritual meaning in the natural world is part of a mystical practice, for Rausch. Carol Warren likewise expressed spiritual connections with the natural world. Breaking briefly into tears, Warren said, “every time I go to a mountaintop removal site I cry. It seems to me like that’s the only sane reaction. The destruction is devastating. I just really believe that it’s wrong. My worst nightmare is that, in that moment, when I am face to face with my creator, my creator says ‘what have you done to my garden?’ And I have to be able to say, at least I tried” (Warren 2009). For both Rausch and Warren, emotional connections to the living

world are significant. In the Catholic tradition, spiritual connections to the natural world often follow the model of St. Francis of Assisi (Peterson 2005:80).¹²¹ Warren cited Francis as an influential model for her own perspective: “he saw God’s hand everywhere...just thought that everything that was out there showed the glory of God. That to me is the appropriate environmental attitude” (Warren 2009). Warren added that she has been influenced greatly by Buddhist teachings and practices as well, though they serve as supplements to her Catholic beliefs. As individuals, Catholics like Rausch and Warren balance their concerns with social justice and mountaintop removal with deeper, personal connections to the natural world. Appreciating nature and valuing it for itself becomes a kind of spiritual practice.

A central feature of local Catholic teachings on environmental issues, the mandate to protect the environment as an extension of social justice is present among mainline Protestant anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia as well. Rebekah Epling, a young Presbyterian volunteer with Christians for the Mountains, commented about the movement, “it’s a social justice issue, it’s an economic issue, it’s a ministry, it’s not just about the environment...A lot of people I know didn’t get into this for environmental reasons” (Epling 2009). In her experience, and following Rausch’s perspective on what most influences Catholic laypeople, concern for social justice generally drives local Christians to involve themselves in opposition to mountaintop removal.

Throughout the coalfields, Episcopal Church leaders have been deeply engaged in social justice and the fight against mountaintop removal as well, including Reverend Jim Lewis and the West Virginia author Denise Giardina (Figure 6-1). The North American Episcopal Church has

¹²¹ In his highly influential article, Lynn White, Jr. proposed St. Francis as “a patron saint for ecologists” (1967:1207). In 1979, Pope John Paul II proclaimed Francis the patron of “those who would seek to protect the environment” (Gottlieb 2006:87). St. Francis’s connection to environmental issues has thus long been established.

long been one of the most socially liberal denominations in the United States, but local conflicts still emerge over coal policies in Appalachia. Jim Lewis was ordained in the ministry in 1964 and served throughout West Virginia since the 1970s. His work against the second Iraq War, mountaintop removal, and on other issues led to some controversy among local Episcopal clergy (Staff 2010), but in the summer of 2010 he was still deeply engaged in coalfield communities. Lewis was a featured speaker at the large rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School on June 23, 2009. There, he cited the nonviolent work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights workers as models for that days protest.¹²² I interviewed Lewis shortly after the rally and asked specifically about his views on mountaintop removal and social justice. Lewis came to his social and environmental work through an “understanding that my faith calls me to deal with people who are poor, broken, down, out, washed out, flooded out, crippled. And not just to bring them charity but to work on systems, therefore, justice” (Lewis 2009). Working with the suffering people of Charleston and other areas of Appalachia—unemployed miners suffering from black lung, unemployed veterans, drug addicts, people pushed out of their homes by mine-related flooding—helped Lewis realize that solving their problems required changing broader systems of oppression. These were not just abstract concepts, though; he noted that “I never saw an issue that the church was facing that didn’t come to the door” (Lewis 2009). Lewis got involved with the protest against mountaintop removal because of his commitment to justice for the poor and suffering.

Denise Giardina likewise came to her position on the issue of mountaintop removal through her social justice work in Appalachia. Raised in a coal camp in McDowell County, West Virginia, by an Italian immigrant father and Kentucky-born mother, Giardina first

¹²² Author’s field notes. Marsh Fork Elementary School, June 23, 2009.

questioned mining industry power as a child. She witnessed what she called a “disjunction” between the ideals of patriotism and faith expressed through the media and church, and the realities of poverty, suffering, and exploitation in the coal fields. Raised politically conservative, Giardina turned to local activism following the shocks of the Kent State shootings in 1970 (when National Guard troops fired on and killed four college students during a Vietnam War protest at Kent State University) and the 1972 disastrous flood on Buffalo Creek. In 1974, Giardina met Jim Lewis and was further inspired to work on justice in the region. Though raised in the Methodist church of her coal camp (a typical camp church, sponsored by the coal company and attended by a lay preacher), Giardina was greatly influenced by Episcopalian thought and was ordained as a deacon in 1979. Since that time, Giardina has also been a successful author of historical fiction, including two works on coal camp life and the community damage caused by coal companies, *Storming Heaven* (1987) and *The Unquiet Earth* (1992). She worked with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth on broad form deed reform through the 1980s, and in the year 2000, Giardina helped create the Mountain Party in West Virginia and unsuccessfully ran for governor of the state. The Mountain Party’s platform continues to emphasize environmental and social reform in West Virginia. Theologically, Giardina believes that the mountains themselves are special in the eyes of God, and thus worthy of care. “Mountains are one of the most important metaphorical ideas in the Scripture...Mountains are where you go to meet God,” she noted (Giardina 2009). For Giardina, echoing the geological history of the region, the Appalachians were among the first mountains created by God, and despite the damages done by humans, she noted, “I don’t think God’s given up on these mountains” (Giardina 2009). Like other mainline activists, Giardina combined a concern for social justice with a belief that the

natural ecosystems of Appalachia reflect the goodness of God and Christians have a duty to protect them.

Roy Crist, an Episcopal priest from Ansted, West Virginia, took a different approach to mountaintop removal from Lewis and Giardina. Crist was born and raised in Ansted, leaving only to serve for eight years with the U.S. Air Force. In 2002, a coal company applied for a permit to begin a mountaintop mine on nearby Gauley Mountain. Some community members were concerned about this permit, since it included an allowance for coal trucks to run through the center of town every five minutes, 24 hours a day. The outlet to the mine, where the coal trucks would exit, also sat near a school, and any accident could easily threaten the children. In response, Crist and others organized the Ansted Historic Preservation Council to challenge the mine's permits. As the representative priest for the local Episcopal Church, Crist and other local Christians also organized three Blessing of the Mountains events on or near Gauley Mountain. These events drew between 50 and 80 participants each (and on two occasions, counter-protestors from the local mine company), and were primarily aimed at raising awareness about the local problem. Theologically, Crist advocated a stewardship perspective in his opposition to mountaintop removal: "as Christians we have an imperative to take care of the land, to take care of what God has given us, and that includes the mountains. And I don't think that we have a right, as Christians, to destroy God's creation, and I think that we as Christians need to oppose it" (Crist 2009). Though he did not emphasize issues of social justice as much as Lewis and Rausch, Crist ultimately entered his work against mountaintop removal in direct response to threats to his community. He agreed that destroying mountains removed an essential, God-given heritage, and community justice issues remained highly important for him.

For Kearns, a central source of mainline eco-justice thought is liberation theology (1996:56). For Catholic and Episcopalian activists in Appalachia, this is certainly true. In his influential text *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutierrez defined the issue simply, saying, “the theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society” (1988 [1971]:174). Gutierrez and other liberation theologians hoped to elevate the poor and oppressed throughout the world and build stronger communities based on Christian equality. Given the emphasis placed upon economic justice and intolerance in Appalachia, it is easy to see why this field of thought has been influential to many mainline activists. Carol Warren cited Oscar Romero, the Catholic bishop who was murdered for speaking out against the repressive government in El Salvador, as a personal influence primarily because he changed his position on church and politics after witnessing the violence done toward ordinary Salvadorans by their government. For Warren, this ability to change to a controversial position based on faith convictions was particularly inspiring (Warren 2009). Jim Lewis likewise expressed affinities for liberation theologians (though he remained wary because liberation theology had been influenced by Marxist thought and some liberation theologians had supported Marxist governments), and especially the prophetic mission of Martin Luther King, Jr. He noted, “the prophets are really central for me...they stood on the temple steps and told people the truth” (Lewis 2009). For Lewis, this prophetic voice, speaking “truth to power”¹²³ in the face of intimidation and corruption, is needed for the anti-mountaintop removal movement.

¹²³ The term originates from Quaker social thought and a 1955 document entitled *Speak Truth to Power: A Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence* (AFSC). It has since been widely adopted by social justice activists as an apt term for the act of resisting dominant forces of social oppression and violence.

Besides individuals like Rausch, Lewis, Giardina, and others, several mainline Christian organizations and activist groups have taken stances against mountaintop removal. Following foundations laid by CORA and CCA, several national denominations released official statements opposing mountaintop removal mining. These included the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Unitarian Universalist Association, and the Religious Society of Friends.¹²⁴ Following these national letters, a significant moment in local mainstream Christian resistance to mountaintop removal came in 2007, when the West Virginia Council of Churches (WVCC) issued its “Statement on Mountaintop Removal.”

The WVCC represents several major denominations through West Virginia, including Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The Council focused mainly on economic and health issues through the twentieth century, advocating political changes based on consensus Christian perspectives. In the 2000s, though, council members began organizing a general statement on mountaintop removal—an unprecedented move for any Appalachian religious governing body. The drafting process included meetings and presentations with numerous people involved with Appalachian coal, including a visit to Larry Gibson’s Kayford Mountain and a presentation from Bill Raney, the chairman of the West Virginia Coal Association. In September of 2007, the Council released its official statement (WVCC 2007). The statement began by establishing the basic Christian duty to care for the mountains: “as people of faith, called upon by our covenant with God and each other to safeguard and care deeply for what God has created, we cannot stand by while our mountains are being devastated” (WVCC 2007:1). Theologically, the statement proposed (like earlier Catholic

¹²⁴ These statements are all available online at <http://www.ilovemountains.org/resolutions> (accessed May 6, 2011).

pastoral letters), that creation itself was a revelation from God. It stated, “Creation is a revelation of God, brought forth by God’s Word. When we spend time with the wonders of Creation, we observe and learn about the beauty and marvelous attention to the smallest details that fill God’s work. Jesus often went into the wilderness to pray, and there is something special about the closeness many feel to God when contemplating such grandeur” (WVCC 2007:1). The statement went on to list numerous environmental, economic, and social damages from mountaintop removal. Rather than condemning the practice, though, the statement ultimately took a position in the middle ground: “we strongly renew that call for enforcement, believing that if the law is fully enforced, the terrible damage of large-scale mountaintop removal will end” (WVCC 2007: 1). In other words, the statement advocated for increased regulation rather than a total ban on strip mining—though it clearly stated that continued deep mining could provide more necessary jobs in the region. This perspective was also expressed by Roy Crist, who said, “if the companies would follow the law, then they would not get as much grief over mountaintop removal as they do. Although I think it ought to be stopped because it is destroying the mountains. But they will not follow the law, and that’s exactly what’s costing a lot of the coal miners their jobs” (Crist 2009). In this way, both the WVCC and Crist took more moderate stances on mountaintop removal than others among their mainline counterparts.

According to Reverend Dennis Sparks, the Executive Director of the WVCC at the time of the statement’s release, Council officials did not receive substantial criticism from pro-coal forces for their work. The UMWA ultimately refused to either support or decry the statement, and other mine officials bristled at the accusation that laws were not being followed by mountaintop removal companies. Because the statement only called for increased oversight on the current laws, though, pro-coal forces could not entirely condemn the Council’s work. For

Sparks, the churches' primary roles were as mediators between the different voices in the region, between proponents and opponents of mountaintop removal. He said, "so we're working hard to be a reconciler in the middle of that great tension right now. That seems to be our primary role" (Sparks 2009). By taking such a middle ground perspective, the WVCC differentiated itself from outspoken individual opponents of mountaintop removal such as John Rausch and Jim Lewis.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, its statement represented an important step in opening the regional discussion of religious resistance to mountaintop removal. It was no longer radical individuals challenging mountaintop removal from religious perspectives, but even the moderate governing religious bodies themselves.

Institutional statements such as the WVCC's help raise awareness about important issues like mountaintop removal, but questions remain about how these issues translate to specific audiences. How do individuals experience the official statements of institutional bodies? Religious studies scholars have acknowledged for years that religious practices "on the ground," among lay practitioners, often differ from official teachings. For example, Orsi (1997) pointed to the practice of certain New York City Catholics using holy water to bless their cars—a practice not officially sanctioned by the church. This disconnection between institutional doctrine and local practice can likewise apply to environmental issues. In his study of Anglican environmental teachings, Michael DeLashmutt found that official Anglican teachings regarding environmental issues failed to reach local churches. The Anglican Church statements advocating environmental sustainability failed to change the practices of individual Anglicans around England and most were even unaware of their church's official positions on environmental issues. DeLashmutt concluded, "the disparity between the beliefs and practices 'on the ground'

¹²⁵ Although Lewis's church, St. John's Episcopal Church, is represented by the WVCC.

and the theologies and imperatives ‘at the top’ surely represent a crucial problem that impinges upon any church’s ability to express its newly developed environmental concern” (2011:79). Similar tensions between official church institutions and individuals working on the ground are evident in the Appalachian context. Bob Marshall, a co-founder of Christians for the Mountains, made a similar point as DeLashmutt: “I think an official stance from the top down is important, but what I’ve found is, a lot of denominations make good strong statements against mountaintop removal for the people there, and then it never gets into the pews. So the problem is, the priests, the ministers are not being encouraged to talk about it, they’re not being given the material to talk about it” (Marshall 2009). There must be continuous engagement with congregations for these different values to be appreciated. Sometimes, political and economic connections among churches institute barriers between official statements and individual preaching. According to Roy Crist, Episcopalians in West Virginia are uniquely implicated in coal industry practices. He said,

the Episcopal Church in West Virginia was actually, historically, started by coal mine owners. Only the owners and their representatives, the fire bosses and so forth, attended the Episcopal Church. And the coal miners themselves either went to the Baptist church or the Methodist church. So the Episcopal Church has a stigma attached in West Virginia as being the coal owner’s church. And still today that’s very prevalent among people (Crist 2009).

Because the Episcopal Church is historically connected to coal mine owners, priests like Crist sometimes encounter resistance from within the clerical office. He said, “I have far more trouble in my own denomination with mountaintop removal than I do with different denominations” (Crist 2009). On a few occasions, other Episcopal priests have challenged Crist in private on his opposition to mountaintop removal, but he remains firm that he is not opposed to mining, just mountaintop removal. The financial connections between church institutions and the mining industry sometimes pose conflicts of interest to people like Crist. After beginning his work

against the Gauley Mountain mine, Crist grew more aware that a significant source of funding for his church's regular Thanksgiving meal, which fed thousands of poor families in his county, came through donations from Massey Energy. Continuing to accept this money posed a moral dilemma for Crist, but he ultimately decided to continue since the money went to feed the poor, and therefore served a higher end. Such financial complexities, though, present themselves to institutional religious groups, whereas independent churches or religiously motivated individuals may avoid them.

Along with institutional complexities, individual religious leaders face challenges when speaking out against the practice because many members of local churches support mountaintop removal, sometimes because they are related to somebody who earns their living from coal. Lewis, Giardina, Crist, and Rausch all noted that they rarely, if ever, speak specifically about mountaintop removal from the pulpit, and each admitted to having been criticized directly by parishioners or having participants walk out during services that in some way criticized coal. Crist said, for example, "I have never, ever preached a sermon from the pulpit opposing mountaintop removal or coal mining, and I will not. But everybody knows how I feel and we talk about it openly" (Crist 2009). I attended a service led by Father Rausch at a Catholic church in Hazard, Kentucky and in the parking lot noticed several "Friends of Coal" bumper stickers. When I noted this to Rausch later, he replied that once a person walked out during his sermon on environmental issues, but given the presence of pro-coal parishioners, he generally preferred to avoid discussing mountaintop removal during sermons (Rausch 2009). Instead, these preachers' environmental advocacy occurs largely outside of the church setting. This raises questions about just how involved Appalachian churches can be in opposing mountaintop removal and what roles they have in the movement. Because of these complexities, some local activists remain critical

of local churches for their complicity in supporting coal industry practices. Church leaders and institutions face pressure from certain constituents to advocate for an anti-mountaintop removal stance, yet at the same time they do not want to alienate other parishioners or potential church members. For this reason, it appears that most of the constructive Christian work against mountaintop removal is being led by courageous individuals like Giardina, Rausch, Lewis, and Crist who sometimes jeopardize their standing with the church to speak about the issue, while church institutions retain more moderate positions.

Mainline Christians are not the only Christians impacted by mountaintop removal in Appalachia, however, and sometimes challenges emerge in crossing perceived boundaries between mainline and evangelical churches. Toward that end, individuals like Rausch, Lewis, and others have attempted to break down those barriers and include local evangelical Christians in decision making. Jim Lewis expressed this concern well: “so many people in the liberal church--and I’m in the liberal church--are ready to go to India tomorrow and eat food that’s Indian food, and learn some language, and move among the people, but they find it hard to go down the road to a hollow and meet some fundamentalists there, people there that don’t have all the education they have, and who don’t talk like they do, and who are easy to categorize. And that’s a fundamental fault that we all are guilty of” (Lewis 2009). Holding too rigidly to expectations of what evangelicals and mainline Christians “should” believe can construct barriers to cooperation among individuals on the ground.

The experiences of activists in Appalachia show that, while generalizations are accurate in places, community progress is made when individuals can cross ideological boundaries and cooperate. While categorizing different religious approaches to mountaintop removal is helpful, such categories inevitably break down on the ground. Individuals are free to creatively adapt

their religious visions. In her study of Latin American Anabaptist and Catholic communities, Anna Peterson stated the necessity of attending to regional specificities well. These communities, she said, “share certain core beliefs and convictions, as well as practices and customs, with coreligionists in other times and places, at the same time that their religious lives are shaped by their own regional and national as well as personal histories, cultures, and landscapes” (Peterson 2005:110). Likewise, mainline Protestant and Catholic individuals and organizations in Appalachia share essential features with their national counterparts, while at the same time they cross denominational boundaries, interact with, and learn from members of other groups. Like mainline Christians, evangelicals in Appalachia express religious reasons for opposing mountaintop removal that intersect with other local groups.

Evangelical Christian Activism

In the summer of 2010 I visited a family in Boone County, West Virginia, who had recently won a court battle protecting their ancestral home from invasion by a nearby mountaintop removal mine. Talking on their porch for a few hours, one woman told me about how her friends from her Baptist church helped the family in their efforts. When I asked if the minister ever spoke about mountaintop removal in services, I was met with a quizzical look. “No,” she responded, but the unstated implication was clear: “of course not, why would you ask that?” This local Baptist’s simple “no” revealed a widespread ambivalence among Appalachian evangelicals toward environmental issues, especially mountaintop removal. Some evangelicals have fought against mountaintop removal and worked to preserve their homes and communities from pollution and other damages associated with surface mining. Evangelical churches, however, following a long tradition of social disengagement, have remained relatively uninvolved in the issue. As prominent historian of Southern religion Samuel S. Hill explained, “the more connected a congregation is to a wider fellowship, the more likely it is to be directly

involved in public politics. Those churches without affiliation are highly unlikely to engage, as churches, or even as individual members, in political causes, rallies, voting campaigns, and lobbying” (2005:144). To speak of evangelical environmentalism in Appalachia, then, is to wrestle with this local ambivalence and history of disengagement.

The few studies on evangelical environmentalism in Appalachia have also found such ambivalence. In a 2003 study of faith-based environmental initiatives in Appalachia, the authors argued that “the trend in the region appears to be that environmental activism is almost totally limited to mainline churches that happen to operate in the region, while the charismatic Appalachian churches—we found—play a more marginal role. In fact, we failed to find any charismatic churches with ongoing environmental reform initiatives” (Feldman and Moseley 2003:231). By 2011, however, conditions in the region had slightly changed. Looking at individuals, rather than churches, along with the national evangelical creation care movement, Billings and Samson pointed to a long history of activism against the coal industry among evangelicals in Appalachia, dating back to the early days of unionization and moving through the early resistance to surface mining (Billings and Samson forthcoming 2011:5-6). Unlike mainline denominations (represented by the WVCC, for example), few evangelical churches or governing bodies (where they exist) have taken positions against mountaintop removal. Some evangelical individuals, however, like Judy Bonds, Allen Johnson, and the family members I met in Boone County, have committed themselves to environmental reform, motivated in large part by their religious convictions and personal connections to environmental devastation caused by mountaintop removal. While some media reports simplistically celebrate a “greening” of evangelicals, the situation in Appalachia shows that more specificity on what such “greening” entails is needed.

To be clear, “evangelicalism” is an often-used but frequently misunderstood term (see Chapter 3). In the 21st century United States, the term is often synonymous in the public mind with conservative political voters, supporters of the George W. Bush presidency, and mega-church attendees. This politicization of evangelicals follows historical precedents from anti-intellectual fundamentalists of the early 20th century, staunch anti-communists of the Cold War era, and televangelists of the 1980s (Pierard 1984). Evangelicals participate in large, structured organizations such as the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as disconnected, independent churches, such as those in Appalachia. Though self-styled spokespersons appear on occasion, this large body of citizens (according to a 2008 Pew Forum survey, 26.3% of all adult Americans described themselves as evangelical Christians)¹²⁶ seems poorly understood by non-evangelical commentators. Given the assumption that all evangelicals ascribe whole-heartedly to the policies of George W. Bush or Tea Party politicians, it is easy to understand why more liberal commentators like Bill Moyers, with *Is God Green?*, seem surprised when different evangelical individuals and congregations turn toward promoting environmental sustainability. Because of such seemingly disparate practices and beliefs, non-evangelicals are generally left frustrated when attempting to account for a basic evangelical worldview. Ambiguity, though, is a core feature of North American evangelicalism. Mark Noll expressed this point deftly, arguing that “‘evangelicalism’ has always been made up of shifting movements, temporary alliances, and the lengthened shadows of individuals. All discussions of evangelicalism, therefore, are always both descriptions of the way things really are as well as efforts within our own minds to provide some order for a multifaceted, complex set of impulses and organizations” (1994:8). Nonetheless, paraphrasing David Bebbington’s (1989) influential definitions of evangelicalism, Noll argued

¹²⁶ Available online: <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations> (accessed May 10, 2011). Catholics were the second-largest group, making up 23.9% of the adult population.

that evangelicals generally share views of “conversionism (an emphasis upon the ‘new birth’ as a life-changing religious experience), biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), activism (a concern for sharing the faith), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work on the cross)” (Noll 1994:8). These views can be seen among evangelical activists involved in fighting mountaintop removal, but individual perspectives beyond this are more diverse. To truly understand evangelical anti-mountaintop removal activism, then, observers need to set aside assumptions based upon and generalized, national evangelical movement and appreciate the ambiguities, hybridity, and creativity revealed through individual practice.

Because of this vagueness inherent in the term, it is necessary to be clear about which evangelicals are involved in anti-mountaintop removal activism in Appalachia. The majority of evangelical respondents for this project come from local, independent Appalachian churches—what Deborah McCauley and others have termed “Appalachian mountain religion” (1995). National groups are also represented in the movement, but mainly through their activities with evangelical environmental groups such as Restoring Eden or Christians for the Mountains (a local group that encourages volunteers from around the country). Participants from national groups tend to see their activism as a continuation of their religious work to care for creation, while local activists are more likely to have entered the movement in response to direct threats to their homes, families, or communities from mountaintop removal. Despite differences in how they arrived at their work, most evangelical anti-mountaintop removal activists with whom I spoke emphasized the concept of creation care, a perspective which they believe sits on solid Biblical foundations. Unlike Kearns’ “creation spirituality ethics,” which promotes biocentric values of nature, creation care advocates emphasize the heightened role of humans in preserving

the natural world. Clearly, evangelical activists in Appalachia do not represent all evangelicals, and the differences between distinct groups (such as between local, independent Holiness churches and members of the Southern Baptist Convention) remain important.

Evangelical creation care perspectives emerged in part from older Christian arguments regarding environmental stewardship (Kearns 1996:58-60; Glacken 1967). Stewardship proponents reimagined the Genesis concept of “dominion,” when God commanded humans to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). In some instances this passage was given what environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott termed this the “despotic interpretation,” awarding humans “a God-given right to exploit nature without moral restraint” (1994:15). Alternatively, proponents of stewardship argued that “being created in the image of God confers...not only special rights and privileges on human beings but also special duties and responsibilities” (Callicott 1994:16). Among some mainline Appalachian anti-mountaintop removal activists, this responsibility entails keeping the natural world in a state they believe God would prefer (generally a natural state, or creation as it existed before extensive human destruction). Carol Warren, the long-time Catholic activist from West Virginia exemplified this perspective when she said, “it seems to me that, from a faith perspective, we are to treat creation as God would treat it. That to me is what dominion means, not that we have a right to use everything any way that we want to. But that concept to me means, if you have dominion you treat it the way God would treat it” (Warren 2009). John Rausch basically agreed with Warren’s interpretation, noting that dominion in the Biblical sense originally referred to holding God’s property as God would hold it, as he said, “it’s stewardship the way God would care for his own garden, and in Genesis 2:15, God put humanity in the

garden to care and cultivate it” (Rausch 2009). Creation care advocates offered similar interpretations of Genesis as well.

The creation care movement (as distinct from broader Christian discussions of stewardship ethics), emerged in large part through the work of University of Wisconsin zoologist Calvin DeWitt. In 1979, DeWitt helped found the Au Sable Institute in Michigan, promoting biodiversity conservation along the lines of Christian stewardship (McKibben 2006). In his writings, DeWitt argued against the Biblical notion of dominion as complete domination, advocating instead the idea of dominion as “a God-given responsibility for all people” (DeWitt 1998:43). Mistaken Christian views toward nature and human dominion, he argued, derive from a dissociation of God the creator of the world from God the redeemer of the world. When these aspects are reconnected, DeWitt believes, it becomes clear that God’s redeeming work is in preserving the earth (1998:58-59). Creation care thinkers place full ownership of creation in the hands of God, as DeWitt claimed, “real power, after all, belongs to the Maker, not the destroyer” (2000:294). At the same time, dominion still implies an elevated position for humanity. As physician and popular creation care advocate Matthew Sleeth argued, “implied in our dominion is our dependency on everything under us. Cut the root out from under a plant and the fruit above it will perish, despite its superior position” (2006:35). Though not free to destroy creation as they see fit, humans still retain an exceptional place in the natural world in this perspective (Peterson 2001), and this forms an important philosophical difference between those who advocate biocentric environmental ethics and anthropocentric-oriented creation care advocates.

Beyond theological concerns and Biblical interpretations, however, creation care entails engaging in and redeeming the world (Kearns 1996:59). As Sleeth said, “the environmental movement needed new leadership, and that leadership had to be motivated by moral convictions.

I am convinced that when the church becomes fully engaged in the problems of creation care, we will overcome seemingly insurmountable odds” (2006:24). If evangelicals widely adopt this position, Sleeth continued, “we will begin to see positive changes on an unprecedented scale” (2006:24). A number of groups have emerged to promote this social vision of creation care, including the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN). A small organization focused mainly on spreading information about creation care, the EEN formed in 1993 and published *Creation Care*, a regular magazine providing Christian perspectives on environmental issues (Larsen 2005).¹²⁷ A second influential national group is Restoring Eden, which emerged out of Christians for Environmental Stewardship in 2001. Restoring Eden and its preceding organization were founded by Peter Illyn, a Pentecostal pastor from the Pacific Northwest. Illyn turned to creation care in the 1990s after he perceived tension between national evangelical resource policies, which promoted reduced environmental regulations and increased exploitation, and his own feelings that the natural world should be protected. In 1990, Illyn experienced a profound moment of spiritual crisis when, on a multi-month trek along the Pacific Crest Trail, he came across a clear-cut in an old growth tree stand. Upon witnessing the devastation, Illyn recalled, “at first I thought, *God, why would You allow this to Happen?* And then I asked, *Who will speak for the ancient forests, Lord? Who will speak for the elk?* (quoted in Ross 2011:84, italics in original). Working with a small permanent staff, Restoring Eden continues to spread information about creation care and support Christian student involvement in environmental advocacy, offering tours for Christian college students to Appalachia to visit communities impacted by mountaintop removal.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ See <http://creationcare.org/> (accessed May 11, 2011).

¹²⁸ See <http://restoringeden.org/about/history>, (accessed May 11, 2011). Lucas Johnston provided an excellent history and analysis of the creation care movement in “The Religious Dimensions of Sustainability” (2009).

In Appalachia, the Lindquist Environmental Appalachian Fellowship (LEAF) works on spreading the message of creation care. LEAF was formed in 2005 by members of the Church of the Savior (connected with the United Church of Christ) in Knoxville, Tennessee in honor of fellow environmentally conscious parishioner Cathy Lindquist.¹²⁹ Besides its legislative work seeking to protect Tennessee's mountains from further mountaintop mining, LEAF distributes creation care packets to local churches, including Sleeth's book. According to Volunteer Coordinator Pat Chastain, Sleeth has been very supportive of LEAF's work and graciously contributed materials for their use (Chastain 2009). A second group in Appalachia, also formed in 2005, is Christians for the Mountains. Like LEAF, Christians for the Mountains is not expressly an evangelical organization, though because of its co-founder Allen Johnson and some other members, it is sometimes held up as an example of evangelical environmental concern (Billings and Samson 2011; Moyers 2006). Christians for the Mountains formed out of meetings held in 2005 by several long-term Christian activists from West Virginia and Kentucky, including Allen Johnson, who had already been very active in Christian environmental groups such as Opening the Book of Nature and the Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation. Participants at the organizational meeting decided to frame their organization as specifically Christian because they felt the need to speak from a specific standpoint, to speak specifically to churches and "sharpen the message," not because they sought to include other activists (Johnson 2009). The group's first action was to develop an educational toolkit, much like LEAF's creation care package. Christians for the Mountains produced a DVD entitled *Mountain Mourning*, featuring the work of Larry Gibson and Maria Gunnoe. In subsequent years, the group raised sufficient funds to organize a volunteer house in Ansted, West Virginia, staffed by

¹²⁹ See <http://www.tnleaf.org/> (accessed May 11, 2011).

Sage Russo,¹³⁰ a local evangelical and activist who had been involved in organizing Mountain Justice Summer (Johnson 2009; Marshall 2009; Russo 2009). Together, LEAF and Christians for the Mountains represent the most visible grassroots Appalachian groups promoting a creation care perspective.

Environmentally conscious evangelical groups and individuals have received significant attention from the mainstream media. *Newsweek* published a short article on Allen Johnson and Christians for the Mountains in August 2005, for example, only three months after the group formed (Gates and Juarez 2005). According to Johnson, the general attitude among the media and liberal groups was that evangelical environmentalism did not fit the dichotomies drawn through the “culture wars” (Hunter 1992; Johnson 2009). Evangelical churches (unlike liberal and mainline churches) are not heavily involved in the movement against mountaintop removal, but evangelical individuals such as Allen Johnson, Judy Bonds, and Sage Russo have taken positions of leadership in the movement. Although they come from different backgrounds, many evangelicals who resist mountaintop removal share similarities in perspective. As explained by DeWitt and Sleeth, caring for creation is fundamentally religious work for Johnson, Bonds, and Russo, based on what they take to be clear Biblical precedents and the living model of Jesus. Some, like Johnson and Bonds, argue that their work is less meant to save the earth than to celebrate the church (and even in some instances, convert others to the Christian message). While some evangelicals unapologetically promote anthropocentric views of human relationships to the rest of nature, others in the Appalachian anti-mountaintop removal movement place God at the pinnacle of creation’s hierarchy (in what is called a theocentric

¹³⁰ Sage sometimes goes by slightly different names, including Sage Vekasi-Philips, but in this dissertation I will present his name as was agreed in our 2009 interview.

perspective). Johnson, Bonds, Russo, and other Appalachian evangelical environmental activists cooperate and share perspectives with non-evangelical groups.

Following Bebbington's (1989) characterization of evangelical thought, advocates of creation care must cite Biblical authority to back their environmentalist perspectives. Calvin DeWitt identified six basic Biblical principles for conservation, the principles of "reciprocal service" (to serve and till the land in order to enjoy its products), "earthkeeping" (to keep the land in good condition), "fruitfulness" (to preserve the capacity for growth and production), "Sabbath" (to not overexploit, to allow for rest), "peaceable kingdom" (to preserve social and environmental integrity and justice), and "practice" (to live these principles, not just reflect upon them) (2005:173-174). Similarly for anti-mountaintop removal evangelicals in Appalachia, the Bible and Christian principles form fundamental motivations for their work, and Bible passages make frequent appearances on signs at protests and other anti-mountaintop removal literature (see Figures 6-2 and 6-3). A first set of Biblical mandates to care for creation cited by Appalachian evangelical activists comes in Genesis, when God creates the world and, at each stage, proclaims it "good" (Genesis 1:1-2:4). For example, Sage Russo, a volunteer for Christians for the Mountains and long time Mountain Justice activist, said nature was to be protected because "it's God's and God declared it good before we showed up on the scene and we were told to have dominion over it and to care for it" (Russo 2009). Though God directly gives dominion over living things to the first man and woman, creation care and stewardship advocates argue that this dominion confers responsibility and respect, not simply exploitation. The Psalms likewise hold many passages that Christian environmental activists cite as supporting a creation care worldview, including most frequently Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Allen Johnson called this passage the

“foundational scripture” for Christians for the Mountains (Johnson 2009). Following this passage, some believe that God is personally angered or hurt when his property is destroyed. At a public meeting with the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, for example, Judy Bonds stated, “these mountains don’t belong to anyone but God ... In my heart, I can feel God’s anger. I can just imagine tears running down His face at what He sees happening to His creation” (quoted in Shnayerson 2008:51). Another important passage for such environmentally concerned evangelicals, reflecting a more general evangelical concern for the end of days, comes in Revelations 11:18, when voices from heaven announce that the time has come “for destroying those who destroy the earth.” As Russo explained, “that’s a pretty harsh, direct statement about accountability in the last days” (Russo 2009). Numerous other passages could be cited, but that Biblical foundation is an absolute necessity for Bonds, Johnson, and Russo.

Following Bebbington’s categorization, many evangelicals argue that humanity exists in a fallen, sinful state, salvageable only through the redeeming power of the resurrected Christ. Among evangelical creation care advocates, human sin is the root of environmental damage as well. In its 1994 declaration, the Evangelical Environmental Network enumerated several essential beliefs behind creation care, including, “we believe that in Christ there is hope, not only for men, women and children, but also for the rest of creation which is suffering from the consequences of human sin” (EEN 1994). For the EEN, environmental devastation is one of those consequences of sin. In *Is God Green?*, Allen Johnson likewise referred to environmental destruction as breaking a covenant and sin. He said, “we’re breaking a covenant with God. We’re breaking a covenant with Creation and with other people and with future generations. It is a sin. Sin’s not a word that is popular today, but that’s what it is” (Johnson, quoted in Moyers 2006). In a prayer offered before a 2005 rally at Marsh Fork Elementary, Johnson made a

similar point: “we name this as you, God, see it to be: sin, evil, iniquity” (quoted in Shapiro 2010:103). Though many evangelicals believe all humans are implicated in original sin, some, like Bonds, continue that specific acts like mountaintop removal require extra input from evil motivations like greed (see Figure 6-4). In her statement introducing *Is God Green?*, Bonds exclaimed, “this is a battle between good and evil and now is a time to stand up and be counted for” (quoted in Moyers 2006). For Johnson, mountaintop removal is a result of “systemic evil,” including social inequalities, economic oppression, and political corruption (Johnson 2009). This perspective on the evil of mountaintop removal is also shared by some non-evangelicals. In a 2007 editorial in the *Charleston Gazette*, Denise Giardina wrote, “I will be as blunt as I can be. Mountaintop removal is evil, and those who support it are supporting evil. The mountains of West Virginia are God’s greatest gift to West Virginia. To destroy the mountains is to spit in the face of God Almighty” (Giardina 2007). Such language is sometimes seen as divisive, but nonetheless it fits within a broader trajectory of evangelical discourse.

Creation care elevates humans to a position of prominence in creation and “human exceptionalist” statements abound in creation care literature (Peterson 2001:38). Richard Cizik, a former executive for the National Association of Evangelicals, made his view clear to Bill Moyers: “those who say, ‘well, you’re caring about plants and animals more than people.’ Au contraire, this is about people” (quoted in Moyers 2006). Like proponents of Kearns’ “eco-justice” perspective, evangelicals emphasize the human justice dimensions of environmental problems. Bob Marshall stated clearly, “it’s as much a social justice issue, as far as the people who are being impacted, as well as the environment” (Marshall 2009). At a rally in North Carolina in 2009, Judy Bonds similarly called for concern about impacted human communities,

saying, “you hear people saying ‘save the baby whales.’ Well, hell, save the baby humans! Come on, let’s save the baby humans!”¹³¹

Although they are concerned for the wellbeing of humans, some Christian Appalachian activists cannot be accurately termed anthropocentric. Instead, the ultimate concern is for the interests of God. As Sage Russo asked, “if we love God the creator, shouldn’t we care for all His creation?” (Russo 2009), the implication being that creation care comes second, after love of God. Rather than saving the world as an end in itself, Allen Johnson explained that his purpose was to “magnify God’s presence and revelation in the world by my advocacy for what God has made and God loves and God has created” (Johnson 2009). Instead of anthropocentrism, then, Russo, Johnson, and others advocate “theocentric” perspectives. The ultimate locus of the good is God’s will, not the flourishing of humans, as many anthropocentric perspectives would claim. Christian ethicist James Gustafson originally advanced a theocentric perspective in his two volume *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (1983, 1992). He later applied this perspective to environmental issues, arguing that “if God saw that the diversity God created was good, it was not *necessarily* good for humans and for all aspects of nature” (1994:44, italics in original). Allen Johnson expressed his personal theocentric approach directly, saying that “it’s not so much this typical anthropocentric view that God gave us this creation so we can use it for our purposes. No, it’s a theocentric perspective; God made this creation for God’s purposes” (Johnson 2009). Neither the supposed inherent rights of nature nor the flourishing of humans at the expense of the rest of the environment, then, formed the foundation of Johnson’s anti-mountaintop removal position. Instead, for Johnson and Russo, activism entails living out, to the best of their abilities, the will of God for justice, peace, and harmony on earth.

¹³¹ Author’s field notes, June 19, 2009.

Attempting to discern the intentions of God and acting upon them thus forms a major motivation for some evangelical anti-mountaintop removal activists. As Judy Bonds explained to Bill Moyers in *Is God Green?* (and to others on many other occasions), “now which one of these mountains do you think God will come down here and blow up? Which one of these hollers do you think Jesus would store waste in? That’s a simple question. That’s all you have to ask” (quoted in Moyers 2006). Similar concerns among Christians around the world led to the popular and lucrative line of “What Would Jesus Do?” merchandise in the 1990s. Following the popularity of this model, the Evangelical Environmental Network created its “What Would Jesus Drive?” campaign to raise awareness about fossil fuels and climate change. Following in the model of Jesus is a goal for other activists in Appalachia as well. Allen Johnson said that the central driving question behind his environmental work was “is this God’s purpose for creation?” (Johnson 2009). For Johnson and Bonds, mountaintop removal is clearly not something God or Jesus would do.

Finally, two important characteristics for evangelical thought according to Bebbington were “conversionism” and “activism,” or emphases upon the “new birth” conversion experience to Christianity and the mandate to spread the faith to others. Both of these characteristics are evident among evangelical anti-mountaintop removal activists.. Judy Bonds was raised as a member of a Free Will Baptist Church near her home in West Virginia, but moved away from Christianity as she got older and more focused on work and raising a family. The Free Will Baptists, one of the many small Baptist subdenominations in the region, argue that redemption is available to all who believe and practice Christian faith, not simply to the elected few, as some Calvinist-based churches hold. Thus, the “free will” in their name: individuals can choose between working toward salvation and perdition, it is not necessarily preordained (Dorgan

1987:38). Though she had moved away from the church in her younger years, the worsening condition of her homeland and the health threats to her family led Bonds back to the church. This exercise of free will in seeking out redemption fit within her Christian upbringing. Bonds explained about her transition back into faith, “you put that on the back burner until something in your life, you desperately need Jesus, and then you start to pray again” (Bonds 2009). As Bonds grew increasingly aware of the destruction surrounding her, she also reflected on the importance of nature on her life: “in feeling in these mountains what I felt as a child, I began to realize that I never felt...as close to God in his creation. Not in a building that man made and said this is where you come to worship God, but right here like where we’re sitting right now, where God made” (Bonds 2009). As these feelings of connection to the natural world developed, Bonds re-read the Bible, discovering passages in Genesis and Psalms about the beauty and value of the earth, and she began to believe that caring for creation was indeed a proper Christian’s duty. She explained, “all that came together for me...and I knew then I was walking the right path....So it brought me closer to God” (Bonds 2009; see also Shapiro 2010:61-62). Bonds had no official theological training, but her experiences in nature and witnessing the environmental destruction of her home generated a conversion experience where she returned to the most familiar moral language of her youth. Other evangelical activists reported similar conversion experiences. Sage Russo worked as a radical activist among anarchist communities for many years, but as he grew more aware of local environmental damage (including mountaintop removal), he noted “what was most evident about God’s existence was disappearing.”¹³² Working on environmental issues marked a conversion to a new Christian life for both Bonds and Russo.

¹³² Author’s field notes, March 29, 2008. Russo was speaking to a panel on religion and mountaintop removal at the Annual Meeting of the Appalachian Studies Association at Marshall University, West Virginia.

Some evangelical activists also see their work as subtly influencing non-Christians in Appalachia as well. Allen Johnson asserted that evangelical environmentalists such as himself provide a “moral plane” for the environmental movement, beyond the interests of secular groups (Johnson 2009). He said that the increasing popularity of evangelical creation care, especially among youth, reveals that the movement answers a need among North Americans: “there is a spiritual hunger, and the question is, who’s gonna feed that” (Johnson 2009). The belief in the importance of Christian activists in the movement against mountaintop removal was shared by fellow Christians for the Mountains founder, Bob Marshall. Talking about radical environmentalists in the region, Marshall said, “we need to be witnesses to these people, that’s a whole hidden gem to this thing” (Marshall 2009). Judy Bonds likewise believed that modeling positive examples of Christian environmentalism could help win secular environmentalists toward the faith. Like Johnson, Bonds believed many young environmentalists sought spiritual depth. Speaking to journalist Tricia Shapiro about young radical environmentalists present in the formation of Mountain Justice Summer, Bonds said, “Earth First! are doing God’s work, they just don’t realize it and they won’t acknowledge it” (quoted in Shapiro 2010:62). The desire to convert others to Christianity is strong among ardent evangelicals, but my experiences in the field show that this concern for conversion did not prevent Appalachian evangelical anti-mountaintop removal activists for working with other activists who rejected evangelical Christian values.

It is clear that evangelical anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia exhibit certain characteristics, identifying their work as distinctly evangelical. Many cite approvingly the concept of creation care, particularly as defined by evangelical thinkers such as DeWitt and Sleeth. Through individual comments, major evangelical themes as described by Bebbington

and Noll are also apparent: a strong emphasis upon the Biblical basis for environmentalism, a concern for personal conversion and spreading the faith to others, and a belief that the church (as the body of Christians on earth) should engage with the world, rather than retreat from it and await the apocalypse. However, as Noll (1994) explained, evangelicalism has always been marked by ambiguities and adaptability. Popular portrayals of evangelical environmentalism, such as *Is God Green?*, often assume a consistent evangelical identity and that outsiders immediately understand the nature of that identity. There remain differences among individual evangelical activists in Appalachia that challenge homogenizing characterizations of evangelical environmentalism. For example, after telling a story about speaking to a reporter for a Christian magazine, Christians for the Mountains volunteer Rebekah Epling said, “people are interested in faith-based organizations working on these things [environmental issues], but they want to put it in this category. Like they think they know what kind of people we are and what we’re doing and kind of want to show their own story of how they can figure this is what Christians...care about it” (Epling 2009). “Evangelical environmentalism,” instead, describes a field of beliefs and practices, and less a worldview shared consistently among all who describe themselves (or are described) as such. Individuals may at times occupy points that clearly fit within that field—such as concern for conversion and Biblicism—but at other times move beyond it—such as Bonds’ reference to the earth as God’s body or Russo’s connection to anarchist political philosophy.

These complexities of “evangelical” belief and practice are evident among Appalachian anti-mountaintop removal activists. Primarily, some evangelical activists in Appalachia experience exclusion or alienation from evangelical churches for their work. Allen Johnson, who has lived in Eastern West Virginia with his wife and family since 1974, said, laughing,

“because of who we are, it’s hard for us to fit into church congregations real well ... It’s been a frustration for us to fit into churches” (Johnson 2009). At the time he and his wife attended a non-denominational church across the border in Virginia, where he described the general attitude as basically accepting. Fellow congregants knew of their work, but in his perception, they did not necessarily support it. The situation was similar for other evangelical activists, such as Judy Bonds. According to Johnson, Bonds experienced great difficulties in her home community and often found greater fellowship among activists than with other local evangelicals.

Beyond intergroup difficulties, some activists in Appalachia, while expressing clearly evangelical beliefs regarding creation, express other attitudes about politics and society that come from outside of the evangelical tradition. Both Allen Johnson and Sage Russo, for example, received religious training from Anabaptist traditions. Johnson was raised in Indiana in the Church of the Brethren, one of the Historic Peace Churches emerging from enlightenment-era Germany; and Sage Russo, raised in a Presbyterian church by a Methodist mother, attended a Mennonite seminary (Johnson 2009; Russo 2009).¹³³ Likewise, Bob Marshall, a co-founder of Christians for the Mountains, was raised Baptist in West Virginia but later joined the Episcopal Church due to that church’s environmentally friendly policies (Marshall 2009). In our interview, Russo clarified his diverse denominational background: “I would consider myself to just be an evangelical Christian, that’s it. Open to the work of the Holy Spirit, somewhat charismatic in that way, but not denominationally bound. I think binding ourselves by denominations hurts us because we cut off what else is there, what else we have to learn from the bigger body of Christ” (Russo 2009). Allen Johnson qualified the “evangelical” label that has been applied to him so

¹³³ Other Anabaptist groups have become involved in the resistance to mountaintop removal. During the 2010 Appalachia Rising march in Washington, D.C., for example, members of the Earth Quaker Action Team broke away and peacefully occupied a local branch of PNC Bank, at the time a leading funder of mountaintop removal mining.

frequently: “it’s hard for me to say I’m totally an evangelical Christian, I’m a bit broader than that, but that’s still my roots in that milieu” (Johnson 2009). The resistance and hostility Appalachian evangelical environmentalists face from other evangelical congregations requires that claims of overwhelming evangelical “greening” must be tempered. Evangelical values influence Bonds, Johnson, and Russo, but other concerns, braided with their religious values, likely influence their continued commitment to environmentalism in spite of broader evangelical skepticism toward anti-mountaintop removal activists.

The Anabaptist and radical Christian influences are evident in the work of Johnson and Russo, especially through their views of the relationship between the church and the state. As Anna Peterson explained, since their emergence in the early Protestant Reformation in Europe many Anabaptist groups have understood themselves as a “third way,” beside Protestants and Catholics. This third way was “distinguished by the core values of nonviolence and nonresistance, separation from the world, mutual aid, and congregational autonomy” (Peterson 2005:22-23). Johnson and Russo accept the importance of social engagement, but they share Anabaptist views of the church as a body of believers (the “believers church” [Yoder 2002:148]) and the importance of mutual aid beyond the powers of the secular state. In a statement that challenges simplistic portrayals of his environmental work, Allen Johnson explained, “my struggle here is not for God’s creation...it’s for the integrity of the church” (Johnson 2009). For Johnson, as similarly defined by Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, “the church is God’s people gathered as a unit, as a people, gathered to do business in his name” (Yoder 2002:177). When Christians fail to follow Biblical mandates for stewardship and justice, then, they not only harm the world, they harm the integrity of the church. Johnson believed that those Christians who promoted mountaintop removal (even knowing its environmental and social

impacts) were overly interested in personal goals, rather than God's goals. He said, "when it comes down to the green of a dollar bill and the green of a tree, that's when you find out where people really are" (Johnson 2009). Christians who allow a sin like mountaintop removal, Johnson contended, have clearly misplaced their religious priorities. For Yoder, the church is a political entity, it is "both the paradigm and the instrument of the political presence of the gospel" (2002:189). Similarly for Johnson, failing to speak out against something like mountaintop removal aligns churches with non-Biblical politics, with a love of money rather than a love of creation.

For Sage Russo, who began his environmentalist work with North Carolina-based anarchist communities, the Anabaptist critique of the secular state was particularly influential. On the morning of July 5, 2009, Russo was asked to offer a prayer service at a gathering of activists on Larry Gibson's property. His sermon was clearly directed to the activists assembled. He started by explaining his own connections with anarchist and radical environmental communities and how he understood why young people might criticize Christians and the church. But the true church was not the fat American driving an SUV, deaf to suffering in the world, he continued. The true church was with a mother in Africa praying with her children in secret amidst a raging civil war, or with farmers of Latin America fighting to preserve their land from government and corporate incursions. The true church was strength for the suffering, and hope for the hopeless.¹³⁴ In other words, the true church was radical and opposed to the dominant, Western capitalist culture. For this reason, the true church was also present in Appalachia, where locals stood against seemingly insurmountable powers to save their communities. For some radical Christians, the body of the church is by definition separate from

¹³⁴ Author's field notes, July 5, 2009.

the state, though since the “imperial baptism” of Constantine, who legalized Christianity and embarked upon a mission to Christianize others by force, the two have worked together (Claiborne and Haw 2008:171).¹³⁵ According to Sage, the true body of the church remains with those who suffer the oppression of the dominant culture.

Russo’s perspective was also influenced by the Christian new monastic movement. This movement combined anarchist understandings of the state and an emphasis upon peaceful and loving resistance with mandates for social engagement. The new monastic perspective is explained by Shane Claiborne, author of influential radical Christian books such as *Jesus for President* (2008) and *The Irresistible Revolution* (2006). Claiborne offered a radical, anarchistic political vision: “once upon a time there were no kings or presidents. Only God was king” (2008:25). New monastics like Claiborne at once critique contemporary political parties and powers, but at the same time offer their own Bible-based political message, not so much itself as a political affiliation, but as a call to engagement in issues of justice. Russo explained, “the message of Christ doesn’t end up on either side of the political aisle, sometimes it ends up on both and sometimes neither, but when politics has become the forefront it’s throwing it [the message of Jesus] off” (Russo 2009). Avoiding political labels and the processes of the dominant system, though, does not suggest a lack of social engagement.

In this call for deeper social engagement, new monasticism diverges significantly from Anabaptist tradition. As Peterson explained, many Anabaptist communities largely withdraw from broader social work, offering aid to the suffering as needed, but generally preferring to stay away from national political changes (2005:115-116). Anabaptists like Yoder emphasize the

¹³⁵ Some Anabaptists likewise critique the state, arguing that Christians work by definition outside of the realm of secular society. Indeed, as Yoder explained, the true Christian community was dramatically changed when early reformers transitioned from focusing on the community itself to winning other souls and Christianizing society itself (Yoder 2002:103-107).

power of meekness and pacifism, as he said, “that suffering is powerful, and that meekness wins, is true not only on heaven but on earth” (2002:35). While the philosophy of passive resistance and nonviolence undergirds much Christian activism in Appalachia, individuals like Russo, Bonds, and others have at times engaged in non-violent civil disobedience. For Russo (and the 11 other Christian activists interviewed in depth for this project as well as many of those with whom I conducted informal conversations), the injustice of mountaintop removal demands engagement: “the Scriptures talk about God hating injustice, over and over again. This is a God of compassion and justice, love and mercy, and if we just turn around, turn our back and walk away from this...that’s not working for the justice and compassion and mercy and love” (Russo 2009). How that action, working for justice and compassion, unfolds remains a debatable subject. In their activism, however, Bonds, Johnson, Russo and other advocates of creation care stray from the history of social disengagement marked by so many Appalachian churches. They combine insights and perspectives from other traditions with a foundational evangelical worldview to generate unique, individual responses to environmental and social problems around their homes.

Conclusion

For good reasons it is common to distinguish between theologies of mainline and evangelical Christians. At the same time, however, mainline and evangelical Christians share perspectives and beliefs, they learn from each other and prove willing to change, while also preserving essential features of their identities. As Christians in Appalachia get involved in local environmental struggles they also encounter what Bron Taylor termed the global environmentalist milieu, “in which shared ideas incubate, cross-fertilize, and spread. It is a process characterized by hybridization and bricolage” (2010:14). Christianity does not provide the only resource for anti-mountaintop removal environmentalism in Appalachia. Christian and

non-Christian activists share beliefs and practices through a braided network as well, and this is most significantly represented through forms of nature religion.



Figure 6-1. Jim Lewis (left) and Denise Giardina (right) speak at a rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School. Photo by author, June 23, 2009.



Figure 6-2. A billboard near Marsh Fork Elementary School. Note the small sign with a passage from Psalms, most likely a reference used in opposition to mountaintop removal. Photo by author, June 23, 2009.

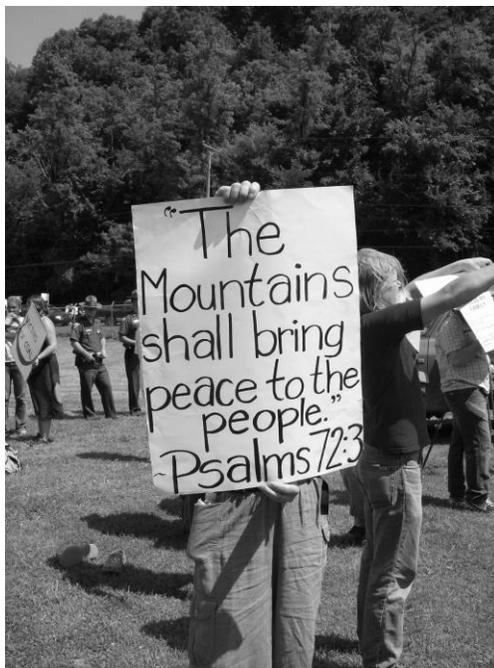


Figure 6-3. A protestor holds a sign at a rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School. Photo by author, June 23, 2009.

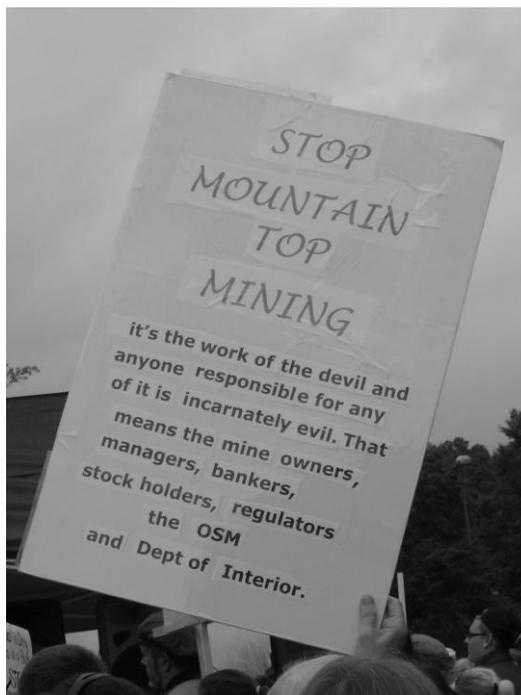


Figure 6-4. A protestor holds a sign at Appalachia Rising march in Washington, D.C. Note the religious references to the devil and evil. Photo by author, September 27, 2010.



Figure 6-5. Judy Bonds (left) talks with a local reporter at a rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School. Photo by author, June 29, 2009.



Figure 6-6. Sage Russo (center) reads from his Bible and prays before a rally against the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville, Tennessee. Photo by author, July 26, 2009.

CHAPTER 7
RELIGIOUS RESISTANCE TO MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL, PART II: NATURE
RELIGION AND HYBRIDITY

Focusing on the influence of religious values on environmental behaviors, such as resistance to mountaintop removal, it is necessary to look beyond recognized traditions such as Christianity to other forms of religiosity that place value in the biological or spiritual processes of the natural world. This chapter examines “nature religion” among anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia. This category encompasses individuals who have affinities with what Bron Taylor termed “dark green religion” (2010), including proponents of deep ecology, Gaia Theory, and other biocentric ideas. It also includes examples of American Indian religiosity, primarily through the work of Indigenous activists from across the nation who are involved with anti-mountaintop removal activism, as well as a final group I refer to as “Appalachian nature religion.” This final category, based in Taylor’s theory as well as work in Appalachian mountain religion (McCauley 1995), includes locals who profess naturalistic forms of religiosity based on feelings of belonging to and kinship with the specific landscape of Appalachia.

Following the exploration of nature religiosity in Appalachia, the chapter reflects upon religious resistance against mountaintop removal in general, examining the points of cooperation and conflict among different stakeholders. Evangelical Christians and radical environmentalists work together on common projects, but this does not mean they are coalescing into a singular group. Instead, individual identities and distinctions remain important on the ground. Religion holds a somewhat ambiguous place in resistance to mountaintop removal. Some say it is the driving force behind their work, while others cite absolutely no religious beliefs at all (though their commitment to fighting mountaintop removal shows that they nonetheless value Appalachian ecosystems). In still other instances, religious values are used in support of mountaintop removal mining. For these reasons, scholars must be aware of their representations

of the “greening” of religion. In conclusion, the chapter proposes that the narrative ethics of Alastair McIntyre, Mark Johnson, and others help understand how religious values influence specific religious activists while at the same time acknowledging the important distinctions between individuals and groups. Of course, focusing on Christian resistance in Chapter 6 and nature religion here does not cover the religious values of every participant in anti-mountaintop removal protests. Instead, my research focus has been on locals and other activists who have made long-term commitments to the issue, and I believe my categorization is sufficiently representative of that community.

Nature Religion and Environmental Activism

Nature religion, in various forms, is widely present among anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia. This term was introduced as a religious type by Catherine Albanese in *Nature Religion in America* (1990) and significantly revised and expanded upon by Taylor in various publications, including *Dark Green Religion* (2010) (though Taylor provided a longer history of the concept, tracing it back through early religious studies scholars such as E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer and older thinkers such as Spinoza and Rousseau [2010:5-10]). Though Taylor and Albanese disagreed on important points, their works can still be read together to provide an image of nature religiosity.

In *Nature Religion in America*, Albanese avoided concrete definitions of nature religion and instead focused on nature religion as a scholarly lens revealing the profound connections between humans and nature that could be traced through numerous specific instances in American history (1990:15). She said, “nature, in American nature religion, is a reference point with which to think history” (Albanese 1990:8). Moving through history, nature religion was evident through diverse expressions. Nature formed both a concrete and symbolic center for American Indians, as well as participants in the macrobiotic spiritual movement, who sought

harmony through lifestyle choices between their bodies and the natural world, to give just two of her several examples. Albanese concluded that such diversity makes it appropriate to speak of multiple nature religions (1990:1999), but tying all articulations together is the concept of nature, which has provided a “symbolic center” for changing beliefs and practices related to U.S. national identity and American conceptions of the sacred (1990:7). In *Reconsidering Nature Religion* (2002), a published set of lectures given in the year 2000, Albanese provided a slightly more direct orientation (if not definition) to nature religion. Nature is an equalizer—all humans must respond to it physically and cognitively. Focusing on nature religion, then, is a way to examine the diversity of responses to, as she said, “aspects of life over which humans, literally, have no control and before which they must bow” (2002:24). The interesting enterprise for Albanese, then, became exploring the numerous historical permutations of religious responses to nature.

Mastery, harmony, and domination were fundamental concepts that persisted in tension through various forms of nature religion, according to Albanese. She said, “on the one hand, nature religion seemed to encourage the pursuit of harmony, as individuals sought proper attunement of human society to nature and thus mastery over sources of pain and trouble in themselves and others. And yet, nature religion fostered more ambivalent themes of fear and fascination for wilderness and, at the same time, an impulse for dominance and control” (Albanese 1990:12). Albanese pointed to Thomas Jefferson as one example of the tensions between harmony and mastery in American nature religion. Like some of his 18th and 19th century contemporaries, Jefferson found intellectual stimulation in the harmony and beauty of the natural world. Jefferson spoke glowingly of viewing Natural Bridge from a distance, a geological feature on his Virginia property. Albanese argued that Jefferson’s thought

represented a particularly American conception of the sublime, at once beautiful and terrifying, that supported specific political visions. She said, “nature religion meant communion with forces that enlarged the public life of the nation. And with Jefferson and other American patriots always on top, it meant conquest to insure that nature’s forces would flow as the lifeblood of the body politic” (Albanese 1990:70). Whether traditions holding nature itself as sacred, or philosophies holding the natural world as a “symbolic center,” nature religions continually wrestled with the apparent harmony of the natural world and the desire to control other aspects of nature.

Bron Taylor, in *Dark Green Religion* (2010), shared some important similarities to Albanese, primarily the idea that green religion infuses American culture and can be witnessed in efforts to protect or celebrate the earth. Taylor emphasized “dark green religion,” or the idea that the natural world itself is worthy of veneration, over “green religion,” “which posits that environmentally friendly behavior is a religious obligation” (much like many Christian environmentalists surveyed in Chapter 6) (2010:10). Dark green religion is “based on a felt kinship with the rest of life...accompanied by feelings of humility and a corresponding critique of human moral superiority...and reinforced by metaphysics of interconnection and the idea of interdependence found in the sciences” (Taylor 2010:13). Feelings of belonging and connection were very important for dark green religious practitioners, Taylor argued; and frequently, the profound experiences of connection, humility, and kinship with the natural world among individuals led them to dark green philosophies and religions, such as deep ecology (a philosophy positing intrinsic value to all species), Gaia theory (the idea that the earth as a whole is a living being), and other forms, which they found supported their experiences. Taylor identified four major types of dark green religion, with permeable boundaries between each type.

The categories sat on a scale between supernaturalistic and naturalistic (considering whether or not there exists some sort of spiritual plane beyond the natural world as explained by science), and with foci on either individualistic or holistic elements (considering whether individual creatures are considerable [animism] or broader ecosystems, the earth itself, and cosmic processes deserve consideration [Gaian]) (Taylor 2010:14-16). Like Albanese, Taylor argued that nature religion is a diverse phenomenon that infuses culture in numerous, sometimes subtle ways.

Though influenced by Albanese's work, "nature religion" in this chapter follows more closely Taylor's definition, referring to values asserting sacredness in nature or expressing a deep reverence for natural places. The different forms of dark green religion Taylor has identified can be found among anti-mountaintop removal activists, including earth-revering ritualization popularized by radical environmentalists, appreciation if not appropriation of Native American religious systems, and naturalistic, science-based views of earth's ecosystems as spiritually valuable. Besides these forms is a unique articulation of dark green religion that I call "Appalachian nature religion." Following the works of Taylor and Albanese, and combined with other works on Appalachian mountain religion (Dorgan 1987; Jones 1999a; McCauley 1995), I define Appalachian nature religion as a localized form of nature religion, based in Appalachian cultural history and feelings of connectedness with and responsibility for the ecosystems of Appalachia, that underlies the activities and values of many anti-mountaintop removal activists with long family histories in the region. While scholars have tended to focus on organized religious responses to environmental issues, such as those of Christian groups surveyed in Chapter 6, these different forms of nature religion also deserve attention for the roles that they play in promoting and sustaining resistance to mountaintop removal mining.

Biocentric thought and the specific philosophy of deep ecology often play into dark green religion, as Taylor argued, “dark green religion is generally deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, value apart from their usefulness to human beings” (2010:13). Most basically, deep ecology is the philosophical perspective developed by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess positing intrinsic value to all living things (Taylor and Zimmerman 2005:456). For Naess, this philosophy was practiced through “ecosophy-T,” a personal philosophy emphasizing self-realization, diversity, and symbiosis between living beings. While ecosophy-T was Naess’s personal ecosophy (named after Tvergastein, the mountain on which sat his favorite hut), he believed other individuals could adopt different personal ecosophies that would support the deep ecology movement (Bender 2003:422-423). Some environmentalists in the 1970s and 80s took Naess’s philosophy and expanded it into a spiritual worldview, complete with different rituals such as the Council of All Beings meant to break down anthropocentric assumptions among participants and foster deeper connections to the earth (Macy 2005; Taylor 2010:21-22). In 1985, George Sessions and Bill Devall provided a popular overview of the deep ecology perspective, including what they termed sources of the perspective from Asian and indigenous religious traditions (Devall and Sessions 1985). By the middle of the 1980s, deep ecology represented the bricolage Taylor found so characteristic of dark green religiosity, combining sometimes disparate religious and philosophical ideas into a unique, earth-revering system.

According to Tricia Shapiro, a journalist who lived and worked with Appalachian radical groups and provided a detailed account of the formation of Mountain Justice and the emergence

of radical activism in the region, environmentalists in the area expressed a diversity of opinions about religion and environmental values.¹³⁶ She reported,

most of the range of anthropo-to-biocentric opinion is present among MJSers [Mountain Justice Summer organizers] from the start, with common ground found in the idea of nature as our life-support system; people who are working to protect that system primarily for its value to themselves can work side-by-side with others working to protect it for its own sake...MJS participants generally share a sense that humans are part of a larger natural community to which they have responsibilities, and a sense that it's wrong to plunder nature and leave it a wasteland (Shapiro 2010:31).

In other words, a sense of connection to and respect for the natural world (what Taylor argued made up a foundation for “dark green religion”) tied different activists together. Shapiro continued that this sense of connection to the natural world infused different religious perceptions among activists as well. She said,

most MJSers who have any sense of spirituality at all perceive it as connected with or activated by contact with nature. Most are at least somewhat familiar and comfortable with the precepts of Deep Ecology. A few of MJS's religious Deep Ecology believers see themselves as worshipping Gaia, or pursuing forms of paganism; most incorporate Deep Ecology into Christian or other religious beliefs and practices. By and large, MJS does pretty well with avoiding religious disagreements (Shapiro 2010:32).

Activists in Appalachia express a wide diversity of spiritual beliefs regarding the natural world, and these beliefs make their ways into different actions and events.

Different forms of dark green religion are apparent at activist gatherings and events in Appalachia. The 2010 and 2011 Mountain Justice Summer Camps, for example, offered workshops on “Deepening our Connections,” which focused on introducing different spiritual means for connecting with the natural world. The workshop convener asked participants about their own philosophies of connection to nature, and then explained basic approaches to deep ecology and nature-based mysticism. The camp also featured a presentation by performance

¹³⁶ Shapiro published her work with AK Press, a anarchist press based in Oakland, California.

artists Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens on sexecology.¹³⁷ Sprinkle and Stephens created the performance art piece as a means of revising human connections with each other and the planet. They explained that the time for the “earth as mother” metaphor had passed. Mothers, they noted, take care of their children, often with little appreciation. Instead, they offered the “earth as lover” metaphor as a future goal for environmentalists. Whereas an “earth mother” takes care of her children, the relationship of “earth lover” proposes an entirely different relationship to the earth. For Sprinkle and Stephens, the time has come for humans to show their appreciation for the earth, rather than simply continuing to take from her. This new eco-sexual relationship is fostered through different performances and rituals in which individuals are allowed to express their connections to the earth in sensual terms. At the late-May 2010 Mountain Justice Camp, for example, Sprinkle and Stephens offered a ritual marriage to the earth, where participants stood in a circle in a field, holding hands, and vowed to protect, serve, and honor the earth as a partner. This performance drew deeply from ecofeminist spirituality, breaking down assumptions of human domination of the earth and promoting embodied connections to the natural world.

Individuals throughout the camp expressed forms of dark green religiosity as well. In one morning meeting, as participants took turns giving their names and places of origin to the assembled group, one activist (a long-time environmentalist and co-founder of Mountain Justice) listed his place of origin as “Katuah,” after the Cherokee name for the Southern Appalachian bioregion.¹³⁸ This bioregional sensibility is sometimes a component of spiritual deep ecology and other forms of dark green religiosity (Taylor 2000). Others, in personal conversations,

¹³⁷ Individuals are allowed to propose their own workshops at Mountain Justice events. For more on sexecology, see <http://www.sexecology.org/> (accessed May 16, 2011).

¹³⁸ This was also the name of a former branch of Earth First! located in the region.

expressed spiritual connections to the natural world and were motivated to participate in Mountain Justice because of those feelings. Bill Price, a field organizer for the Sierra Club and a descendant of West Virginia coal miners, described his religious perspective as “a love for the land. If you want to call that spirituality—which I choose to do—then, there is a spirit-based, cultural part of that love for the land that I would put firmly in religion and faith” (Price 2010). Such motivations were not shared by all, however.¹³⁹

Another dark green religious response to mountaintop removal is Kentucky artist Jeff Chapman-Crane’s sculpture, “The Agony of Gaia” (see Figure 7-1). The life-sized sculpture was completed in 2004 and unveiled at the Kentuckians for the Commonwealth annual meeting. The piece includes a woman (Gaia, the Greek earth goddess) lying on her side, her hands covering her eyes. Her head lies on green ground with a verdant forest on her shoulders. Moving toward her feet, though, her body becomes an open mine, with miniature bulldozers, dump trucks, and drag lines excavating the coal of her midriff. The background of the piece equally moves from sunny to stormy skies. Finally, Gaia’s feet have been completely destroyed of their original form, shaped instead into rough, terraced blocks, much like un-reclaimed mountaintop removal land. At the base of the sculpture is a poem entitled “Cry of the Unreclaimed” by the artist. The poem begins with a statement about the original Appalachian ecosystem: “only the clarion cry of woodland bird, the song of mountain stream should fill the silence here.” However, this pristine land has been harmed by human greed: “But no. Lust would never have it so....Stripped to the bone and ripped apart she grieves, her heart is left to die alone.” All is not lost, though, as concerned humans may stand to protect the earth: “But know. Her seeds are left for us to

¹³⁹ Author’s field notes, May 28 to June 6, 2010.

sow.”¹⁴⁰ I interviewed Chapman-Crane at the 2010 Mountain Justice Summer Camp, which convened near his home in Eolia, Kentucky. Chapman-Crane brought his sculpture to the camp, where it sat under a pavilion through the duration of the meeting. He explained that he hoped the image would evoke strong emotions in viewers, perhaps inciting them to act. He said,

for a long time in this country, in our culture, been the attitude that the earth is just there for us to exploit for resources with no responsibility towards it at all, no thought to the consequences, the environmental impacts. It’s just simply something for us to exploit. I wanted to create a piece that showed that the earth is a living creature, that it feels what we’re doing to it, and that there is profound impacts to doing what we’re doing. And it’s not really just coal mining here, you know, it’s much larger than that. It’s a world-wide problem. We simply treat the earth as this source of raw materials to fuel our energy consumption. Our greed, basically. So I wanted to do something that really showed the opposite view” (Chapman-Crane 2010).

Like other environmentalists, Chapman-Crane critiqued the anthropocentrism of standard American culture, offering instead the idea of the earth as a living being worthy of reverence and respect. While noting that there remained some elements of Christianity that value the earth, Chapman-Crane believed churches in the region, generally, had failed to challenge anti-environmental anthropocentrism. Reaching people, then, required metaphors from outside of the Christian tradition, he asserted. Together, the sculpture and the poem offer a striking representation of the earth as a living being, who feels the damage done to her by humans and who is in danger of permanent damage unless people change their ways.

“The Agony of Gaia” is an example of what Bron Taylor termed “Gaian Earth Religion,” which “understands the biosphere (universe or cosmos) to be alive or conscious, or at least by metaphor and analogy to resemble organisms with their many interdependent parts” (2010:16).

As Taylor noted, the Gaian trope among contemporary environmentalists originated with the

¹⁴⁰ This full poem and a rich description of the sculpture are available on the Kentuckians for the Commonwealth Website: <http://www.kftc.org/our-work/canary-project/people-in-action/gaia/more-about-the-agony-of-gaia> (accessed May 16, 2011).

work of British scientist James Lovelock, whose “Gaia theory” posited that “the biosphere functions as a self-regulating organism, maintaining the conditions necessary for all the lifeforms it contains” (Taylor 2010:35). Lovelock did not originally mean his theory to reflect specifically earth-worshipping religious values, but many Neo-pagan and New Age religious practitioners took the concept as a useful referent to feelings of the interconnection between nature, animals, and humans (Pike 2004: 23; Taylor 2010: 35-36). Chapman-Crane’s description of the project revealed a sense, more specifically, of Gaian Spirituality, since he believed that the earth remained conscious of the damages being done to it. These forms of spiritual deep ecology, bioregionalism, and Gaian Spirituality are not co-equivalent; instead, as Taylor noted, they make up facets of the “radical environmental worldview,” a wide body of thought drawn upon by environmentalists and related to human/nature interactions (2010:75). Because environmentalism in Appalachia has direct connections to the broader history of North American environmental movements, it is not surprising to find these forms of religiosity in the hills.

As Taylor noted, however, “ambivalence towards some forms of nature-based spirituality and ritualizing permeates the radical environmental movement” (2001a:185). This is certainly true of radical activists in Appalachia, due in some part to demographic changes among radical groups and geographic influences. It is easy to stereotype radical environmentalists as “hippies,” characterized by certain manners of speaking, clothing, and hairstyles. However, since the 1990s, the body of North American radical environmentalists has slightly shifted more toward urban anarchists, who are much more likely to listen to punk rock than the Grateful Dead, and participate in anti-corporate direct actions (made famous by the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle) rather than the defense of old-growth forests. Some (but by no means all) anarchists promote straight-edge practices, declining drugs and alcohol and sometimes following

vegan diets. For some of these anarchists, atheism is a central component of their worldview, characterized by the phrase “no gods, no masters.” As Taylor revealed, there has long been a tension between earth-spirituality practicing environmentalists and atheistic anarchists within radical environmental circles, and since the emergence of modern radical environmentalism there have been participants who were critical of different forms of spiritual practices within the movement. This tension persists among activists in Appalachia.

The prayer service on Kayford Mountain offered by Sage Russo during the July 4th, 2009, weekend celebration, discussed in Chapter 6, provided one example of the tensions among different activists regarding religious practices. The pavilion was clearly divided: those who seemed most interested in Sage’s message sat near him, while others respectfully sat at a greater distance. Still others, who had been present for previous days, were absent entirely. The social dynamics of this prayer service represented basic attitudes among many local radical activists toward religious views more broadly. According to some of the organizers of the first Mountain Justice meetings, religion was initially a contentious issue. Activists from across the nation as well as rural locals showed up to the first organizational meetings, and such diversity occasionally revealed conflicts over worldviews. Matt Landon, an Earth First!er and organizer of Mountain Justice meetings, noted, “there was some fear of openly discussing religious beliefs. Part of that could have just been the culture of people that showed up the first summer” (Landon 2010). At first, discussions of religious orientations toward the natural world resulted in the charge of “woo” from others, a term popular among radical environmentalists describing spirituality among activists (Landon 2010; Taylor 2001a:184). Sage Russo reported similar tensions among groups at early meetings. As a Christian and anarchist, Russo had faced criticism from others before. In the first meetings, some activists who Sage described as

anarchists ultimately left the movement “because they couldn’t go door to door and talk with any of the neighbors about stuff, because they had all this other stuff on their agenda beforehand, they couldn’t just focus on mountaintop removal mining, they needed like a complete revolution at all times” (Russo 2009).

As those activists who were openly hostile toward Christianity and other religions left, others who were willing to work with religious people remained. As the movement progressed and more local and national activists became involved (including expressly Christian activists), people grew more open to different religious perspectives. For some, meeting strong evangelical women like Judy Bonds changed their opinions about Christianity. Russo recalled about the first months of Mountain Justice meetings, “when Mountain Justice Summer first started there was a lot of people in there that just did not want to work with Christians....And then they started meeting Judy Bonds and folks like that and they were like, ‘hmm, we got a lot more to explore.’ So they started being much more cordial” (Russo 2009). Others, without necessarily accepting the faith claims of Christians, recognized that having local Christians involved opened valuable opportunities for networking and outreach. They realized that welcoming local religious communities ultimately helped the movement, and as Landon stated, “that’s what it’s about, making connections with local folks” (Landon 2010). After the first few years of Mountain Justice activism, most non-religious activists (like those who sat at a distance during Sage’s prayer) seemed at least respectful of such beliefs. John Johnson, a Mountain Justice organizer, expressed this opinion clearly: “I’ve rejected my Christian upbringing ... but I appreciate that there are Christians who have this spiritual connection and spiritual impetus to protect the land and to stand up for social justice....I’ll take my hat off and bow my head with them—at least be

respectful” (quoted in Shapiro 2010:95). This attitude of religious tolerance remains prominent among anti-mountaintop removal activists.

Non-religious activists are involved with the anti-mountaintop removal movement as well. Still, exchanges occur between non-religious and religious activists, and these non-religious individuals are nonetheless integrated into a broader system of activism guided by environmental values. Based on his research in the Pacific Northwest, Mark Shibley provided useful tools for examining the permeable boundaries between religious and non-religious activists. Among many religious studies scholars, the U.S. Pacific Northwest is often assumed to be relatively secular, due to lower institutional religious attendance. Scholars have termed the region the “none zone,” due to the frequent responses of “none” among Northwesterners on surveys of religious affiliation (Killen and Silk 2004). For Shibley, though, the apparent lack of institutional religion reflected the presence of a widespread earth-based “secular spirituality” (2011:165). Instead of nonreligious, then, the residents of the Pacific Northwest were “differently religious,” often focused on different environmental values rather than institutional religions (2011:181). Because anarchist communities and radical environmental groups in the East often have direct connections with communities in the Pacific Northwest, Shibley’s work offers useful tools for understanding the number of seemingly non-religious activists involved in the fight against mountaintop removal. It is, of course, improper to call someone “religious” who adamantly refuses the term for themselves, but their perspectives can still be understood as part of a broader network of environmental and religious values.

Besides forms of spiritual deep ecology and Gaian spirituality, another significant source of dark green religiosity among environmentalists comes from the religious traditions of indigenous peoples (Taylor 2010:75). As discussed in Chapter 5, Appalachians frequently draw

cultural connections between American Indian (most often Cherokee) cultures and traditional Appalachian lifeways. Judy Bonds' Cherokee heritage was a significant part of her identity, for example, and she credited the prominent places of local women in the movement to Cherokee traditions. Bonds said to Tricia Shaprio, "I'd always herd there's an old saying in Cherokee, and it's Appalachian [too], that while the men sat around the campfire and talked about what to do, the women got out and done it" (quoted in Shapiro 2010:66). Carol Warren, the long-time Catholic activist, similarly cited native traditions favorably, saying, "we are so interdependent with the rest of creation, out Native American brothers and sisters got it right, we're all related. What we do to the environment, it's definitely gonna come back on us" (Warren 2009). Native spirituality is not mutually exclusive with other religious forms, including Christianity. Indeed, a significant percentage of contemporary American Indians are Christians who at the same time preserve indigenous cultural and religious practices (Martin 1999:62-63). For many Appalachians of multiple religious orientations, Native religion serves as a body of insights and ecological wisdom from which to draw.¹⁴¹

At the same time, the environmental movement has sometimes met with controversy over the appropriation, by some, of what they understand as American Indian spirituality or ritual. Taylor provided an account of a particularly contentious moment surrounding a 1993 Earth First! rendezvous on Mount Graham, Arizona, a site sacred to local Apache tradition and people from the region. During the gathering, some of the assembled environmentalists had openly consumed alcohol, despite objections by the Apache present. The resulting discussion showed the diversity of opinions concerning Native American cultural rights and the appropriation of cultures by environmentalists. Ultimately these discussions reflected the persistent tension

¹⁴¹ For example, the Catholic Committee of Appalachia hosts a week-long Cherokee themed spiritual retreat. See http://www.ccappal.org/?page_id=1491 (accessed May 17, 2011).

among activists who incorporated certain American Indian traditions in their own religious practice, and those who believed such practices constituted disrespect (Taylor 1997).¹⁴² Such tensions also exist among anti-mountaintop removal activists, who often attempt to balance respect for local native peoples and histories with current environmental values.

In conversations, several activists informed me that some sort of Native American religiosity (such as regular practices like sweat lodges or a more general feeling of kinship with the natural world that they associated with the beliefs of Native peoples) influenced their own earth-based spirituality. Among younger activists, however, these views seemed less common, yet references to Native American spirituality are frequently present in rallies and other activist representations. The “True Cost of Coal” poster, for example, contained one detailed image of seven generations of salamander women (one still an egg) engaging in basket weaving, harvesting wild plants, and learning about plants from elders (Figure 7-2). Though perhaps subtle, this image clearly referred to the concern for preserving resources with the “seventh generation” in mind, associated originally with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Arnold 2005). The concept of preserving nature, mindful of the seventh generation, was a widely adopted trope among 20th century environmentalists.

The anti-mountaintop removal movement has also included American Indian activists, including Matt Sherman, a Blackfoot Indian activist from West Virginia. On June 23, 2009, at the rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School, Sherman was the last speaker before the march and civil disobedience at the entrance to the Massey Coal processing plant (Figure 7-3). In his brief speech to the crowd, Sherman spoke of reconciliation between the miners and the activists

¹⁴² There exists a large body of literature critiquing Native American cultural appropriation among non-Native westerners, including environmentalists. See Churchill 2002, Krech 1999, Deloria 1998, and Gill 1991. At the same time, others have worked to respectfully show positive contributions from native cultures for environmental ethics. See Harvey 2005, Berkes 1999, Basso 1996, and Nelson 1986.

present. He said, “I’ve not seen the enemy...we’re all one people.” Following cheers, he continued, “whether we’re with Mountain Justice or Massey Coal, the blood of our relatives is buried in these mountains.” For Sherman, all cultures, not just native, should come together to stop mountaintop removal. However, he argued that native peoples (especially women) will ultimately bring an end to the mining practice. Pointing to Maria Gunnoe, the Goldman Prize winning activist, Sherman said, “the souls of the Indian women will bring an end to mountaintop removal ... The soul of the Indian is strong in the mountains of West Virginia.” Spirituality was at the forefront of Sherman’s speech, as well. He exclaimed, “this is a spiritual war, a war of the spirit.”¹⁴³

Before Sherman took the stage, one miner in the audience tried to shout down each speaker with the question, “how did you get here today?” The implication was that, if the anti-mountaintop removal speaker arrived by car (which of course they all did), he or she was a hypocrite, relying on coal-generated steel. Most speakers just ignored the miner, but Sherman responded, to exuberant cheers, “I soared in here today on the wings of eagles, sent by the Creator, to stop mountaintop removal!” As Sherman continued, a hawk began circling overhead. Many in the crowd clearly viewed this as an important spiritual omen and a sign of approval from nature itself. Sherman paused to observe the hawk, then commented, “those are our ancestors, come to join us.” Concluding, Sherman said of the ancestors, “they are with us in these mountains today, and they are proud of what we are doing today.”¹⁴⁴

Sherman’s speech drew together many important themes of American Indian religiosity and their importance to environmental movements. In September 2010, during the Appalachia

¹⁴³ Author’s field notes, Marsh Fork Elementary School, June 23, 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Author’s field notes, Marsh Fork Elementary School, June 23, 2009.

Rising march in Washington, D.C., Sherman and a group of Native American drummers from Ohio lead the solemn procession of coalfield residents and activists to the gates of the White House, where they sat and awaited arrest. The decisions about the logistics of the march were made by a committee of coalfield residents and long-time activists in Appalachia. Asking Sherman to lead the march, then, reflected the organizers' desire to honor the original inhabitants of the land.

For some Appalachians and many anti-mountaintop removal activists, Native cultures represent foundational social and environmental attitudes upon which later European immigrants built their own distinct Appalachian culture. This Appalachian culture is the product of cultural bricolage, representing the outcome of earlier historical interactions. Scholars of religion in Appalachia have noted this uniqueness in the region, terming the forms of independent Christianity found in the mountains "Appalachian mountain religion." In her influential work on the subject, Deborah McCauley borrowed the notion of a "regional religion" from Catherine Albanese and called the religion of this region "Appalachian mountain religion." In early editions of her text *America: Religions and Religion*, Albanese cited the example of Appalachian mountain religion as a regional religion, or a religion that is "shaped by people who live together in a certain geographic area. It is born of natural geography, of past and present human history, and of the interaction between the two" (1999:325).¹⁴⁵ In later works, Albanese adopted the term "vernacular religion" for a similar concept, "most properly understood as the appropriated beliefs—and lifeways—of a group of people who 'speak' the same religious language" (2007:9). If it is true that there are regional religions throughout the nation, and that one such form exists in Appalachia, then perhaps it is appropriate to speak of an Appalachian nature religion, derived

¹⁴⁵ Though in later editions, this section was removed and the text significantly shortened.

from local human/nature interactions through history and “spoken” by certain opponents of mountaintop removal.

In 1905, Emma Bell Miles noted that “only a superficial observer could fail to understand that the mountain people really love their wilderness—love it for its beauty, for its freedom” (1975 [1905]:17). Over 100 years later, Miles’ perception remains accurate. Several activists noted the presence of deep connections between Appalachian people and the landscape. Judy Bonds said that a force in the local environment itself drew people to it, saying, “it’s just something about these mountains here, the ancientness of these mountains, that you can feel it. These are some of the first mountains God created” (Bonds 2009). Other activists noted that feelings of connection to the land characterized Appalachian culture in general. For example, Rebekah Epling said, “being tied to the land is a really central part of Appalachian culture—which hollow you live in, which kin live where...being tied here in that generational aspect is really strong” (Epling 2009). Carol Warren likewise commented that “people have a great attachment to place, especially if they’re really rooted there and they have many generations of people that have preceded them in that place. You’re attached to that place, and there’s something about it that’s just part of you, and seeing that destroyed just has to be horrible” (Warren 2009). In her work with Mountain Justice activist, Tricia Shaprio found that these felt connections to the region’s environment motivated activists’ actions. Connection to a home place did not lead to provincial concern to one specific property, but Shaprio noted that activists “also identify with the entire region’s landscape and culture, and recognize that it’s necessary to protect the whole thing, not just your own home place” (2010:94). Shapiro went on to theorize that these connections to the landscape formed a common denominator between Christian and

anarchist activists, who overcame their mutual skepticism of each other through shared environmental values.

This Appalachian nature religion infuses the work of numerous activists in the region, though some express its themes more prominently than others. Those who expressed spiritual connections to the landscape of Appalachia most directly were the long-time West Virginia activists Larry Gibson, Julian Martin, and Joe Begley, though these themes feature more subtly into the beliefs of others like Judy Bonds. Appalachian nature religion, then, refers to these intimate connections residents feel with the landscape of Appalachia. More specifically, these connections are characterized by a profound feeling of personal belong and connectedness to the land, based in formative experiences with that landscape; a concern for past and future generations of people in the region; and agnosticism about supernatural claims. This definition closely parallels Taylor's definition of dark green religion, particularly the argument that it is "based on a felt kinship with the rest of life" (2010:13). Most crucially, these connections are based in the specific landscape of Appalachia, not nature in general (though I doubt any of the individuals examined below would support other socially and environmentally damaging practices elsewhere in the world). To expand the kinship metaphor, for these Appalachians who profess local nature religion, the mountains are immediate family and thus require immediate attention, while other natural places are extended family.

This feeling of kinship with the mountains of Appalachia is the most prominent element of Appalachian mountain religion as reflected through interviews and archival data. Larry Gibson made this kinship connection directly, saying, "people of the world don't understand the connection between the people and the land of Appalachia. Appalachia is a rare, special place. It embraces you no matter what part of Appalachia you're in" (Gibson 2009). He continued, "I

make a statement in some of the talks I give that, my mother gave me birth, but the land gave me life” (Gibson 2009). Former deep miner Marvin Gullett noted that these connections to the land pervade Appalachian culture. He said, “they’s something about the Appalachian man that he loves the soil ... It’s not that it’s worth that much to the outsider, but to him, that is home and kin. That was where he was born, and where he wanted to die, die and be buried at, see?” (Gullett 1977). In an interview done in 1987 and currently held at the Kentucky Historical Society, Joe Begley (the Kentucky surface mining activist from the 1960s and 70s) also made a kinship connection to the land. He said about his views of strip mining, “I don’t think anybody’s got the right to destroy their family. I don’t think anybody’s got the right to destroy the environment” (Begley 1987). As revealed in this quote, Begley viewed family and the environment as two sides of the same coin. His statement proposed a moral syllogism: just as it is wrong to hurt your kin, it is wrong to hurt the environment because we exist with both of them in similar relationships. For him, feelings of kinship were derived from time spent with the land. Julian Martin, a long-time West Virginia activist (and the person who created the famous “I Heart Mountains” stickers), explained that time in the woods led him to his perspective on nature’s value (J. Martin 2010). For Gibson as well, it was his time living on the land and experiences in the woods that helped generate his feelings toward it. Speaking of his ancestors, Gibson said, “they didn’t live ON the land, they lived WITH the land” (Gibson 2009). Experiences leading to a reverence for the land are not just personal, then, but connected to an ethic of respect passed from previous generations.

Nature itself is valuable in this perspective, but individuals like Gibson, Begley and others work to preserve it not only for some intrinsic value in the place, but for future human generations on the land as well. Allen Johnson termed the religion of Larry Gibson and others

“covenantal” because of this feature (Johnson 2009). Appalachian nature religion perceives a promise, or covenant, between past, present, and future generations. The land was left in a certain condition and it is the duty of the present generation to leave it in at least as good a condition for future generations. A central offense of mountaintop removal is that it presents irreversible change, violating the duty of current generations to preserve the environment for future generations.

Oral histories at the Kentucky Historical Society confirm this covenantal/kinship relationship between Appalachians, the land, and future generations. In various interviews for the “Coal in Kentucky” project, conducted in 1977 (the year SMCRA was passed), several former miners and coal town residents were asked about their views on strip mining. Bill Viras, a former miner from Pike County Kentucky who first entered the mines in 1916, said of strip mining, “I’m strictly opposed to strip mining, because it tears up the topsoil and it don’t leave it in a shape that ever benefit the rising generation of people ... The topsoil is worth more to leave for the rising generation than whatever they [strip mine operators] get out of it” (Viras 1977). For Viras, strip mining was inappropriate because it removed good soil—the very foundation of life in an agrarian culture. For Marvin Gullett, the hills of Appalachia presented a kind of eternal presence. He said of early miners, “years ago, we used to think well after the mine’s all done, we’ll still have the old hills. Maybe go back to farming the little patches again, and we’ll live some way. ... They realized that someday the coal would give out, it’d have to give out” (Gullett 1977). Revealing the intersections between these feelings of kinship and local Christian values, Gullett continued that “we used to think of the mountains as being eternal.” He then quoted

Psalm 121:1--“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help”¹⁴⁶--and continued, “but now in these days and times, the strength they’re getting out is the energy...the coal” (Gullett 1977). For Gullett, strip mining entirely changed the orientation of mountaineers to the mountains, and this bodes poorly for future generations and the covenant between present and future generations. This concern for preserving the land for future generations transcends different generations, and is thus a second important feature of Appalachian nature religion.

Finally, the clearest proponents of Appalachian nature religion express agnosticism regarding supernatural claims, either questioning the existence of supernatural powers and deities or stating that such questions remain unimportant in their lives. Within the broader set of dark green religion, Taylor identified areas of both supernaturalistic and naturalistic forms.

Agnosticism toward supernatural claims places people like Begley, Martin, and Gibson into the naturalistic area, though their opinions lie closer to supernaturalism in the spectrum of beliefs than would those of scientific atheist. For example, Joe Begley jokingly noted, for example, “if they’s a God—and I don’t know about that—but if they’s a God, you can bet your boots he’s from Eastern Kentucky” (Begley 1987). This quote revealed Begley’s connection to his place, but it also revealed his agnosticism on the presence of God. A few minutes later in the same interview, Begley made a more directly naturalistic statement about his religion: “my religion is the stream, the timber, the wildlife, the animals and the people. I’m not worried about where I’m gonna go—I don’t care where I’m gonna go in the end. It’s here now, now’s when I’m living, and I want to preserve that, I want to have that” (Begley 1987). He concluded that long thought saying, “we ought to cherish dirt, that’s where we’re gonna go in the end” (Begley 1987). In

¹⁴⁶ This is the King James Version of the passage, and not the New International Version used in other Bible quotes in this dissertation. The King James and NIV versions differ slightly, and it was clearly the King James Version cited by Gullett. I used the King James Version here to preserve the original intent of the speaker.

Taylor's terms, this would most closely approximate "Gaian naturalism." For Begley, the functioning ecosystem as a whole is worthy of moral consideration. Supernatural issues, such as the presence of God or an afterlife, remained less important in his perspective (Taylor 2010:16).

Julian Martin expressed similar views. On July 16, 2010, Martin and I drove around Southern West Virginia, visiting an active mountaintop removal site. When we stopped at the edge of the site, where the natural forest gave way to stripped land, Martin noted that he feels a sense of awe in the woods. He continued, "if I was still a believer, I would attribute it to a feeling that I was in the presence of God...I've been at places in the mountains and the woods that feel like cathedrals, they just have a holy feel about them. And if there is a God you sure as hell ain't going to find him over there on that strip mine; more likely found in these woods" (J. Martin 2010). Like Begley, Martin's comment showed a concern for immediate experience and skepticism about the existence of supernatural elements, in this case God.

While Begley and Martin expressed skepticism about supernatural elements, others in Appalachia criticize church officials in the region for their historical complicity with the coal industry. Joe Begley noted that it was Christian ministers who often convinced locals to sell their land to developers. These ministers exploited the trust of locals for monetary gain, and in Begley's mind, they should not be forgiven (Begley 1987). Larry Gibson also critiqued Christian ministers' complicity in the exploitation of Appalachia. In 2004 a group of Appalachian ministers, including many of the founders of Christians for the Mountains, went to Kayford Mountain to visit Larry. They arrived late, and when they finally approached Larry's home, Gibson asked them, "where've you been?" As participants began apologizing, Gibson interrupted and said again, "No, where've *you* been?" Gibson was not referring to that specific group of latecomers, but of Appalachian preachers in general. Mountaintop removal had been

happening for decades, and if it was something Christians should care about, why did they wait until the 21st century to get involved? Gibson noted, “if they had been doing it all along, do you think the industry would have been as far advanced as they are? Probably not” (Gibson 2009). This was a profound moment for those present, and many (including Allen Johnson) have since committed themselves greatly to the fight against mountaintop removal and won the respect of Gibson (Epling 2009; Johnson 2009).

Of course, while perhaps skeptical of supernatural claims and church institutions in the region, Gibson, Begley, and Martin remained aware of the Christian narratives that had profoundly shaped their culture. In his regular picnics at Kayford Mountain, Gibson asks for prayer services. Bible quotes also adorn many of the hand-painted signs around the site. Clearly, Christian narratives make up part of the local culture Gibson seeks to preserve. Joe Begley, while skeptical of supernatural claims, expressed affinities for local Baptist culture and the model of Jesus as a protestor (Begley 1994; Begley 1987). Appalachian nature religion and Christianity need not be mutually exclusive, but instead can coexist in different degrees depending upon the individual. By identifying features of Appalachian nature religion among its clearest proponents, more subtle expressions become more apparent as well. It is clear that, among local anti-mountaintop removal activists from this and past generations, Appalachian nature religion makes up one current within the broader stream of religious and environmental values.

In its multiple forms, dark green religion is present among anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia. Because of the interactions between proponents of dark green forms, such as spiritual deep ecology, and local evangelical Christians, however, the situation on the

ground in Appalachia may be unique. While activists with different religious orientations have worked together in the movement for years, important differences still remain.

Cooperation, Co-optation, and Counter-Resistance: Religion and Narratives on the Ground

Evidence presented in Chapters 6 and 7 revealed how different religious values are prominent for anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia. Whether mainline Christian, evangelical Christian, dark green religion, or some combination of these different forms, religious activists work together and share ideas in the movement to stop mountaintop removal. Judy Bonds expressed well what is likely a widely shared belief among Appalachian activists: “I think we can all be brothers and sisters in caring for the creation, no matter why we care for it, and I think it’s time for us all to come together and believe that” (Bonds 2009). Amidst calls for unity and cooperation, though, distinctive identities persist. While religious activists may agree that mountaintop removal should stop, they also disagree on other important social issues and perspectives. Mediating these differences effectively is crucial for the overall success of the movement, and explaining the role of religion in resistance to mountaintop removal requires acknowledgment of these potential points of conflict.

In his work with evangelical environmental activists, Lucas Johnston was introduced to the term “walking together separately” (Johnston 2010:155). While evangelicals engaged in environmental issues, he found, they distinguished themselves from other non-evangelical activists, and “evangelical” identity was prior to the “environmentalist” identity. This applies to many evangelical anti-mountaintop removal activists as well. Allen Johnson explained in a *Newsweek* interview, “my identity is not as an environmentalist...It's as a Christian. Because I am Christian, I should be involved with social justice, the poor, the needy. Environmentalism is

one thing in my circle, but it's not my center” (quoted in Gates and Juarez 2005). As with other evangelicals interviewed by Johnston, Christian identity is central for Johnson’s work.

One of the most substantial fears among evangelical anti-mountaintop removal activists is in being subsumed into the secular environmental movement. Many of the individuals I interviewed made it clear that they did not want their values buried under the secular movement. Allen Johnson said of evangelical activists, “we need to have our own identity....God supersedes everything else” (Johnson 2009). Bob Marshall likewise expressed the desire to remain distinct from other environmental groups: “there’s a risk of being co-opted by the environmental movement and seen as just being used by them. So I think we have to be really careful. So what we like to do is work with the environmental groups, but not necessarily as one....We don’t want to be seen as another branch of the Sierra Club, because that’s not who we are” (Marshall 2009). For Marshall, retaining specifically Christian has practical impacts on activism in Appalachia as well. He noted that many coalfield residents automatically reject environmentalists but are more willing to accept Christians. Speaking as Christians rather than environmentalists, then, poses a way to reach communities that would otherwise be off limits. Marshall said that Christians “need to be visibly different” from secular environmentalists (Marshall 2009). Sage Russo commented that Christians themselves are sometimes too ready to fall in line with secular environmental groups. He said, “I think that there’s a temptation a lot for the religious community to fold in under the secular community. And sometimes we’re just happy to be acknowledged....And there’s a temptation for us to water down our message and our faith to appease the secular community as well, in the interest of pluralism and political correctness” (Russo 2009). Russo continued that Christians cannot allow themselves to be just an image for

secular groups, saying of some, “they’re not really interested in what we’re about; they’re just interested in the image of us being there” (Russo 2009).

While evangelicals and other anti-mountaintop removal activists (primarily anarchists) may ultimately agree on the value of Appalachian nature and culture, they disagree on other social points. These disagreements can sometimes cause tensions within groups that activists have had to manage carefully. For example, some evangelical activists consider concern for environmental justice to be a continuation of pro-life policies. One prominent campaign of the Evangelical Environmental Network involved promoting increased regulations of mercury due to the chemical’s impacts on fetuses, often leading to birth defects. An announcement on the EEN website stated the position clearly: “Christians are called to protect life, and for us that includes the unborn. Jesus taught us to love our neighbors and treat others as we would want to be treated. Protecting the unborn and children from mercury poisoning and air pollution is in keeping with Jesus’ commands. It is time to stop the mercury poisoning of the unborn.”¹⁴⁷ Such a perspective conflicts with those who hold socially liberal beliefs. Indeed, during the first months of Mountain Justice, some anarchist activists ultimately refused to work with conservative locals. Since that time, however, activists of different beliefs have managed to put aside those other differences when necessary, without changing their opinions. Sage Russo characterized the approach when conservative and liberal individuals meet within the movement as “let’s not talk about politics right now, let’s talk about caring for the person next door. Let’s talk about caring for your grandkids, and that’s it. We’ll work about politics later. And we understand that we don’t have to match up completely on the same page” (Russo 2009). The Catholic activist John Rausch said, “I seldom have a discussion with anybody I’m working on a social project on that I

¹⁴⁷ See <http://creationcare.org/blog.php?blog=30> (accessed May 19, 2011).

feel like I have to disagree with or they feel like they have to disagree with me. You just don't go there. Plus, I have no interest in discussing that kind of stuff" (Rausch 2009). While differences between different religious groups opposed to mountaintop removal certainly exist, they do not seem to fundamentally impact the efforts of activists.

Christian activists in Appalachia also face arguments in favor of mountaintop removal based on Christian perspectives. For some miners and their supporters, the Christian belief that God created the world specifically for human benefit supports continued mountaintop removal. One miner interviewed by the *New York Times* argued that coal was ultimately meant for human benefit, that God "produced things that we need on this earth. Without coal, you wouldn't have the warmth and light you have right now" (quoted in Banerjee 2006). One of Rebecca Scott's interview subjects likewise argued that God placed coal in the earth for humans to use, though in a more qualified manner. He said, "I think God put that coal there, in the ground, as He did the timber ... I believe it is there to get, and if they go about it in a good, clean workmanship manner, they should be able to get it" (quoted in Scott 2010:181). In some instances, supporters of mountaintop removal cite a prophecy of Isaiah as Biblical support for the practice: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 40:3-5). Read literally, the passage seems to provide direct support to the practice of mountaintop removal.

Christian anti-mountaintop removal activists respond that citing this Isaiah passage to support mountaintop removal is a misuse of scripture. Dennis Sparks said of those who used Isaiah in support of mountaintop removal, "now there's some exegesis for you that's really

eisegesis, right?” (Sparks 2009). In other words, mountaintop removal advocates were imposing their own beliefs onto their interpretations of the text (eisegesis). Denise Giardina similarly noted that those who propose the passage supports mountaintop removal “don’t understand metaphor” (Giardina 2009). For Allan Johnson, such interpretations reveal a denial of addiction. Rather than facing a continued dependency upon fossil fuels, supporters of mountaintop removal search for anything they can find to support their position and not face their own addictions (Johnson 2009). Nonetheless, the same religious texts that are used to oppose mountaintop removal are used by others to support the practice, and individuals are faced with competing interpretations when forming their opinions.

Some Christian opponents to mountaintop removal find a middle ground between views of human dominion and the correctness of mountaintop removal. Louise Dixon, the wife of a Kentucky miner, argued that God put coal in the mountains for human use, but that God also intended humans to access the coal through deep mining, not strip mining. She said,

[God] put it here for our benefit, and there was enough coal in the state of Kentucky, if the world should last... a million years, there would have been coal for everybody. We opened our own little coal bank, we got our coal out, therefore we didn’t have to pay for our fuel, we didn’t pay for water, all those things. But greed came in and took over. And these mountaineers had no idea of what they were doing (Dixon 2001).

Coal may be a gift from God for Dixon, but strip mining is the product of human greed.

Reverend Roy Crist similarly said “I have to agree that the coal was placed there by God, and it was placed there for a reason, and if the reason was for us to generate electricity or to keep warm or whatever, that certainly was God’s intention. But it can be mined without blowing the tops off of mountains” (Crist 2009). Clearly, Christians in Appalachia face numerous arguments both in favor of and opposed to mountaintop removal. Other factors must be involved in decision making, with Biblical justifications, such as quoting the above Isaiah passage, used to support

that decision. Roy Crist argued that financial reasons generally drive locals to support mountaintop removal. For Crist, Christians should be aware of overly criticizing those who support the practice. He said, “we forget sometimes that there are people of faith on the other side of this issue. And a lot of those people are on the other side of this issue simply because that’s how they earn their living. It’s not because they’re bad people, it’s not because they’re not Christian people, it’s because they earn their living mining coal” (Crist 2009). So, it is possible to accept the pro-coal view that the resource was given specifically for human benefit while at the same time rejecting the practice of mountaintop removal.

A second major argument used by some Christians in support of mountaintop removal (or really, in opposition to environmentalists who propose sweeping lifestyle changes) comes from advocates of dispensational premillennialism. This position, popular among Christian fundamentalists from the early 20th century, divided history into distinct segments and interpreted historical and contemporary events in light of their relevance to heralding the coming end of days (Marsden 2006:4-5). Based on beliefs in the impending apocalypse, some fundamentalist and evangelical churches argue that people should worry about saving souls, not environmental issues. Others continue that God will make all environmental problems right in the end anyway, so there is no need to remediate them now; and in some instances, worsening environmental decline is viewed as one of many signs of the end of days. Advocates of creation care and Christian mountaintop removal opponents generally reject this approach to the world, although some retain an evangelical interest in premillennialism. Matthew Sleeth responded to this anti-environmental view directly, arguing that “we are to keep the commandments, and love God and all God loves, regardless of how much time is left....Knowledge of an end time reminds believers to double their efforts to do the will of God” (2006:37). Sage Russo agreed with

Sleeth, arguing that knowledge of the end of days does not absolve Christians of their obligations to live as good Christians. For Russo, claims that the millennium cancels any obligation toward environmentalism or social concern represent excuses for inaction, rather than solid arguments. Jim Lewis added that following the idea that God will ultimately take care of all problems to its logical extreme makes life essentially impossible. He said of those who claim to believe that argument, “I don’t think they really live like that; I don’t think you can get up in the morning and live like that. I can’t” (Lewis 2009). Again, for Lewis, arguments that humans need not concern themselves in environmental and social issues represent excuses for inaction, or cases of what Allen Johnson called “splitting the Gospel,” rather than solid arguments in favor of mountaintop removal and other extractive industries (Johnson 2009).

Clearly, there are multiple religious arguments for and against mountaintop removal, and religious environmentalists have many options and interpretations to choose from to make up their minds or support their opinions. As Roy Crist noted, those Christians who use their faith to support mountaintop removal are no less Christian than those who oppose it. Even those who agree in their opposition to mountaintop removal sometimes differ in their reasoning. Evangelical Christians may support creation care though ultimately reject being included in broader environmentalist circles, wishing to “walk together separately.” Radical environmentalists may likewise support the inclusion of Christian coalfield residents in the movement against mountaintop removal while politely rejecting their efforts at conversion. While cooperation between multiple religious groups certainly occurs in opposition to mountaintop removal, differences remain important as well. Certain beliefs and identities remain significant, but their boundaries become blurred as individuals work together. An interesting (if

sometimes tense) interplay between people of different religions, with different environmental values, is occurring in Appalachia.

The condition of religious resistance to mountaintop removal is “messy” (Orsi 2005:167). Returning to Orsi’s metaphor, religious responses to mountaintop removal are “braided,” with “improbable intersections, incommensurable ways of living, discrepant imaginings, unexpected movements of influence, and inspiration existing side by side” (2005:9). The multiple, sometimes contradictory, responses to mountaintop removal make up singular braids in the rope of religious environmentalism. Following the more organic metaphors of Taylor (2010) and Taylor (2007), different religious responses are currents in a broader stream of environmental concern. Points of tension are just as important as points of agreement, and the creativity exhibited by individuals. The impact of religious values on resistance to mountaintop removal is difficult to disentangle from other factors, but such disentanglement may not be necessary. For those groups and individuals presented in this dissertation, religious values clearly make up an important part of their reasoning in opposition to the surface mining practice. The importance of religion in the resistance to mountaintop removal should certainly not be overstated, nor should it be understated.

Another element that ties different religious activists together in the movement against mountaintop removal is the importance of narratives and relationality. Traditional Appalachian culture comprises what Robert Bellah called a “community of memory,” or one that is “involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community” (Bellah et al. 1996:153). Though the makeup of this Appalachian community is contested, all activists against mountaintop removal seem to agree that a specific community (comprised of both humans and

their surrounding environment and other organisms) is threatened by the practice. Activism against mountaintop removal represents “practices of commitment” from individuals interested in preserving that community (Bellah et al. 1996:154). Tying these individuals together are narratives of relationality; and though the content of these narratives differs (whether based on the Bible or perceptions of kinship with the natural world), different activists are nonetheless engaged in similar projects. If different religious values make up currents in the broader stream of environmental activism, then narratives of relationality mark the banks of the stream, binding the river’s chaotic flow in a generally consistent direction.

Alastair MacIntyre, George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson help to further theorize the links between narratives in anti-mountaintop removal activism.¹⁴⁸ In his highly influential *After Virtue* (2007), MacIntyre argued that humans exist within and are beholden to a series of nested relationships and narratives—or “stories” identifying the self and others. Individuals are both actors in and authors of the narratives within which they find themselves situated, but individual control is not complete. Instead, MacIntyre considered individuals to be co-authors of their own narratives along with other individuals, nature, and historical and cultural factors. He said, “we enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others” (MacIntyre 2007:213). Though individual control over narratives is not absolute, searching for truth necessarily entails discovering the narratives of life. MacIntyre famously argued, “man is in his actions and practices, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but

¹⁴⁸ By introducing narrative ethics here I am teetering on the edge of a great academic precipice. Numerous thinkers from a vast array of disciplines, including philosophy (Ricoeur 1983, 1984, 1985), theology (Hauerwas 2001), and history (Carr 1991), have employed the concept of narrative structure toward very diverse ends. My use of narrative theory is thus only a small sampling, but engaging with the broader field would likely require a separate project.

becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (MacIntyre 2007:216). Individuals continually negotiate their places within multiply nested narrative traditions as they progress through their lives, and moral decisions are made based on these narratives. For example, “I am Jay’s son” is a component of my life story, and that story identifies a specific son/father relationship which in turn implies specific duties and moral obligations. The narratives of life relate stories about our relationships and duties, for MacIntyre. Appalachians find themselves situated in this way as well, between narratives of Appalachian history, religious traditions, and economic policies. The Australian philosopher Arran Gare found MacIntyre’s theory especially useful for reconceptualizing global environmental problems. He argued that “if MacIntyre is right, the beliefs that matter for how people choose to live and act are those embodied in the narratives they are living out” (Gare 1998:7). The question partially becomes to which community is service owed, and for mountaintop removal opponents, the answer lies with local human and natural communities suffering the damaging effects of the mining practice.

George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s “cognitive science of moral understanding” (Johnson 1993:11) added to important concepts to the work of narrative theorists, such as that of the embodied mind and the metaphorical structure of cognition, useful for theorizing the importance of narratives in understanding religious resistance to environmental issues. In their early work *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson argued from linguistic evidence that human cognition is basically structured metaphorically, where one thing is understood and experienced in terms of another (2003:5). Complex value systems, including those found within

different religions, helped explain physical experiences, according to Lakoff and Johnson. They argued, “symbolic metonymies are critical links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterize religions and cultures. Symbolic metonymies that are grounded in our physical experience provide an essential means of comprehending religious and cultural concepts” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003:40). The authors continued that “the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003:22). Concepts like creation care appeal to some Christian Appalachians, then, because they cohere with shared social concepts of Christian duty and environmental responsibility. Of course, this does not prove that concepts like creation care will necessarily influence others since there are plenty of Christians in the region who oppose creation care. Still, the work of Lakoff and Johnson helps explain why it is possible and potentially powerful for different religious narratives and metaphors to combine with environmental values and experiences. Individuals do not simply choose to believe in creation care, but instead, they reflect concepts based on larger connections within the social and embodied mind.

Lakoff and Johnson wrote more specifically about nature and religious thought in their later work, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999). They argued, “the properties of mind are not purely mental: they are shaped in crucial ways by the body and brain and how the body can function in everyday life” (1999:565). Minds and cognition are always embodied, shaped by history, culture, and the natural world. Toward the end of the book, Lakoff and Johnson took up the implications of this embodied theory of mind for religions. Religious feelings, they argued, entail feelings of transcendence, defined as “empathetic projection,” or the projection of our own experiences onto others. Religions utilize humanity’s natural tendency to metaphorical thought,

as they say, “an ineffable God becomes vital through metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:567).

Religious experiences are always filtered through metaphorical structures, and the embodied nature of the mind ties religious metaphor to nature. They argued,

the environment is not an ‘other’ to us. It is not a collection of things that we encounter. Rather, it is part of our being. It is the locus of our existence and identity. We cannot and do not exist apart from it. It is through empathetic projection that we come to know our environment, understand how we are part of it and how it is part of us. This is the bodily mechanism by which we can participate in nature, not just as hikers or climbers or swimmers, but as part of nature itself, part of a larger, all-encompassing whole. A mindful embodied spirituality is thus an ecological spirituality (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:566).

Humans are participants within the natural world and co-authors of the narratives in which they live. Religions, or at least embodied spiritualities, do not always disconnect individuals from awareness of nature, but on the contrary, can foster a deeper connection with the environment.

Lakoff and Johnson provide a plausible explanation as to how experiences in the hills of Appalachia may promote feelings of belonging and connection to nature and motivate religious responses in its defense.

Of course, MacIntyre and Lakoff and Johnson would disagree on several important points, but their discussions of narratives helps researchers understand religious resistance to mountaintop removal. Religious values do not operate independently for activists. Instead, they are nested within networks of values, histories, and physical conditions that are bound together through narratives; and these narratives ultimately describe relationships. Paraphrasing MacIntyre, the various religious narratives active in Appalachia describe human/nature and human/society relationships. To be a steward, in the context of creation care, is to exist in a specific relationship between humanity, creation, and God. This relationship posits a special duty for humans to care for those over which they have been awarded dominion. For proponents of Appalachian nature religion, to be a mountaineer likewise implies a “covenantal” relationship

to past and future generations and environments. Each of these forms ties specific narrative traditions to behavioral values, and though evangelical Christians and radical environmentalists might have little else in common, in Appalachia they share relational commitments to protect the ecosystems and communities of the mountains. As ecofeminist philosopher Jim Cheney argued, “narrative is the key, then, but it is narrative grounded in geography rather than in a linear, essentialized narrative self” (1989:126). Likewise, narratives of religious resistance to mountaintop removal are grounded in the geography and history of Appalachia, though in many cases they also entail insights and traditions from far outside of the region.

Appalachian activists John Rausch and Allen Johnson made similar arguments about the importance of relationality within Christian environmentalist narratives. For Rausch, “morality is really a dialogue” (Rausch 2009). In our interview he noted that Christians tend to think of morality as concrete terms of law, but instead, religious laws propose specific relationships between individual humans, societies, and God. Creation care, likewise, is not a divine prohibition and law, but a call to responsibility and relationship. Rausch said, “that’s what care of creation is, it’s not a law—‘how dare you cut this grass’—no, [instead the command is] ‘how dare you not look after God’s garden, because you’re in relationship to God through the garden’” (Rausch 2009). This relational perspective was shared by evangelicals Allen Johnson and Calvin DeWitt. Johnson commented that the Biblical mandate for stewardship given to the first humans in the Garden of Eden identified a specific relationship between humans, God, and creation. He said, “we are created, first of all, to be relational...relationship with God, relationship with one another, relationship with creation” (Johnson 2009). Calvin DeWitt likewise proposed a “three-party, human-creature-Creator” relationship, following lessons from the Book of Job (2000:297). The power of creativity in this relationship lies with God, while humans and other creatures co-

exist in relationship with the creator and creation. Analyzing religious resistance to mountaintop removal in terms of narrative theory and relationality, then, is not entirely foreign to Appalachian activists themselves. The theories of MacIntyre, Lakoff, and Johnson help tie together to fundamental values and motivations of religious activists in the region while at the same time not masking their differences. The result is both explanatory and respectful to movement participants.

Conclusion

Mainline Christians, evangelical Christians, and dark green religious practitioners (of multiple forms) make up the three main categories of religious values employed by long-time, committed activists against mountaintop removal. These categories are not perfect, representing more overlapping fields of influence than solid, discrete identities. They also each represent different narratives on human/nature relationships. Following Orsi's (2005) metaphor, these three categories make up strands in a larger braid of religious resistance to mountaintop removal. Following Shapiro (2010:31), what ultimately holds these different strands together is a shared commitment to preserving the ecosystems and communities of Appalachia. Of course, that similarity exists only in the broadest scope. Zooming in, we see that fundamental differences between groups persist. Some locals hope to preserve the coal industry while phasing out surface mining, while others seek a complete cessation of coal mining and burning in order to remediate the global problem of climate change. Some activists view their commitment to saving the mountains as a necessary feature of their moral responsibilities as Christians to provide justice to the poor and suffering on earth, while others operate under the belief that mountaintop removal represents a direct affront to the earth organism who is, itself, worthy of spiritual respect. At these points and others, different activists may never agree. Likewise, lessons learned in Appalachia will likely not perfectly apply elsewhere, since the issue is very

much tied to the specific landscape of the southern mountains. Total agreement between parties and translatability to other issues is not necessary, though. Whatever other fibers are wrapped in the braid of resistance, the main trajectory of religious resistance to mountaintop removal is to end the mining practice. Other issues, though at times intertwined, ultimately comprise another story.



Figure 7-1. “The Agony of Gaia” by Jeff Chapman-Crane. Note the open, bleeding ribs and strip mining machinery scattered around. Photo taken by author in Chapman-Crane’s studio, Eolia, Kentucky, June 4, 2010. Image reproduced with artist’s permission.



Figure 7-2. Detail from “True Cost of Coal.” Seven generations of salamander women work on plant identification, weaving, and planting. Beehive Design Collective, no copyright.



Figure 7-3. Matt Sherman speaks at a rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School. Photo by author, June 23, 2009.



Figure 7-4. Larry Gibson describing the mine site surrounding his property on Kayford Mountain, West Virginia. Photo by author, July 3, 2009.



Figure 7-5. Julian Martin stands at the edge of a mountaintop removal site in West Virginia. Photo by author, July 16, 2010.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Following a panel on mountaintop removal policies at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Appalachian Studies Association, a local Appalachian man from the audience stood and argued that anti-mountaintop removal activists should not focus on saving the few un-impacted mountains left in Appalachia. Instead, they should work on new environmentally friendly industries for the region once the mining industry ran its course, because, as he concluded, “we’ve only got a few years of coal left anyway.”¹⁴⁹ For him, the environmental damage was for the most part already done, and the more reasonable approach for the future meant preparing for the inevitable decline of the coal industry.

Government and coal industry reports, however, do not support this speaker’s claims. The World Energy Council (WEC) reported that, as of 2008, the United States controlled 242.7 billion tons of coal reserves. This was almost as much as the nearest other coal-heavy countries (Russia and China) combined (WEC 2010:4). While the WEC reported on the U.S. generally, data from Appalachia showed a similar bounty of future reserves. In 2010 the West Virginia Coal Association estimated that there remained over 51 billion tons of recoverable coal in the state of West Virginia alone. At 2010 recovery rates (about 144 million tons per year), it would be over 300 years until West Virginia coal ran out (WVCA 2010:6).

If not challenged by government officials or resisted by local communities, coal mining in Appalachia could persist for centuries. Activists respond differently to this data. Some, like the man who spoke at the Appalachian Studies Association meeting, believe that coal will just have to run its course. One activist was very pessimistic, and in an interview said that mountaintop removal would probably continue until the coal ran out, and even then, the region

¹⁴⁹ Author’s field notes, March 29, 2008.

would likely be used as a toxic dump site. Other activists are not content to simply allow mountaintop removal to continue, however. Instead, they offer alternative industries for the region. Many around Coal River Valley in West Virginia (including Judy Bonds in her later days) advocate for wind energy farms on the already flattened mine land. Activists cite studies showing the long-term profitability of wind power in the area and urge Appalachia to become a leader in alternative energy production (Zeller 2010). Others provide more positive visions of Appalachia moving to a post-industrial, decentralized agrarian society, and thus a vision of a post-capitalist U.S. (Figure 8-1).

If mountaintop removal is to be stopped, the U.S. government must take a stronger position against the practice. While President Obama's brief review of permits in 2009 and the EPA's block on some mountaintop removal expansion permits in 2010 showed some promise for locals, longer and more detailed evaluations of mining policies and practices are needed to account for the multiple ecological, economic, and human health impacts of the practice. Opponents of mountaintop removal argue that regional Appalachian politics are controlled by coal-friendly legislators, and as long as the coal industry is allowed to have dominance over policymakers, few local legal challenges to mountaintop removal can have success. For this reason, there must be stronger efforts toward community democracy, where individuals feel they can freely express their beliefs without coercion. Voices from impacted communities must be heard by local and national politicians. As some activists argue, Central Appalachia presents a good site for wind and alternative energy development. If investors are interested in developing wind energy there, then it could potentially become a job-producing industry, rivaling coal on the free market. Stopping mountaintop removal, then, would require the efforts of courageous locals and interested parties from outside of the region. Because coal mining directly fuels U.S. energy

dependency, which in turn contributes to the growing problem of global climate change, it is in everybody's interest that policymakers carefully consider the local and global ramifications of mountaintop removal.

During the first decade of the 21st century, mountaintop removal emerged from a relatively unknown story into one of the most significant environmental justice movements in the United States. The issue drew some of the brightest social organizers and environmental activists from around the country, and inspired many locals to take positions of leadership that they may have previously eschewed. Whether people joined the movement to protect their backyards, or to stand in resistance to the United States' fossil-fuel based economy and its relationship to climate change, resistance to mountaintop removal became an important event in the history of North American social and environmental justice. Sierra Club field organizer Bill Price recognized the issue's potential political importance when he encouraged scholars and activists, "this is ground zero, this is the movement to get involved in" (Price 2010).

Significantly, the resistance to mountaintop removal involved religious activists who incorporated their faith and values into their efforts. Biocentric radical environmentalists, atheistic anarchists, mainline Christian preachers, and evangelical mountaineers (to just name a few groups) were drawn together by a shared commitment to stop mountaintop removal mining. Although religious tensions in the early years of the 21st century pushed some activists away from the issue and skepticism of some locals toward "outsider" environmentalists persisted into 2011, the movement against mountaintop removal also revealed some of the promise of religious and environmentalist cooperation. Activists drew upon familiar narrative traditions, including religious values and cultural histories, to motivate and support their cause. The strength and

influence of the movement, although such things are difficult to measure, is in part due to the incorporation of religious themes.

The movement against mountaintop removal could offer valuable insights for other environmental and social justice movements around the world. Just as the Appalachian movement drew upon lengthy local and national histories of resistance (including local union organizing, radical direct action tactics, and methods of legal challenge used by national environmental groups), other future movements may draw upon lessons learned from mountaintop removal protestors. This includes how to effectively coordinate activists of different religious beliefs to work together, without masking or downplaying their values and the differences between them. At the same time, secular groups should not parade religious activists in front of their movements as signs of the “greening of religion” without understanding the real values held by those religious practitioners—even those values that may be controversial. Religious values may not always be involved when communities stand against environmentally oppressive practices, but when they are, it is important to acknowledge and understand them. For their parts, scholars must help to elucidate the broader philosophical, historical, cultural, and religious connections between groups, but they must also be honest about what these values are, and what they are not. Categorizing different values helps explanation, but it must be done carefully to prevent misrepresenting the feelings and experiences of activists on the ground. In this study I have attempted to do just that. Addressing the muddiness and hybridity of religious values on the ground leaves little room for firm answers. Just as a river continually reshapes its banks, analytical points of reference shift and footings remain unstable when describing religious environmentalism. Nonetheless, regardless of what scholars think of the movement, some Appalachians will continue to rise up in resistance to mountaintop removal, viewing this as

essential to protect their homes, health, and ecosystems, and often times they will consider their resistance as a religious obligation.

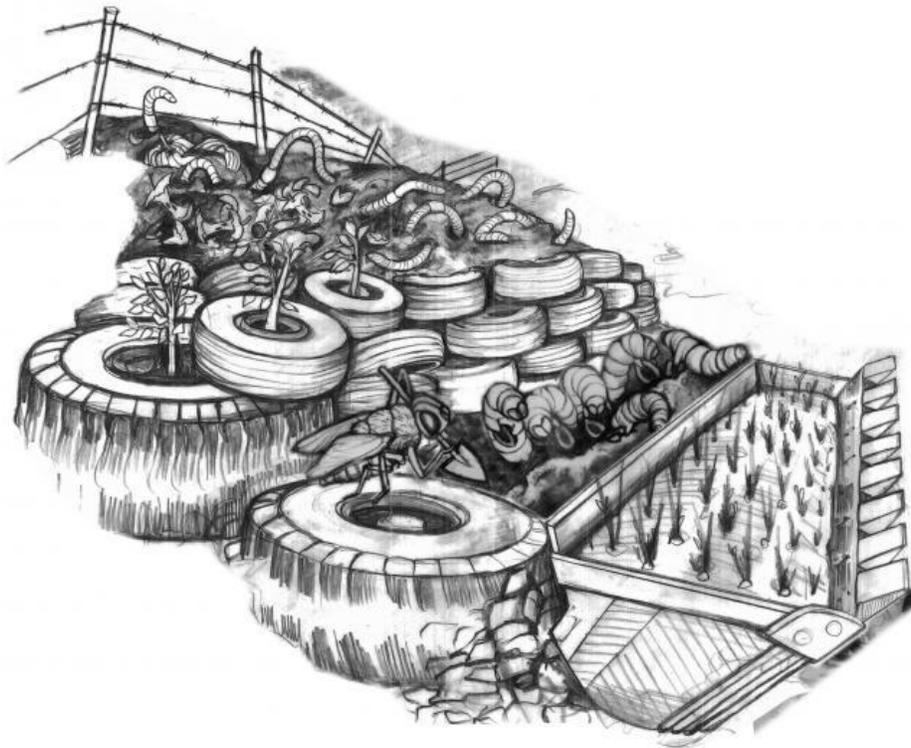


Figure 8-1. Detail from the “True Cost of Coal” poster featuring land restoration in a post-coal Appalachia. In the image, worms and flies work to rebuild soil and vegetation on old mine equipment. Beehive Design Collective, no copyright.

APPENDIX RESEARCH METHODS

The primary research for this dissertation is based in archival research, participant observation among anti-mountaintop removal activists, and in-depth interviews with movement leaders. This research was conducted between March 2008 and the spring of 2011, with substantial time spent in the field in the summers of 2009 and 2010. The following is a brief explanation of these methods, explaining why they were chosen, how they were applied, and what conclusions they helped produce.

The choice to use this three-legged primary research structure was inspired by leading scholarly works on religions and nature, primarily Gould 2005, Haberman 2006, Peterson 2005, B. Taylor 2010, and S. Taylor 2007. Though covering a diverse range of subjects, each of these sources analysed specific community responses to environmental issues through in-depth interviews and field observations, combined with substantial historical contextualization. Whether Salvadoran intentional communities, radical environmentalists, Hindu environmental activists, or back-to-the-land activists, each of these sources revealed the rich scholarly potential of interdisciplinary work in religion and environmental studies with values held as a central variable. The success of these works greatly influenced my own adoption of similar methods among anti-mountaintop removal activists. As discussed in later chapters of this dissertation, simply examining organized religious responses to mountaintop removal, I found, was insufficient for revealing the diverse religious responses to the subject. In order to ascertain those different responses, and to truly understand the movement and its historical continuities and internal debates, I had to engage, in depth, with activists themselves. The result, I believe, accurately reflects the diversity of responses to mountaintop removal among those who oppose it

and contributes to further understanding of how human religious values influence their practices toward the natural world.

The use of archival data was intended to help provide historical contextualization for the modern anti-mountaintop removal movement. Working at university and institutional archives at Berea College, East Tennessee State University, the University of Kentucky, and the Kentucky Historical Society, I focused on oral histories of coal miners and coal camp residents, religious surveys conducted in the early 20th century, as well as the personal and professional documents of Appalachian environmental groups and leaders, such as the Appalachian Alliance and Harry Caudill. Oral histories from former miners and coal camp residents held at the Kentucky Historical Society and Eastern Kentucky University proved particularly useful. Between the late 1970s and early 1990s, many retired deep miners and their families were interviewed about coal camp life and their views of mining industry changes. Many of these individuals were asked about their perspectives on surface mining. Analyzing these statements and understanding their historical contexts, and comparing the analysis to that of the leading histories of the Appalachian coal industry, allowed me to compare and contrast historical views of surface mining to contemporary views of mountaintop removal. Documenting these views allowed me to chart a shift in popular perceptions of the issue as forms of surface mining grew more intensive and environmentally costly.

Besides archival data, much of the primary research of this project comes from 19 face-to-face semistructured interviews (Bernard 2002:205). Each of these interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and was conducted with University of Florida IRB approval (protocol 2008-U-654). Each respondent signed an informed consent form, which I still hold on file, agreeing to the terms of the interview and choosing whether or not to remain anonymous or be named in the

project. All of my respondents allowed me to use their names in the project. Though questions differed slightly depending upon the research subject, each individual was asked questions on their personal history in Appalachia and in relation to mountaintop removal, their personal religious commitments and the relationships of those commitments to their beliefs about mountaintop removal, and their views on specific issues related to mountaintop removal, such as the use of direct action tactics, their perceptions of the social and environmental costs of the practice, and their visions for a post-mountaintop removal Appalachia. Within each category I allowed time for open-ended conversation. I selected my subjects by observing, through the media and at rallies, the most visible opponents of the issue. My first interview was with Judy Bonds In June 2009. Following that, I concluded each interview (or in the discussion after the interview) asking the subject to recommend others with whom I might speak. In that way, I identified future interview subjects. I also met people at events and rallies, introduced myself and explained my project, and scheduled interviews from there.

In selecting my subjects, I was primarily interested in individuals who took strong leadership positions in the movement against mountaintop removal and who had long histories of work on the issue. I did not, in other words, just pick random people that I met at different events. I decided to focus on movement leaders because I wanted to understand how religious values influenced those most responsible for guiding the contemporary movement. Exploring the religious values of other participants at anti-mountaintop removal events (some of whom may have only learned of the issue recently and thus not have much perspective on its trajectory over the years) would be interesting, but a different project from what I intended to undertake. Finally, and perhaps problematically, I did not seek out individuals who supported mountaintop removal for official interviews (though I did have some informal discussions with mountaintop

removal supporters at times). This choice was made primarily because my project focused on religious views *against* the practice. Pro-mountaintop removal arguments are readily available through the published statements of coal officials and pro-coal lobby groups. Other researchers, including Rebecca Scott (2010), have conducted interviews with supporters of mountaintop removal. It can be difficult for those unfamiliar with the issue to understand how contentious it is in Appalachia. During my research, I (along with other activists) was subjected to verbal threats and abuse on numerous occasions from pro-coal counter protestors, and on one occasion, had an air horn blown in my face at close range, temporarily impacting my hearing. Although I took care to not express anti-mountaintop removal views at rallies, by being embedded with anti-mountaintop removal activists, I was viewed by others as supporting the issue and therefore subjected to similar treatment. Such intimidation made reaching out to coal supporters difficult, if not even at times unwise. Given all of these conditions, I decided that secondary sources provided enough detail to effectively and fairly reproduce general categories of views in favor of mountaintop removal, though further research would enrich this data.

I recorded and transcribed each interview. Through my own qualitative analysis, I selected insightful, representative, and interesting quotes from the interviews to report in this study. I categorized the contents of each quote and organized its place within broader discussions of similar issues in the paper. Beyond individual quotes, interviews provided necessary context for each respondent's statements, which helped to accurately interpret and categorize their positions on different issues. My interview transcriptions accurately reflected the contents of the discussions, including pauses, repeated phrases, and linguistic fillers (such as "um"). Quoting the interviews in the text of the paper, however, these details were replaced with ellipses to preserve a more easily readable narrative flow. In the text, I have worked to preserve

sufficient context for each statement, introducing important details in the surrounding narrative, to ensure that the interview subject's intended meaning was preserved. My goal has been to reflect and interpret data, developing my argument out of the details that exist. For this reason and for my integrity as a researcher, I have presented the views of my research subjects as accurately and fairly as possible. If I have mistakenly characterized an interviewee's message, it was accidental and not an attempt at misrepresentation or skewing data.

The final method used for this project was participant observation, including attendance at public meetings related to mountaintop removal, anti-mountaintop removal rallies, and work with different activists groups in Appalachia (Bernard 2002:327). Specifically, I attended the following events: a benefit concert for the students of Marsh Fork Elementary School in Shakori Hills, North Carolina on June 19, 2009; a day-long rally at Marsh Fork Elementary School on June 23, 2009; the Mountain Keeper Festival at Larry Gibson's property on Kayford Mountain on the July 4th weekends of 2009 and 2010; a Sludge Safety Project community meeting in Ansted, West Virginia on July 7, 2009; a tour of Kentucky mountaintop removal sites with Father John Rausch and Women in Service to Appalachia on July 12, 2009; a march and rally at the Tennessee Valley Authority headquarters in Knoxville, Tennessee, organized by United Mountain Defense, on July 26, 2009; Mountain Justice summer training camp near Whitesburg, Kentucky, between May 27 and June 6, 2010; a June 8, 2010, protest at a Lexington, Kentucky, PNC bank organized by Kentucky Mountain Justice; and the Appalachia Rising march in Washington, D.C. on September 29, 2010. Along with these events, I stayed for extended periods at the Christians for the Mountains volunteer house in Ansted, West Virginia, in June 2009 and the United Mountain Defense house near Knoxville, Tennessee, in July 2010. In both places I lived with other activists and engaged in planning and strategizing as well as more

mundane activities like cooking and household decisions. Because I spent much of the summers of 2009 and 2010 driving between events, interviews, and camp sites (where I generally stayed when not conducting research), I frequently provided rides for other activists. This provided me with many hours of informative conversations that impacted my overall understanding of the movement against mountaintop removal.

I did not mechanically record any of my participant events, but I did take extensive notes in a journal. Depending upon the event, I generally did not take notes as the event unfolded, but reflected on the event and my impressions in the journal afterwards. Because rallies and hearings are open to the public and comments were made in free public space, I took notes freely. In some instances, I conducted break-out conversations with other participants. I always revealed my project to anybody to whom I talked in this way, let them know that my research would appear in a dissertation and possible other publications, and gained verbal approval to reflect our conversation in my project. In these instances I did not record the individual's name (even if I knew it), but applied a descriptive term in my notes. For example, I had a long discussion in West Virginia with "a young Mountain Justice activist from Vermont." That description allowed me to remember the individual and the context of the conversation, without ever identifying him or her by name. I do not use the names of individuals encountered in my research unless they agreed for me to do so on an informed consent form, and even in those cases, it is only the content of interviews that appears. The only exception to this is in the case of public speeches. In several instances, activists like Judy Bonds, Jim Lewis, Allen Johnson, and others made short speeches at rallies or other public events. In the dissertation, if I cite any of these comments, I refer to the speaker by name and reference the date the comments were made.

Besides attending rallies and marching with anti-mountaintop removal activists, I also lived and worked with activists, sometimes putting myself at risk of arrest. Working with more radical activists presents unique challenges for fieldwork. Many contemporary activist groups observe what is called “security culture”—a vaguely defined set of conventions meant to protect other activists. I always revealed my project and intentions with the activists with whom I worked, and this at times meant I was excluded from certain conversations. There were certain individuals, too, probably out of a general distrust of the growing number of reporters, documentarians, and researchers in the field, who completely avoided me and seldom made any conversation. I only spoke with those who were comfortable with it, and left others alone. I can sympathize with the growing annoyance among activists toward researchers. One activist, for example, told me of several faux pas he had witnessed by other journalists and researchers, such as recording conversations or taking photographs without the approval of all present. I did not repeat those mistakes.

My purpose for conducting participant observation was to get a sense of how the anti-mountaintop removal movement unfolds on the ground, to experience the movement first-hand, and to build relationships with and gain access to activists. For this reason, I did not need to know sensitive details, and I have intentionally not been exposed to any information that could be used against activists in a court of law. Observations from my time spent with activist groups appear in my research journal.

Connecting archival, interview, and participant observation data has been necessary to understand the contemporary movement against mountaintop removal. Too many journalistic and scholarly accounts of the movement rely only on secondary sources. My intention was to provide an unprecedented level of depth to research on this movement and accurately reflect the

importance of different religious values in the movement. Technically, I could have used secondary accounts from influential activists for this project, such as Judy Bonds and Larry Gibson; but such research would have failed to truly account for the diversity of beliefs among activists. I believe that my project has been made much stronger by the use of these different mixed methods, and I hope it will be useful to others scholars working on similar issues as well as the activists themselves, who so generously gave their time.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph Witt was born in Conway, Arkansas. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and religion from Hendrix College in 2003, and then moved to the University of Florida to study in the newly formed program in religion and nature. He earned his Master of Arts in religion from the University of Florida in 2006. Mr. Witt has accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Religion at Mississippi State University, beginning in the fall of 2011.