

MARTYR'S LOCAL: PUBLICS, VIOLENCE, MEMORY-MAKING
AND RAMIFICATIONS OF THE COMMITMENT TO PROGRESS
THROUGH RHETORICS OF THE MARION MASSACRE, 1929-PRESENT

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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On October 2, 1929, millhands at Marion Manufacturing shut down their machines and walked off the factory floor. Months of striking had left workers in very much the same precarious situation that pushed them to mobilize in the first place. However, the wildcat strikers found themselves on the wrong end of the Sheriff's deputies' guns and six laborers died outside the mill gate in what would come to be known as the Marion Massacre. Throughout the strikes, violence played a key role as a tactic of both resistance and control. Despite the violent nature of the strikes, the tragedy that ended them, and the national media attention they received, the Marion Massacre has become largely lost to public memory. Analyzing the role of violence and public-memory making as tactics of both resistance and control, this thesis explores the Marion Massacre through the lens of public and counterpublic theory to better understand the ramifications of ideological commitments to progress in the New South and contemporary American society. Commitments to progress, specifically the privileging of nonviolent resistance over deliberative democratic solutions,

stifled the socio-political efficacy of the union in Marion and impacted how the strikes have been remembered for nearly a century. This thesis asserts that wildcat strikes are legitimate counterpublic tactics for achieving agency in the public sphere, that violence should be understood with more nuance and more attention should be given to the rhetorical nature of violence, that counterpublic memory-making is a key tactic for long-term resistance to oppressive ideologies, and that public memory has just as strong of an influence on individual identity as it does on collective identity.

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Dedication

For Nana, I wish you were here.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments	vi
Dedication	ix
Chapter 1: The Marion Massacre and Rhetorical Approach to Appalachian Studies.....	1
Chapter 2: Seeking Counterpublicity in Climates of Violence: Publics, Progress, and Wildcat Strikes in Marion, N.C.	25
Chapter 3: Public Memory, Place, and Power: Vernacular Discourses of the Marion Massacre	48
Chapter 4: Martyr's Local	71
Bibliography	79
Vita	85

Chapter One:

The Marion Massacre and a Rhetorical Approach to Appalachian Studies

Our leaders preach if we disagree/ We're the traitors of society

- "Ignition," Trivium

"We had our suspicions, but we didn't know," recounted Sam Finley a millhand in one of Marion, North Carolina's textile mills, "But anyhow, they were there and waiting all night; and they had five gallon of whiskey and drank it, these deputy sheriffs did."¹ Months of violent unrest that included dynamite blastings, scuffles with law enforcement, and shootings had put Sheriff Adkins and his deputies on edge. Finley continued, "this sheriff and his deputy and deputies were standing right at the gate. Well, he pulled a stick of tear gas and put it in [strikers] faces. When they turned for masks these deputies shot them in the back three to five hundred yards, running down the road, shot down and killed right in the road."² Six workers died that morning outside the gate of Marion Manufacturing while production at the mill carried on as usual.

¹ Vesta and Sam Finley, interview by Mary Frederickson, *Southern Oral History Program Collection*, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, July 22, 1975.

² Finley and Frederickson.

Earlier on that morning of October 2, 1929, millhands on the night shift at Marion Manufacturing shut down their looms and walked off the factory floor.³ Discontent with conditions in the mills and with the inability for the United Textile Workers (UTW) to negotiate a lasting truce, this group of workers took the radical action of striking without union support. This *wildcat strike* was the culmination of five months of protest and unrest in the small mountain town. Over the course of that “summer of dynamite,”⁴ Marion’s millhands challenged the hegemony of the town’s textile mills, dynamiting buildings and wrestling with deputies as they fought for fairer treatment on the factory floor and in the mill villages where they lived. However, Marion’s millhands challenged more than just paternalistic industry. These exploited workers, excluded from the American Dream, questioned through their protests the very foundations of American socio-political identity. While an industrializing Southern economy may have brought prosperity to a select few, laborers in Marion and thousands of others across the South brought attention to the inequities of America’s *progress*.

This research seeks to understand the ramifications of these ideological commitments to progress as it is evidenced in American political discourse by specifically understanding how it impacts resistance movements and reifies structures of power. The labor unrest in

³ The information in this paragraph is summarized from a number of sources including *Unraveled: Labor Strife and Carolina Folk during the Marion Textile Strikes of 1929* by Travis Sutton Byrd, *When Southern Labor Stirs* by Tom Tippett, and *The Marion Massacre* by Mike Lawing. Secondary literature specifically discussing the labor uprising and the massacre in Marion in 1929 is relatively scant, with Byrd’s book being the definitive treatment, when compared to some other uprisings of the era like Gastonia 1929 and the Uprising of 1934. Because of this, these books and a handful of other scholarly monographs and theses provide the bulk of the secondary historical sources for this thesis which is subsequently supplemented by my own primary source research of period newspaper articles covering the strikes in Marion. Through this combination, I feel that I have been able to present a fair portrait of the events of 1929 that builds upon this secondary literature and distills, without distorting, months of newspaper articles from the *Asheville Citizen*.

⁴ Travis Sutton Byrd, *Unraveled: Labor Strife and Carolina Folk during the Marion Textile Strikes of 1929* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2015), 122.

Marion of 1929 serves as a useful case study for this analysis because the events of that summer are woven together by the threads of progress and the New South, violence and resistance, and memory-making and forgetting. The Marion Massacre, in both reality and legend, offer a unique window into how progress as an ideology that drives America can serve to reify structural relations of power by legitimizing state violence and not violence in the name of resistance, by justifying economic expansion even if it means exploitation, and by erasing a massacre of workers from public memory rather than telling the story even if it contradicts our collective conceptions of progress.

By looking at the case of Marion we can glean lessons about the protests that can help us understand that socio-economic moment and apply those lessons to our own time to more fully understand contemporary American political trends, particularly the movements of rural and working-class populations. In fact, scholars and cultural critics have long used Appalachia as a means of explaining dominant social and political trends in American society. Indeed, in the wake of the 2016 election, Appalachia, or “Trump Country,” has served as a window into the mind of the rural voter and become a lightning rod for criticism and blame as a conservative and reactionary hotbed.⁵ However, this is nothing new. Appalachian Studies has long seen Appalachia and the many stereotypes that circulate about the region as measures of national progress and the viability of the American experiment. Henry Shapiro traced the “discovery” of Appalachia to local-color and missionary literature and the fears of urban Appalachians of economic modernization.⁶ Shapiro showed how the ideas of Appalachia and America came to be seen in radical opposition to one another --

⁵ Elizabeth Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018), 22.

⁶ Henry Shapiro, *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 3.

America representing the result of “inevitable processes of historical development”⁷ and Appalachia embodying an impoverished and backward land “in but not of America.”⁸ In fact, Appalachia, as a place and a culture, have served “throughout the twentieth century as a continually negotiated mythic space through which modern Americans have attempted to define themselves and their national identity.”⁹ The contemporary proliferation of Trump Country journalism is only one example of this phenomenon but it highlights the pertinence of understanding what causes rural lower class populations to undertake socio-political action. The events that occurred in Marion in 1929 and memories of said events demonstrate the limits and possibilities of alternative forms of resistance, like violence and wildcat strikes, and the power of memory to craft the landscapes from which we act in ways that either reify or challenge social stratifications.

A Brief History of the Marion Massacre, 1929

In 1929, Marion had four textile mills. The abundance of cheap labor, access to transportation networks, and availability of local investors made the town an appealing site for industry. Much like the coal towns found in other parts of Appalachia,¹⁰ these textile mills were equipped with their own villages and company stores. Mill workers who were known as “lint heads” and “trash,” worked twelve-hour days for minimal wages, and were treated as *second-class citizens* in Marion.¹¹ Despite the harsh conditions workers in Marion

⁷ Shapiro, 31.

⁸ Shapiro, 18.

⁹ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁰ Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

¹¹ Mike Lawing, *The Marion Massacre* (Shelbyville: Wasteland Press, 2004), 8.

faced, many found conditions in the mills to be preferable to those they would have experienced back home on their family farms.

Instead, the strike began in response to two trends occurring at the factory that violated these relatively comfortable conditions.¹² The first, the *stretch-out*, a common phenomenon throughout southern textile mills, forced workers to do sometimes up to twice as much work in the same twelve-hour day for the same pay. Specifically, workers were required to work an extra 20 minutes before and after their shift while working an increasing number of machines during those shifts. The second involved the firing of workers who had joined the recently formed union. Management and owners at the mill were unresponsive to workers' appeals for reinstatement. On July 11, 1929, workers left their stations at Marion Manufacturing. The United Textile Workers union would very shortly thereafter sanction this initial wildcat strike.¹³

In response to the unrest, the mills initially began a series of firings and evictions. The attempted evictions led to more unrest in Marion. Governor O. Max Gardner eventually appointed Judge N.A. Townsend to arbitrate a resolution to the strikes.¹⁴ Gardner urged the union and mill owners to send representatives to meet with Townsend however, the two sides remained deadlocked. Initially weary of sending in troops, Gardner authorized the deployment of the National Guard to Marion. The presence of the troops elicited blasts of dynamite from the strikers.

On August 24, Townsend announced an agreement that was tenuous at best and ultimately fell apart. In the wake of its dissolution, a series of dynamite explosions rattled the

¹² Sam Howie, "The New South in the North Carolina Foothills: A Study of the Early Industrial Experience in McDowell County: A Thesis" (master's thesis, Appalachian State University, 1978), 8.

¹³ Byrd.

¹⁴ Byrd, 123.

town. The most destructive blast occurred on the morning of August 30, when a bombing at the Clinchfield Mill resulted in \$1,000 worth of damage.¹⁵ Strikers grew emboldened and resorted to more violent tactics. In turn, the mill owners and state officials became more desperate to quell the insurrection.

A conference began between representatives of the union and the mills to reach another settlement to end the disputes.¹⁶ However again no formal signed document emerged from this conference, only an informal agreement on the initiatives. By September 25, reports circulated about the mills violating the terms of the agreement. As a result, on the morning of October 2, the second wildcat strike began at Marion Manufacturing. Some workers had grown to resent the union due to the continuous breakdown in agreements as well as the fact that union employees found it harder to find jobs in Marion. This led them to once again take strike action outside of union support.

One striker proclaimed: “We are going to throw picket lines around the fence and prevent scabs from entering the gates. If the workers hit us, then we will have a right to fight.”¹⁷ Workers chanted “To hell with the bosses, to hell with the scabs.”¹⁸ Sheriff Adkins attempted to quell the crowd a few times before he decided it was time to fire tear gas into the crowd. Strikers contend that at this point the Sheriff and all of his deputies opened fire on them and continued firing as they fled. According to law enforcement, Adkins was attacked first by a striker, while others shot at the deputies, who returned fire in self-defense. Some of those wounded or killed were shot from behind, which became a point of contention. Strikers

¹⁵ Byrd, 141.

¹⁶ Anonymous, “Normal Forces Working Mills,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), September 13, 1929.

¹⁷ Lawing, 49.

¹⁸ Lawing, 50.

claimed this was proof that they were shot at by deputies as they fled, while law enforcement claims this was proof that strikers fired at deputies and accidentally struck their own. Thirty-one people were wounded and six died, one dying on the scene.¹⁹ Work began in the mills after the dead and wounded were removed from the road and in the afternoon the mill had the road scraped to cover up the pools of dried blood.

A Context of Unrest: Labor versus Industry in Appalachia and the South

Standing as a gateway town²⁰ between the mountains to the west and the established industries and ports to the east, Marion occupied an important intersection that brought cheap labor from the Appalachian Mountains to the textile mills that drove the region's economy. This clash of cultures and classes made Marion a hotbed for labor unrest, violent suppression, and an overall turbulence that would both mirror and foreshadow the path the country would take as the roaring twenties collapsed into the Great Depression. In 1929 on the brink of Black Tuesday, that clash of cultures became manifest in the labor revolt that would end with the massacre of six laborers. The strike coincided with textile worker unrest throughout southern Appalachia and the greater South. Sam Howie writes that anywhere from seventeen to eighteen thousand workers were on strike in 1929. Some of these strikes involved Northern labor organizers; however, most of the strikes that characterized the region at this time were unorganized wildcat strikes.²¹ This is true of Marion as well. While workers initially found financial and strategic support from the union, ultimately they found that

¹⁹ Robert E. Williams, "Killed at Marion," *Raleigh News & Observer* (Raleigh, NC), October 3, 1929.

²⁰ John Inscoc and Gordon McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 23.

²¹ Howie, 9.

neither organization nor capitulation would bring relief to their strife. It was only through striking out on their own, they felt, that they could force the mills to bend.

The industrialization occurring in Marion was part of a wave of industrialization that occurred throughout the Southeast at the turn of the century that came to be known after its rallying cry “the New South.”²² The New South, as Woodward notes, does not refer to a place so much as an ideology -- a *slogan*, in Woodward’s terms -- that is closely aligned with the ideology of progress. Woodward claimed the New South “set apart those whose faith lay in the future from those whose heart was with the past. It suggested moods ranging from forthright recantation to an affable and uncritical optimism. It was invariably laden with a hopeful nationalism suggesting that the lately disaffected South was at last one in faith with the country.”²³ Indeed the industrialists who brought their factories to the South saw not only the fortunes to be made but also the ability to rehabilitate a region of the country that had recently been economically ravaged by the Civil War and Reconstruction. One of the most prolific industries to take hold in the region was the textile industry.

According to Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., “Textile mills built the New South.”²⁴ While agriculture remained dominant in many parts of the South, in the Piedmont region, stretching from southern Virginia into northern Alabama and including many small towns like Marion, the textile industry rapidly took hold and drastically changed society.²⁵ The expansion of cotton mills was rapid. As industrialists, driven by their belief that bringing

²² C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966). This is the canonical text in the historiography of works on the New South. Though the debates and conversations have evolved much since its publication, people still refer often to *Origins* when beginning their discussions of the New South.

²³ Woodward, ix.

²⁴ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al. *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xvii.

²⁵ Hall, et al.

industry was a form of civic piety and a moral incitement,²⁶ built more and more mills throughout the region “the number of mills in the South mounted from 161 in 1880 to... 400 in 1900 -- an increase of 48.4 percent in the eighties and 67.4 percent in the nineties.”²⁷ As mentioned, this process of economic development became a “civic crusade inspired with a vision of social salvation.”²⁸ Indeed the New South represented an ideology of economic and social progress. These industrialists and politicians believed that the South could be redeemed and rehabilitated both economically and morally with the coming of industry and the recovery of the region’s economy. Governor O. Max Gardner made clear the connections between the New South and democratic notions of progress when he said, “the very essence and spirit of this cultural and spiritual renaissance was the democracy, relentless as it was youthful, of the New South.”²⁹

It is also possible to situate Marion’s industrializing economy and unrest within the turbulent socio-economic environment throughout the South and Appalachia at the turn of the 20th century. Throughout the region, labor and industry seemed to continuously find themselves at odds as the region grappled with the impacts of growing industrialization. In 1897, deputies gunned down nineteen anthracite coal miners and injured thirty-eight more in Lattimer, Pennsylvania.³⁰ Labor unrest in Matewan, West Virginia led to the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921, an epic labor clash that saw miners suppressed by a dangerous alliance

²⁶ Woodward, 133.

²⁷ Woodward 132.

²⁸ Woodward, 133.

²⁹ David Leroy Corbitt, ed., *Public Papers and Letters of Governor Oliver Max Gardner: Governor of North Carolina, 1929-1933*, (Raleigh: Council of State, State of North Carolina, 1937), 195.

³⁰ Paul A. Shackel, *Remembering Lattimer: Labor, Migration, and Race in Pennsylvania Anthracite Country* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

between the federal government and the coal industry.³¹ At the heart of the problem lay a feeling of desperation invoked by prolonged exploitation and inadequate compensation. Laborers had grown discontent with their living and working conditions that seemed to betray the ideals of economic progress that drove the nation and the New South.

Another trend in Marion, common in other textile towns of the South as well as industrial towns throughout Appalachia, was the prevalence of violence. It has been shown that “sharp economic change obviously disturbs the relationship between what men and women have been led to expect, and the conditions they actually experience.”³²

Industrialization and the drastic changes that it brought to the economic and socio-political landscape in these industrial towns, especially the rapidity and drastic nature of the expansion of textile mills, can thus be seen as key contributors to this prevalence of violence.³³ In fact, industrial frontiers throughout the country were inherently violent.³⁴ Understood in this context, the prevalence of violence in a seemingly quiet textile town like Marion is rendered more salient. Much like the rest of America’s industrial frontiers, dramatic shifts in the economic and cultural landscape -- the development of a textile economy and the mass influx of migrant workers from the mountains -- in Marion led to violence. Further, the *climates of violence* that engulf these towns render the rhetorical contours and possibilities of violence much more visible. That is, whereas violence is typically reserved for and only legitimate

³¹ Matthew Richards, “Mountaintop Removal, Activism, and the Commitment to Progress in Industrial Sacrifice Zones: The Socialization of Class in West Virginia” (doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, 2016), 75.

³² Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 8.

³³ Altina L. Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 139.

³⁴ Paul Rakes and Kenneth Bailey, “‘A Hard-Bitten Lot’: Nonstrike Violence in the Early Southern West Virginia Smokeless Coalfields, 1880–1910,” in *Blood in the Hills: A History of Violence in Appalachia*, Bruce Stewart, ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 334.

when done by the state,³⁵ in places like Marion, violence became the norm, a common tool for communication.

The prevalence of both wildcat strikes and violence in strike action throughout the southeast and Appalachia during these turn-of-the-century labor revolts requires exploration and explication. Not every strike that has occurred in the history of the United States has left dead bodies in its wake nor has every strike been undertaken without the assurance that institutional support provides. In spite of that, strikes from Lattimer to Marion or from Gastonia to Matewan, experienced violent uprisings with or without consistent union support. While the rest of the country prospered in an industrializing New South, while robber barons lined their pockets and America harnessed its manifest destiny, many were left by the wayside -- discontent, disillusioned, and ready to fight.

Publics, Progress, and Violence: A Rhetorical Approach to Appalachian Studies

This thesis turns to rhetorical theory in order to fully elucidate the ways in which power operates in Appalachia on a symbolic and ideological level to reify power relations within the region. Rhetoric has a long history examining and critiquing the ways in which power operates on symbolic and discursive levels to reify ideological commitments and socio-political stratifications of populations. For example, Barbara Biesecker, influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, has argued that studying and critiquing rhetoric can highlight alternative methods of resistance that challenge established matrices of power.³⁶ Ronald Greene has shown how rhetoric functions as a “technology of deliberation” that is utilized by

³⁵ Jeremy Engels, “The Rhetoric of Violence: Sarah Palin's Response to the Tucson Shooting,” *sympleke* 20, no. 1-2 (2012): 123.

³⁶ Barbara Biesecker, “Michel Foucault and the Question of Rhetoric,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25, no. 4 (1992), 361.

governing apparati to police populations.³⁷ Another example would be the work of Dana Cloud, who has borrowed heavily from Marxist thought to understand how union rank-and-file find agency despite partnerships between union leadership and corporate management.³⁸ This is but a small sample of these scholars' work and of the work of rhetoricians thinking about rhetoric and power as a whole, but they help to show the insights to be gained by understanding the symbolic dimensions of power and how they operate.

Two foundational texts that have influenced many rhetoricians to think through the rhetorical nature of power were written by Raymie McKerrow and Michael Calvin McGee. McKerrow's influential article "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and *Praxis*" forwards a conception of rhetoric as a tool through which we can examine "the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world."³⁹ McKerrow's critical rhetoric seeks to "demystify" the conditions of power through critical analysis of ideological "discourses of power."⁴⁰ Further, rhetorician Michael Calvin McGee outlined the connections between rhetoric, power, and ideology by forwarding the concept of the *ideograph*. For McGee:

An ideograph is an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable.⁴¹

³⁷ Ronald W. Greene. "Another Materialist Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 15, (1998).

³⁸ Dana Cloud, *We Are the Union: Democratic Unionism and Dissent at Boeing* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

³⁹ Raymie McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis" in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, eds. Mark J. Porrovecchio and Celeste Michelle Condit (New York: The Guilford Press, 2016), 396.

⁴⁰ McKerrow, 396.

⁴¹ Michael Calvin McGee, "The 'Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, eds. Mark J. Porrovecchio and Celeste Michelle Condit (New York: The Guilford Press, 2016), 378.

This thesis project uses the concept of the ideograph, as developed over time in the field, to analyze progress and American society's commitments to it. In addition, McGee outlines how some ideographs serve to brand some behaviors as unacceptable.⁴² In relation to the strikes in Marion and the conception of Appalachia in the American imaginary, violence serves as an ideograph that denotes unacceptable forms of resistance and demarcates lower-class populations as expendable and exploitable when furthering the cause of progress. Rhetorical theory thus provides us a lens through which we can critically look at how these public discourses of progress and violence function to reinforce power, stifle counterpublicity, and reinforce relations of power in Appalachia.

The most influential examination of power relations in Appalachia has come from John Gaventa. Gaventa's analysis of quiescence and rebellion in Appalachia has had a lasting impact on the field specifically in regards to how we understand how power operates. *Power and Powerlessness* finds that the quiescence of the Central Appalachian Valley cannot be blamed on the mountaineers themselves, nor can it be seen as a consensus of submission to the powerful, but instead that quiescence has been overstated and to the extent that it exists, it is the result of a long history of limitations placed upon the mountaineers by absentee owners and local elites.⁴³ Gaventa argues that there are three dimensions of power operating in Appalachia. The first is the pluralist idea of equitable political systems. How political participation is structured to stratify political interests and create unequal access to policy-making constitutes the second dimension of power. For Gaventa, the third dimension of power is evident in the processes by which the powerless are prevented from formulating

⁴² McGee, 378.

⁴³ John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 252.

political consciousness in the first place. Through his analysis of Middlesboro, Kentucky, Gaventa shows how these dimensions of power operate cumulatively and complementary to sow quiescence and the appearance of quiescence into Appalachian society.

The turn to rhetorical theory specifically helps us to understand this third dimension of power. This project shows how the ideology of progress serves to stifle opposition movements. In addition, by analyzing the memory of the Marion Massacre and the dynamic between memory and power, this thesis highlights the process through which quiescence or resistance may be sewn into a population through the circulation of memories. Conversely, this thesis brings attention to alternative methods of resistance in Appalachia and for counterpublics more broadly. The first of these as shown in chapter two is the viability of wildcat striking as a means of counterpublic action. In Marion, millhands effectively launched wildcat strikes that brought attention to their demands and conditions of exploitation. Secondly as shown in chapter three, the articulation of counterpublic discourses through counterpublic memory-making can have a significant impact on the lessons that we learn from historical events leading to a challenging of industrial hegemony and state-sanctioned violence for generations to come.

Lastly, the turn to rhetorical theory is made more urgent simply due to the nature of the field of Appalachian Studies. While the field has its fair share of anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists, among countless other experts from a plethora of fields, there are few rhetoricians tackling the symbolic operations of power and ramifications of communicative world-making in the region. Rhetorical theory has a significant amount to offer Appalachian Studies, and vice versa, especially in terms of analyzing rhetorics of resistance and control as well as the ramifications of ideological constructions on the region's

population. Turning to rhetorical theory further contributes to and diversifies Appalachian Studies' interdisciplinary project, bringing new methods of research and analysis into the field, leading to new perspectives and contributions to our rich field of research. Rhetoric and Appalachian Studies are particularly suited to critique notions of progress because of because of rhetoric's attention to ideology and Appalachian Studies' understanding of the relationship between the region and America's national identity.

American identity revolves around progress, which, as discussed, is often defined in relation to Appalachia. Belief in notions of progress is “contemporary common sense.”⁴⁴ In American culture, and Western culture as a whole, progress underlies nearly every ideological point on the spectrum. Since the Industrial Revolution, progress, in its various iterations, has occupied this position as the central component of American society.⁴⁵ Of these many iterations -- scientific, intellectual, spiritual, or moral -- progress has come to signify *economic* progress. As discussed above, Appalachia has long been used as a measure for and further justification of American commitments to progress. Appalachia simultaneously represents how far America has progressed, provides reasons for further economic development and exploitation, and acts as a scapegoat to explain away conditions that antagonize American society's commitment to progress. Appalachia provides progress with adequate ground to “define our society for us, justify certain beliefs and actions, and signify collective commitments, such as the belief in technology as the answer to all problems, and the treatment of all nonhuman [and some human] life forms as resources to be exploited.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Kevin DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 46.

⁴⁵ DeLuca, *Image Politics*, 46.

⁴⁶ DeLuca, *Image Politics*, 48.

One of the many ways that this relationship between Appalachia and America is constructed is through stereotyping Appalachia as a land of violence and using that impression of violence to distance Appalachia from progressive America, reifying regional difference and inferiority. In the American imaginary, Appalachian hillbillies and outlaws have been held responsible for violent blood feuds, shootouts with prohibitionists, and conflicts with oppressive industrialists. As Bruce Stewart argues, these characterizations of Appalachia demonstrate that “highlanders were unwanted remnants of America’s pioneer past.”⁴⁷ However, as DeLuca argues, “The extent to which social control is fundamentally rhetorical and ideographic usages imprison us is most evident when circumstances or antagonisms open potential spaces for change.”⁴⁸ DeLuca’s warning becomes more visible in the context of the labor strife in Marion. Public commitments to progress, in this case, a commitment to nonviolence, in Marion were directly confronted by an actual proliferation of violence in the textile town. As violence spread, the hegemony of progress served to delegitimize violent resistance and those associated with it evidencing the ideological and rhetorical power of progress. The case of Marion shows how commitments to progress are a condition of *belonging* in America, penalizing and prohibiting alternative actions like violence, which ran counter to the visions of progress.⁴⁹

Violence is often excluded from iterations and conceptions of progress because it is typically seen as uncivil, anti-democratic, and even primitive. To this end, associations with and characterizations of violence have been used to stratify populations. This stratification is evident when considered in the context of Appalachia. However, rhetoric as a field also

⁴⁷ Bruce Stewart, *Blood in the Hills: A History of Violence in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 4.

⁴⁸ DeLuca, *Image Politics*, 50.

⁴⁹ McGee.

carries with it this rejection or at least skepticism of the efficacy of violence in contemporary democracy. Going all the way back to the classics, one can find an oppositional but harmonious relationship between *peitho* and *bia* or symbolic and physical persuasion respectively.⁵⁰ Violence erupts to force action where rhetoric has failed to persuade one to action. In addition, civic violence (not objective state violence) has typically been seen as something that rhetoric and contemporary democracies strive to eradicate.⁵¹ Commitment to these ideals of progress and nonviolence dominate public discourse further isolating violence from the scope of rhetorical study. Because of this, violence had typically been eschewed by rhetoricians who instead focused on symbolic persuasion.

As mentioned, violence is only legitimate in contemporary Western democracy when done by the state.⁵² This is due in part because this state violence serves to protect and expand notions of and commitments to progress. Mass incarceration, police brutality, and war are all examples of acts of violence perpetrated by the state and lauded by civilians who share those commitments to progressive ideals. This also leads to some acts of violence being treated differently than others meaning who is the perpetrator and who is the victim becomes an important socio-political question. The division between legitimate state violence and unsanctioned violence from marginalized populations is made clear in Marion in 1929. While acts of violence done by discontent laborers ultimately served to delegitimize the union in public discourse, the massacre of six laborers at the hand of the sheriff and his special deputies resulted in an end to the labor strife without repercussion for the murderers. As Matthew Richards notes, “violence is most ideologically potent when it encourages blindness

⁵⁰ Megan Foley, “*Peitho* and *Bia*: The Force of Language,” *symplike* 20, no. 1-2 (2012): 173.

⁵¹ Engels, 123.

⁵² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

to the violence of capitalism, to patterns of living that not only do physical harm to people, but do violence in other ways.”⁵³ The legitimation and implementation of state violence combined with the simultaneous rejection of resistive violence served to reify the stratification between Marion’s upper-class elite and the town’s millhands. Ultimately, this resulted in glossing over the exploitation of labor by industry for greater profits.

In order to conceptualize and analyze rhetorics of progress and violence in Marion and their impacts on methods of resistance and control, this thesis will utilize public and counterpublic theory. Public and counterpublic theory has a long history within the field of rhetoric and has often been used to study social movements. Appalachian Studies benefits from a more robust study of publics and counterpublics because they offer different frames for analyzing social movements that highlight the discursive contours and foundations of these movements. Through this lens, social movements become fights for agency in the public sphere. Today, many rhetorical theorists of publics and counterpublics can trace their lineage back to the works of John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas. Dewey theorized of publics as a product of communicative interaction between people debating civic issues. The public, for Dewey, is “all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for.”⁵⁴ To this end, the public forms the state, which is measured by its ability to relieve individuals from “negative struggle and needless conflict” and confer “positive assurance and reinforcement.”⁵⁵ This ties publics, the state, and democracy to moral action, as each are constituted by their ability to alleviate the negative consequences of society and maximize

⁵³ Richards, “Mountaintop Removal,” 30.

⁵⁴ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 16.

⁵⁵ Dewey, 72.

the positive. Jürgen Habermas also conceived of an *ideal* public sphere constituted through the deliberation of citizens that would act as a counterweight to the actions of the state.⁵⁶ Through the discussion of matters of public concern in a public space, private citizens would be mediators between the state and society at large working to come to a “consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all.”⁵⁷ Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere stands as a theoretical ideal to be strived for by contemporary democracies. The nature of publics and the distinctions between public and private spheres became the subject of much debate throughout political philosophy as evidenced by the work of Hannah Arendt,⁵⁸ of rhetorician David Zarefsky,⁵⁹ and many of Habermas’ contemporaries thinking within the Frankfurt School of thought.⁶⁰

Following in the steps of Dewey, Habermas, and these other philosophers, contemporary scholarship on publics emphasizes the material conditions of their participants, the multiplicity of the public sphere,⁶¹ and publics’ commitment to ideals of progress. To this end, Nancy Fraser critiqued the bourgeois public sphere and forwarded the idea of *subaltern counterpublics*.⁶² For Fraser, four assumptions serve to make Habermas’ ideal public sphere too exclusionary, privileged, and impotent to truly function in contemporary democracies

⁵⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989) 2.

⁵⁷ Habermas, 83.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Frazer, “Hannah Arendt: The Risks of the Public Realm,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2009).

⁵⁹ David Zarefsky, “President Johnson’s War on Poverty: The Rhetoric of Three ‘Establishment’ Movements” in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest*, eds. Charles E Morris III and Stephen Howard Browne (State College: Strata Publishing, Inc., 2006).

⁶⁰ Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Marc Silberman, “Critical Theory, Public Sphere, and Culture. Jürgen Habermas and His Critics,” *New German Critique* 16 (1979).

⁶¹ Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

⁶² Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* no. 25/26 (1990): 63.

constituted by diverse populations and uneven structural relationships: the assumption that all private citizens could participate equally; that there should be only one *bourgeois* public sphere; that private interests should be excluded from public deliberation; and that the public sphere should be separate from the state. Fraser instead emphasizes the multiplicity of publics and the *oppositional nature* of some publics. Fraser argues that these subaltern counterpublics are “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”⁶³ For Fraser, counterpublics are crucial to the functioning of democracy as sites of opposition that create space for marginalized discourses and identities. These counterpublics are sites, spaces, ideas, and discourses that act as checks on not only the state but also on other publics.

Counterpublics can assume many different forms and functions. Michael Warner and Robert Asen have outlined some of the various ways in which we can conceptualize of publics and counterpublics. Warner emphasized how the *circulation* of literature constitutes publics and counterpublics. For Warner, simply participating or even just being present makes one a part of the public discourse circulating at that moment. You, for example, are part of the public this thesis constitutes by reading it, in Warner’s conception of publicity.⁶⁴ He thus argued that counterpublics are alternative, oppositional interpretations, identities, and discourses that necessitate a degree of otherness.⁶⁵ Asen argues that publics and counterpublics should be defined more carefully with attention paid to the material

⁶³ Fraser, 67.

⁶⁴ This “breaking of the fourth wall” is a technique that Warner himself used in his texts on publics to make his point about circulation constituting publics.

⁶⁵ Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics (abbreviated version),” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (2002): 423.

conditions and structural relations of power that inform publicity.⁶⁶ Asen shows how counterpublicity is theoretically and socio-politically most valuable when it is constituted by discourses representing marginalized groups operating at the intersection of identity, place, and topic. This focus on the structural relationship between publics and counterpublics is particularly useful for the analysis of the Marion Massacre. Because of the precarious status of the workers and their structural disadvantages in relation to the union and the establishment, the wildcat strike of October 2nd can be seen as an articulation of counterpublicity by workers placing them in opposition to those other publics. Through this expression of discontent, the workers carved out their space in the public sphere.

Given that publics and counterpublics become ways of acting in contemporary democracy, it becomes interesting in the context of the Marion Massacre to ask what impacts violence and progress have on the ways that publicity is articulated both in climates of violence and in the discourses that emerge in their wake. As DeLuca urged, violence presents many possibilities for rhetorical and material action and is a common repressive tool used by the state. However, violence can also carry liberatory potential for counterpublics. Matthew Richards has extensively discussed the relationship between violence, counterpublicity, and the public's commitment to progress.⁶⁷ Richards argues that counterpublicity can be articulated through violence when discourses of power use violence towards oppressive ends themselves. Analyzing the case of the Gulabi Gang, Richards shows how the resistive group was able to use violence to challenge material and ideological inequities, bringing attention to neglected issues and places, and "altering the terrain of agency in a given context and

⁶⁶ Robert Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," *Communication Theory* 10, no. 4 (2000): 427.

⁶⁷ Matthew Richards, "The Gulabi Gang, Violence, and the Articulation of Counterpublicity," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 9, no. 4 (2016): 559.

highlighting inequities as the motivation for violent responses.”⁶⁸ Richards’ analysis fundamentally complicates the assumption that violence is arhetorical or the limit of our rhetorical possibilities. Instead, the liberatory possibilities for violence are highlighted showing its capacities to negotiate and mediate the consequences of public and state action.

However, “The tactic of violence is... politically and socially unavailable” to counterpublics Richards warns because “deliberation is privileged as the only acceptable way to negotiate publics and public concerns.”⁶⁹ Public commitment to notions of progress, and with it nonviolence, renders violence ineffectual even as it is used by marginalized groups to articulate agency in the public sphere. This analysis of Marion fully crystallizes Richards’ warning about the public’s commitment to nonviolence. While violence allowed for the articulation of agency for marginalized millhands in Marion’s climate of violence, a nascent but powerful commitment to progress and nonviolence rendered the union as a counterpublic largely ineffectual. In this situation, workers turned to wildcat action to articulate counterpublic agency, which ultimately ended in violent suppression and a reification of the power of the mills and other publics in Marion.

Public and Counterpublic Memory:

The Long-Term Effects of Commitments to Progress

Further, the clash between violence and progress can have significant control over how a movement or population is remembered. Marion provides us with a unique case to explore the implications of challenging these conventions in the long run. That is, Marion shows us that pushing the boundaries of acceptability can often render movements and

⁶⁸ Richards, “Gulabi Gang,” 569.

⁶⁹ Richards, “Gulabi Gang,” 571.

peoples invisible in public memory. Indeed, these acts of public memory can be just as intertwined with notions of and commitments to progress. What we choose to remember as a public and how we choose to remember it say a lot about the values that we hold as a community and what we wish to project into the future.

Despite overwhelming media attention during the Marion strikes, the labor uprising has in large part become lost to public memory -- glossed over in labor histories, misquoted in some, and forgotten to residents throughout North Carolina. The mills in Marion have been torn down. Residents of Marion are hesitant to speak of the strikes if they even know about them at all.⁷⁰ A student in my class, born and raised in Marion, had never heard of the Massacre. A notion of shame often characterizes the public memory of the Massacre.⁷¹ In one of the few pieces of rhetorical scholarship that discusses the textile industry in the early 20th century, Dana Cloud's "The Null Persona," one sentence is dedicated to the labor strikes in Marion, *South* Carolina, an unfortunate printing of misinformation that has circulated throughout the field and was written by one of the most influential contemporary rhetoricians.⁷²

It is clear that Marion has come to be remembered in public discourse with contempt, misremembrance, or even just a lack of remembrance at all. One interesting question to ask is what impact the violence of the strikes may have had on its memory. Perhaps because of how violent they were and the overall violence they brought to the community the public has

⁷⁰ Lawing, 2.

⁷¹ Jake Frankel, "Mountain shame: Remembering the Marion Massacre," *Mountain Xpress*, March 29, 2011, <https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/033011mountain-shame/>.

⁷² Dana Cloud, "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1999): 184.

forgotten about the massacre in an attempt to move on.⁷³ However, the massacre had another impact on the public memory of the events of 1929. Evident in vernacular discourses about the Marion Massacre are the contours of a *counterpublic* memory of the summer of 1929. This counterpublic memory highlights the sacrifice of the millhands in the face of oppression and disproportional violence perpetrated by the mill owners and law enforcement in Marion. This counterpublic memory is evidence of how violence can function to craft new ways of thinking and acting,⁷⁴ shifting the rhetorical landscape and allowing for the use of alternative rhetorical tactics. Circulating counterpublic memories has a significant impact on the possibilities and efficacy of resistance in the places in which these stories are told. This makes counterpublic memory-making a key tactic in resisting potentially oppressive ideologies like the commitment to progress.

⁷³ Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

⁷⁴ Kevin DeLuca "Practicing Rhetoric Beyond the Dangerous Dreams of Deliberative Democracy: Engaging a World of Violence and Public Screens" *Argumentation & Advocacy* 49, no. 3 (2013).

Chapter Two:
Seeking Counterpublicity in Climates of Violence:
Publics, Progress, and Wildcat Strikes in Marion, N.C.

There's a strike and a line of cops outside of the mill/
 'Cause there's a right to obey and there's a right to kill

- "Calm Like a Bomb," Rage Against the Machine

This chapter will examine the history of the strikes in Marion in the summer of 1929 and the massacre at the gate of Marion Manufacturing through the lens of public and counterpublic theory to understand how marginalized workers found space in the public sphere. Through a variety of tactics including traditional statements to the press and protests but also a number of alternative tactics like dynamitings and scuffles with sheriff's deputies, workers found agency outside of but also in addition to union organizing. These violent tactics, however, were not limited to just union activists as citizens both pro- and anti-union found themselves committing acts of violence throughout the summer of 1929. This all served to construct a climate of violence in Marion that shifted the rhetorical landscape to allow for the proliferation of more violent outbursts. Despite the prevalence of violence, the commitment to the ideals of progress, in this case a commitment to *nonviolence*, led to a delegitimization of the union in Marion, which had become associated with the violence

taking over the town. Through this lens, the wildcat strikes become rhetorical tactics that opened new spaces for workers in Marion's public sphere to compensate for the delegitimization of the union.

This sheds light on how marginalized groups can navigate turbulent climates with multiple conflicting publics. Both the use of violence and the use of wildcat strikes in Marion highlight the possibility for public political action despite a lack of institutional power. However, this analysis highlights the dangers of turning to violent action when it comes to the perceived legitimacy of the movement due to underlying ideological commitments. That is, while violence can open new rhetorical spaces for resistance, it can also serve to close others. In addition, the Marion Massacre also shows the potentiality for violence, especially in a climate of violence, to be used towards repressive ends by the state. In the case of Marion, violence and wildcat strikes are double-edged swords that can both challenge established methods of public deliberation and serve to reify social and political stratifications.

The analysis for this chapter unfolds in three steps after a short discussion of the theory that frames it. First, I look to establish the foundations of public and counterpublic discourse in Marion. This section seeks to draw rough contours around discourses in an attempt to distinguish *publics* from burgeoning *counterpublics*. The goal is to sketch out foundational ideas that inform these publics, the ideologies that undergird them, and the entities that embody them. The second section attempts to bring violence fully into the discussion to highlight how it destabilized Marion's public sphere and understand how the various publics navigated the shift in the rhetorical landscape. Of particular note in this second section is the fact that violence delegitimized the union, pushing it to adapt its

rhetoric to maintain its counterpublic potential. The necessity for wildcat action is reintroduced here as an alternative tactic for achieving counterpublic agency. The third section deals specifically with the massacre at the mill gate. In this section, the limits of violence as a tactic of resistance are rendered fully visible and it becomes clear that violence is ultimately a tactic reserved for use by the state. The ramifications of the commitment to progress become visible as the union was delegitimized because of violent resistance while state violence reified structural relations of power.

Violence, Articulation, and Legitimacy

As detailed in chapter one, violence can be used to articulate counterpublicity for marginalized groups when power structures themselves oppress through violence.¹ However, for the purposes of this chapter, a more in-depth look at the theory of articulation is useful as it will help to understand the role of the wildcat strikes in Marion. Emerging from Marxism and cultural studies, articulation comes into rhetorical theory through the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe who discuss the articulation and constant rearticulation of hegemony through discourses emerging from various subject positions and institutions which allows for the formulation and reformulation of power.² Specifically for Laclau and Mouffe, articulation consists of any “practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified.”³ That is, articulation consists of the realignment of existing symbols to create new meaning. In Appalachian Studies, a good example of this would be the articulation of the hillbilly icon. Throughout popular culture, as the field has shown, various

¹ Richards, “Gulabi Gang.”

² Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London, Verso, 1985), 1.

³ Laclau and Mouffe, 105.

symbols like overwhelming poverty, ignorance, simplistic lifestyles, etc. have come together to form an image of the *hillbilly* that persists to this day and has evolved over time to fit the cultural and social moment.⁴ Articulation is a practice of rhetorical world-making that allows for the constitution and reconstitution of identity and subjectivity through discourse. As Kevin DeLuca put it, “In such a world, rhetoric becomes ontological: the mobilization of signs for the articulation of identities, ideologies, consciousnesses, communities, publics, and cultures.”⁵ In Marion, workers used violence and wildcat strikes to articulate counterpublic discourses. The rhetorical use of both tactics allowed for the restructuring of Marion’s public sphere, shifting the rhetorical landscape, to create space for oppositional identities and discourses emerging from discontent workers, the union, and other citizens in the town.

However, just because violence can be used towards resistive and liberatory purposes does not mean that it or the movements it becomes associated with will always be perceived as legitimate. As Slavoj Žižek argues, “Opposing all forms of violence, from direct, physical violence (mass murder, terror) to ideological violence (racism, incitement, sexual discrimination), seems to be the main preoccupation of the tolerant liberal attitude that predominates today.”⁶ For Žižek there are three kinds of violence.⁷ Subjective violence, the most visible, characterized by acts of crime and terror. The other two are forms of objective violence: symbolic violence produced through speech and systemic violence produced by the machinations of our political and economic systems. What is crucial for Žižek is that some forms of violence, oftentimes subjective violence, become the focus of attention which masks

⁴ Jerry Wayne Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Harkins.

⁵ Kevin DeLuca, “Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 32, no. 4. (1995): 346.

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, (New York: Picador, 2008), 10.

⁷ Žižek, 1-2.

the often brutal and catastrophic forms of objective violence that plague our society. Indeed subjective violence is often seen as antithetical to progressive democratic society, which as previously discussed rhetorical theory and Appalachian Studies has persuasively argued. While forms of state violence, like war and policing, are often lauded.

This opposition towards subjective violence means that counterpublics articulated through violence are constantly negotiating the line between their counterhegemonic efficacy and their social and political legitimacy in societies dominated by commitments to progress. In Marion, the commitment to progress and nonviolence led to the delegitimization of the union which had become associated with subjective violence (dynamitings, scuffles with police, and shootings) which resulted in the need to articulate counterpublicity through alternative means, i.e., the wildcat strikes. In addition, the focus on the subjective violence of the union ultimately masked and justified the objective violence of the Marion Massacre, which reified power relations in the town and restructured the hegemony of progress.

The Discursive Foundations of Publics and Counterpublics in Marion

For this study, newspaper articles provide a unique and accessible window into public discourse in Marion during the strikes. In these articles, statements from union and mill management, quotes from laborers, opinions of writers and civilians, and much more are available for analysis, making them essentially transcripts of public discourse surrounding the strikes. I have chosen to focus on the articles published by the *Asheville Citizen* as its one of the largest regional newspapers meaning that the information it printed circulated widely and had an even larger impact on the formation of public discourse about the strikes. The

Citizen also had daily coverage of the events in Marion that summer meaning I had the ability to follow all of the ebbs and flows of the story.

The strikes in Marion began at Marion Manufacturing, one of the three largest textile mills in the town and the one that, because of its overt paternalism and temperamental owner, became the central focus of strike action for the UTW local #1659.⁸ The strike began, as mentioned, in response to two trends occurring at the factory. The first, the *stretch-out*, a common phenomenon throughout southern textile mills, forced workers to do up to twice as much work during their shifts for the same pay. The second, was the firing of workers who had joined the union. Management and owners at the mill were unresponsive to workers' appeals for reinstatement. On July 11, 1929, workers left their stations at Marion Manufacturing. This wildcat strike would shortly thereafter be sanctioned by the UTW; however, the workers' desperate claim for a stake in the public sphere is clear. With some workers overworked and some unemployed, the time to act was upon them.

The contours of multiple public discourses forming in Marion, and specifically how wildcat action functioned to articulate counterpublicity, begin to take shape. The permeability of these discourses shows the fundamental inability to clearly construct an exact idea of what discourse is *public* and what discourse is *counterpublic*. Even at a rhetorical level, it is impossible to box in discourses or people into neat categories. The language espoused by the directors of the mill highlights this most clearly. While they unanimously touted the centrality and importance of the mill to the community and its workers, they were not unanimous in their sentiment towards the strike.⁹ J. Will Pless was more sympathetic to

⁸ Byrd, 88.

⁹ Anonymous, "J. Will Pless is Asked to Seek Strike Solution," *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), July 13, 1929.

the workers, arguing for their right to unionize, while Marion Manufacturing's president Reginal Baldwin was more anti-union, beginning the industrial espionage programs that attempted to infiltrate the union's ranks and even offering to "pay them to strike his mill," in an effort to taunt the burgeoning union.¹⁰ The Marion Chamber of Commerce, perhaps like many of Marion's citizens in these early stages of the strikes, announced that they were "entirely neutral in reference to the strike."¹¹ These *public* discourses, in terms of their popularity and their structural supremacy, begin to show us the development of various public opinions about the strikes. It is clear that neutrality, sympathy, and antipathy towards the strikers and their destabilization of Marion's socio-political landscape all had their place in Marion's public sphere.

Statements from representatives of labor however clearly exemplify a rhetoric in opposition to these positions. In other words, *counterpublic* discourses began to emerge as exemplified by the rhetoric of the union and its agitators. In a statement released to the *Asheville Citizen*, union organizer Alfred Hoffman claimed that the workers were protesting "unfair discrimination" and that they had tried to "avert this situation but realized our efforts were futile after no attention was paid our requests."¹² In addition, Hoffman's statement days later that the strike was a "spontaneous reaction to the terrible mill conditions which prevail in Marion" ran counter to much of the rhetoric of the New South and laissez-faire capitalism that argued southern workers were "cheap and contented labor."¹³ Here we can see how this

¹⁰ Tom Tippet, *When Southern Labor Stirs* (New York, J. Cape & H. Smith, 1931): 118.

¹¹ Anonymous, "Strikers' Trial Scheduled Today in Marion Court," *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), July 24, 1929.

¹² Anonymous, "650 Employes of Marion Mill Stage Walkout," *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), July 12, 1929.

¹³ Byrd, 15; Sinclair Lewis, *Cheap and Contented Labor: The Picture of a Southern Mill Town in 1929* (Merckle Press, 1980).

initial wildcat strike carved out a new discursive space in Marion's public sphere that offered a legitimate place for labor's demands and desires. Wildcat action functioned to articulate a counterpublic discourse in Marion that would be co-opted by the union.

Physical violence quickly followed the beginnings of the strike and also, like wildcat strikes, functioned to articulate public and counterpublic discourses in a way that brought about material effects in the form of legal repercussions and the manipulation of public opinion. On July 18, Baldwin attempted to usher a group of loyal workers past the picket line to begin work at the mill. As strikers resisted their entry, Baldwin fell to the ground grasping his bleeding head. According to Hoffman, it was the gate of the mill that "struck the president during the scramble which ensued," however, the affair ended with eighteen warrants issued to strikers for "Conspiracy to assault beat and wound one R.W. Baldwin, president of Marion Manufacturing Company and other employes [sic]."¹⁴ This conflict followed Baldwin's return from a meeting with Pless and other executives for the mill. Pless argued in favor of the strikers, which ultimately led to his removal from Marion Manufacturing's board of directors.¹⁵ This was a win for Baldwin that reflected the power of mills in Marion and the precariousness of the strikers. The meeting was meant to bring about a swift and peaceful resolution to the strikes but the triumph of Baldwin meant that no stasis would be reached between the union and mills. This moment of violence at the mill gate also exemplifies how the union was connected to violent action in the public discourses in Marion. Not only had Baldwin's power been reaffirmed through this incident, but with

¹⁴ Anonymous, "18 Arrests Are Made in Strike at Marion Mill," *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), July 19, 1929.

¹⁵ Byrd, 98.

charges brought upon numerous strikers for assault, the union's image in Marion's public was beginning to be attacked.

This violent incident also helps to elucidate the public's commitment to nonviolence (or progress) which is evident in the discourses that emerged from it. Commitments to nonviolence led to a flat-out rejection of the scuffle as a legitimate means of deliberation or action. Judge John H. Harwood's decision in the court case that followed clearly displays how nonviolence would be ideologically favored over violence in Marion's public sphere even as violence proliferated in practice on the streets. Rationalizing his decision to issue an injunction barring strike activity on the mill's property, Harwood argued that employers have a right to hire whom they wish and employees have the right to work where they please.¹⁶ Following in this vein, Harwood proclaimed that "Civil wrongs cannot be righted by force."¹⁷ This was a clear denunciation of violence and proclamation of a commitment to notions of progress defined by deliberation and peaceful solutions. It was Harwood's desire that "the men go back to work and then the differences be arbitrated, while the men are still engaged in work," further exemplifying his commitment to deliberative solutions to the conflicts in Marion. This initial scuffle between strikers and Baldwin exemplifies violence's rhetorical capacities. While striking Baldwin may have articulated discontent on account of workers, on the one hand, it also served to associate the union with violence in the public sphere. This is made evident by the union's attempt to distance themselves from being cast as violent actors by blaming the gate.

¹⁶ Anonymous, "Marion Strikers Restrained from Picketing Mill," *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), July 25, 1929; Byrd, 104.

¹⁷ Quoted in Byrd, 101.

The “Summer of Dynamite”:

The Construction of a Climate of Violence in Marion

In response to the growing unrest in Marion, the mill owners began a series of evictions, leading to more unrest. Evictions consistently became a site of violence during the strikes. Because mill owners also owned the villages, the mill owners had near complete control over the livelihood of workers who were not only fighting for their jobs but also a roof over their heads. The first notable attempt to evict residents of the Clinchfield mill village occurred on August 16. Sheriff Oscar Adkins went to the home of J.B. Lamb to serve him an eviction notice; however, Adkins decided not to evict Lamb when he learned that his daughter was ill.¹⁸ As Adkins and his officers returned to the street they discovered that their truck was missing. According to reports, “They were informed that the former employes [sic] of the mill had told the driver to get out of the village with his truck.”¹⁹ Adkins then moved to evict Clinchfield resident and worker Van Black. When Sheriff Adkins ordered Black to vacate the premises, Black refused. At this time, a “‘mob’ of about 400 men formed and forced the deputies to leave after pushing Deputy C.I. Tate down the steps and injuring his leg.”²⁰ Adkins is said to have wanted to leave to avoid any potential bloodshed. When he returned to his car, the crowd attempted to turn it over.

This event highlights the growing climate of violence in Marion. The desperation and precarity of the workers induced violent action as a response made possible by the shifting rhetorical landscape that sanctioned violence as a discursive tool for the articulation of workers’ agency. Millhands used force where traditional methods of action proved

¹⁸ Anonymous, “Crowd Prevents Eviction Move,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), August 17, 1929.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

inadequate. Not only were workers able to overpower the sheriff and his deputies, but they were also able to do so without legal repercussion. Instead, the workers used violence to achieve a sense of security and control over their environment forcing the sheriff to leave without serving or enforcing any of the eviction notices. The threat of growing instability brought about violence that articulated counterpublicity, bringing public attention to the precarity of workers.

In the midst of growing violence, the union made a number of moves to alter its image in the public sphere. The scuffle with Baldwin at the gate, eviction conflict, and other episodes and their coverage in the media began to conflate union activity with the violence in Marion. In a statement to the *Asheville Citizen*, the union condemned the actions of Adkins who seemed to take sides with the mills, declaring him an “impartial officer of the law” and affirming their own commitment to peaceful resistance stating, “Violence never aided any case,” and that, “we can control our tempers.”²¹ This is one of the clearest discussions of violence that emerges in the primary sources. The union’s position against violence is clear evidence of the commitment to progressive ideals even amongst a counterpublic entity. Even while laborers engaged in physical conflicts with deputies, the union was taking a public stance that denounced the violence and affirmed ideals of progress. This stands as an attempt to distance the union from violent action so that it may maintain its legitimacy in the public sphere.

The union implemented a number of other tactics to maintain its public legitimacy and distance itself from violence. As strikers and mill owners prepared for the reopening of Clinchfield, the union designated a special squad of strikers, marked with red handkerchiefs

²¹ Anonymous, “Strikers Deny Spirit Waning,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), August 16, 1929.

to act as the “peace committee, charged with the duty of keeping order.”²² The union also continued its use of mass public prayers at sunrise, a tactic devised to portray an image of peaceful, god-fearing protesters. Aware of public animosity towards violence, even as it engulfed the town, the union knew it had to distance itself from violence in order to maintain its position as a functional counterpublic entity. This shows the impact of violence on the legitimacy of counterpublics. As Max Weber noted, only the state, with its monopoly on violence, has access to the use of violence while maintaining its legitimacy.²³ The growing violence and its connection to union agitators was wearing away at the union’s legitimacy, forcing the union to make these moves to recover its social and political legitimacy in Marion’s public sphere.

With no clear end to the strikes in sight, Governor O. Max Gardner sent Judge Nat Townsend to arbitrate an agreement between the union and the mills. His response to the growing intensity of the conflicts clearly align state interests with those of the mills and illustrates a public ideological commitment to nonviolence. “Your men are doing everything possible to aid the losing of your cause,” Townsend told Hoffman. He continued, “Your men have violated the laws of the state and the honor of North Carolina is at stake.”²⁴ At this time, the state, in support of the mills and their return to operation, brought their own symbolic changes to the streets of Marion by deploying National Guard units from Morganton and Asheville to aid in keeping order at the reopening of Clinchfield.²⁵ This was a public show of

²² Douglas Eller, “1,500 Workers to Join Their Ranks at Dawn,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), August 19, 1929.

²³ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 77-79.

²⁴ C.R. Sumner, “Clinchfield Plant Will Essay Start Again Today,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), August 19, 1929.

²⁵ Sumner.

force. The deployment of the guard to help quell the violence taking over Marion highlights the growing climate of violence in the town and the public's commitment to nonviolence. The unrest in Marion had reached national news, due mainly to the chaotic and violent nature of the strikes, forcing the governor to act. With the coming of the guard, it is clear that Gardner felt the violence in Marion had grown beyond the capacities of the local government to handle it. In addition, their deployment exemplifies the public commitment to nonviolence in the midst of growing instability and violent action. Townsend's statement that the strikers are trying to *lose their cause* shows that their violent resistance was not valued by the public and was harming their overall legitimacy.

However, the presence of the Guard did little to tamp down the violence in Marion. After the Guard's arrival, three non-union workers attacked a union picketer with knives.²⁶ One of those three men, Charlie Couch, was also charged with drawing an automatic pistol on women on the picket line. But perhaps the most jarring manifestations of the laborers' discontent were the frequent bombings, so common the summer has come to be known as "the summer of dynamite."²⁷ The first of these blasts occurred on the night of August 18. Alfred Hoffman had planned a prayer at the break of daylight for the following morning. Members of the peace committee handed out sandwiches and coffee to strikers on the picket line who felt the growing tension coming with the reopening of Clinchfield. Suddenly, at approximately 1:50 am, "the windows in the mill villages were rattled by a sudden explosion."²⁸ Another blast shortly followed, this one targeting the home of Boyce Sprinkle, a foreman at the Clinchfield Mill. As the town roared to life and picketers assembled at the

²⁶ Sumner.

²⁷ Byrd, 123.

²⁸ Sumner.

mills, “Several members of the ‘Peace committee’... reported that they had been fired upon.”²⁹ Once again we see violence erupting in the moment of instability and precariousness for strikers. Though the reopening of Clinchfield was welcomed by Hoffman, who preferred to focus on Marion Manufacturing, for workers the reopening of the mill meant that Clinchfield’s strikers would be left on the picket line while loyal workers earned a paycheck. Public commitment to nonviolence was doing little to hinder its rhetorical deployment towards the articulation of counterpublic agency.

Dynamite blasts would become a common occurrence in Marion and the community would respond to them in ways that fully demonstrates the public’s commitment to progress and nonviolence. Another notable series of dynamite explosions occurred on August 23.³⁰ Byrd recounts “Suddenly, a chain of explosions pockmarked the night. Faintly, the clatter of gunshots and breaking window glass filled the vacuum of silence left in the wake of the blasts.”³¹ The company store and the home of Boyce Sprinkle, once again, were targets that night. However, what is peculiar about this series of blasts is that it seems that *anyone* was a target that night. Byrd notes “the random nature of the dynamitings targeted the village and its inhabitants.” These blasts made it clear that even residents of downtown Marion were not completely safe. The chaos and uncertainty they brought to the town further destabilized the union’s image and highlights the precarity of workers and citizens alike in a climate of violence. This proved to be particularly harmful to the public image of the union. With more people becoming subject to violence, the union would have to do more work to counter the conflation with violence occurring in the media and amongst citizens. At the same time, the

²⁹ Sumner.

³⁰ Douglas Eller, “Leaders Fear Peace Parley May Collapse,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), August 23, 1929.

³¹ Byrd, 135.

random nature of the bombings would elicit more vocal opposition to the violence and the union, particularly from the town's religious leaders.

Blame for the August 23rd blasting fell squarely on the union which further impacted its image to the public. The violent nature of the strikes, particularly the abundance of dynamite, swayed public opinion resolutely against the union. The union released a statement that claimed "no violent acts have been committed and none was threatened,"³² in order to distance themselves from the violence in Marion that was attributed more and more to union and strike activity. The union's ability to be a legitimate representative for the workers, their ability to function as a counterpublic discourse to those of the state and the mills, was beginning to slip.

Some of the most vocal public opponents of the violence in Marion were the town's religious leaders. They would be key in helping to equate the union with violence. The discourse emerging from religious leaders in Marion provide a clearer window into how the union's image was equated with violence leading to public delegitimization. Reverend J.N. Wise actually became a target of a failed dynamiting that occurred in the wake of faltering negotiations in the closing weeks of August. A group of strikers hijacked Wise's car and threw a stick of dynamite in the bushes of his home that failed to go off.³³ Wise became a vocal opponent of labor violence and his statements would exemplify public discourse that equated the violence in Marion with union activity. The *Asheville Citizen* reported on August 25th that "Protesting against what they characterized as a reign of terror," Reverend Wise and several ministers urged Judge Townsend "to send the troops to the mill village."³⁴

³² Quoted in Byrd, 132.

³³ Douglas Eller, "Strikers May Turn Down Proposal Entirely," *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), August 25, 1929.

³⁴ Eller, "Strikers May Turn Down Proposal Entirely."

Churches held prayer meetings in which they would “ask for deliverance from a ‘second night of terror’ the reference being to the explosions that have been occurring in the mill village area at intervals since the strike got underway.”³⁵ In setting the bond for the three strikers charged with dynamiting Wise’s house, Squire Dysart claimed, “There has been too many explosions in the mill village during the past few nights,” asserting that the \$1,000 bond for each was fair. In response, the union again attempted to distance itself from the work of individual strikers. Hoffman stated, “I want to say that we do not approve of the use of such methods,” and that “we believe the dynamite that has been exploded... was done by persons whose real motive was to have the troops brought to the village.”³⁶ Despite the union’s efforts, the community only saw a clear connection between the violence in Marion and the union. The public’s commitment to nonviolence combined with the growing and ever-present violence in Marion was serving to delegitimize the union and further undermine its counterpublic potential.

The Marion Massacre:

Wildcat Strikes and the Violent Suppression of Counterpublic Discourse

The violence in Marion, from scuffles at the mill gate and tangles with law enforcement over evictions to dynamitings and shootings, had served to delegitimize the union in public discourse. In addition, a number of failed agreements between the union and the mills to bring about an end to the strikes also served to put the union on shaky ground with workers. According to reports, the workers lost faith in the union entirely after a

³⁵ Douglas Eller, “Peace Terms Turned Down by Strikers,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), August 27, 1929.

³⁶ Douglas Eller, “Marion Seething with Excitement as Strike Draws to Climax,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), August 30, 1929.

September 8 agreement, described as “articles of surrender on the part of the unions.”³⁷ Rehired workers saw a reduction in both hours and pay, rather than just the reduction in hours they sought.³⁸ Baldwin and Hart announced that loyal workers would see an increase in their wages as a sign of their appreciation. Adam Hunt, the overseer who began the stretch-out that pushed workers to strike in July, instituted a “policy of hazing and harassment” inside the plant and on the outside circulated a blacklist against UTW members and sympathizers.³⁹ Millhands who returned to work did so “because they had to, not because they were enthusiastic to do so.”⁴⁰ Workers had struggled and fought since early summer, yet they remained as precarious as ever. Just as wildcat action on July 11 was necessary to kick off the strikes, workers again would turn to a wildcat strike to push once more for the rights they felt they deserved and that union could not deliver. On October 2nd, months of violence culminated in the moment that would come to define Marion’s labor struggle.

Perhaps the clearest example that Marion’s public sphere had been altered by the strikes and the violence that engulfed the town that summer of 1929 can be seen in the rumors that circulated around town. As Gerard Hauser notes “publics are more than ideal; they are concrete emergences whose contours form through the materiality of the rhetoric to which they are attending and who make themselves evident through the materiality of their own vernacular modes of rhetoric.”⁴¹ The rumor mill in Marion concerning the possibility of

³⁷ Douglas Eller, “Hoffman Admits Defeat In Clinchfield Strike,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), September 8, 1929.

³⁸ Douglas Eller, “Hope For Peaceful Settlement Of Marion Mill Strike Fading,” *Asheville Citizen*, (Asheville, NC), September 7, 1929.

³⁹ Byrd, 181.

⁴⁰ Byrd, 160.

⁴¹ Hauser, 271.

renewed strikes and violence exemplifies this vernacular discursive manifestation of Marion's public sphere. Byrd explains that everyone in the town gathered at barber shops and other public places to discuss and gossip about the possibility of a new strike -- and the possibility of violence. "*Some-body's gonna get kilt [sic],*" one Marion resident recollected in an interview with Byrd, "everybody knew something [was] bound to happen."⁴² Rumors of a wildcat strike spread throughout the mills and the town since late September.⁴³

Almost all of the union leadership, Hoffman included, had left Marion to attend various conferences, conventions, or to tend to other matters.⁴⁴ This lack of union leadership combined with a lack of faith in the union made wildcat action all the more probable. Even Adkins and his deputies knew. The night before the strike, they had men on shifts in the mill prepared for when the workers would turn off their machines and walk out.⁴⁵ If Hauser is right and vernacular discourses are the only way to gauge public opinion, then it seems clear to everyone in Marion that the union had failed to bring about a satisfactory resolution to the struggle and that strike action would resume. Suddenly someone on the night shift yelled: "Strike!" Wildcat action again signaled the constitution of a new counterpublic in Marion. Through this wildcat strike, workers articulated their discontent with not only the mills, the state, and law enforcement but also with the union who had failed to represent them in the boardroom and gave them a bad reputation as violent outlaws in Marion's public.

The wildcat strikers formed their picket line outside the mill's gate and Adkins and his men likewise gathered across the street. Adkins had prepared himself with canisters of tear gas. Workers who refused to strike left the gate and hurried home. Day shift workers

⁴² Quoted in Byrd, 185.

⁴³ Byrd, 182.

⁴⁴ Tippett, 135.

⁴⁵ Byrd, 186.

began to show up at Marion Manufacturing and, with the 6:55 a.m. whistle blowing to signal the beginning of their shift, they tried to cross the picket. A struggle ensued as strikers screamed, “Let’s go to work on those damned scabs.”⁴⁶ Adkins did his best to gain control of the situation but eventually, at 7:02 a.m., resorted to throwing the first can of tear gas.⁴⁷ A deputy followed suit and with a cloud of smoke hovering over the gate of Marion Manufacturing, Adkins waved a second bomb in the air and tried to bring everyone to order. It was at this moment that a striker is said to have assaulted the Sheriff from behind. With Adkins stunned on the ground, chaos reigned. Violence again had engulfed the town. The next few minutes would exemplify violence’s repressive potential and capacities. While the National Guard may have been a mostly passive representation of state power in Marion, the Sheriff and his deputies, beaten back multiple times by hords of strikers, now used violence to their own ends in the culmination of the labor unrest of 1929.

At this moment, by all accounts, the events become unclear.⁴⁸ Whether Adkins was able to retaliate or one of his deputies came to his aid, Adkins’ attacker was subdued. It was in this moment that shots were fired. Lyle Hicklin, a witness to the events at the mill gate recounted for the *Asheville Citizen*:

Wherever the first shot originated and by whomever the first shot was fired, the effect was to draw spontaneous fire into the crowd before the gate and to create panic and havoc pitiful to behold. Some in the forefront of the striking ranks toppled into the road, several mortally wounded. Others fell as they fled toward safety. The shooting stopped as suddenly as it started and broke out again as members of the crowd continued to flee. Then all became quiet except for moans and screams and curses.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Byrd, 190.

⁴⁷ Byrd, 191.

⁴⁸ W.L. Hicklin, “Tragedy Stalks Narrow Mill Lane At Marion As Ghastly Toll Is Taken,” *Asheville Citizen* (Asheville, NC), October 2, 1929.

⁴⁹ Hicklin, “Tragedy Strikes Narrow Mill Lane.”

Some of those who fled were gunned down as they ran. Witnesses recall never seeing any firearms amongst the strikers though many of them had been armed with sticks, knives, and other tools.⁵⁰ When all was said and done, a couple of Adkins' deputies suffered minor injuries while a handful of strikers were dead on the scene. As others succumbed to their injuries over the following days, the death toll would reach six. A fresh load of dirt was dragged across the street to erase the carnage while work resumed at Marion Manufacturing.

Despite the state's rhetorical commitment to nonviolence, in the end, law enforcement was unable to avoid its own violent action. The wildcat strike of October 2nd demonstrated the public nature of the commitment to nonviolence and the necessity for a new counterpublic space for the articulation of millhands' agency. However, the inauguration of this counterpublic fully destabilized a town that felt it had seen an end to the strikes, and the violence, with the September 8 agreement. The oppression of this counterpublic was the result. Violence served its ultimate rhetorical end as a technique of power in Marion by reifying power relations, silencing counterpublicity, and restructuring the dominance of the mills and the state over the textile town's millhands.

This examination of public discourse in Marion has highlighted the various publics that emerged as a result of the strikes in Marion, the ways that people navigated this climate of multiple publics, and the ramifications of violence and progress on the stability and efficacy of these publics. With the foundations of various publics established in the wake of the first wildcat strike, it is clear how wildcat action functioned to craft counterpublic space where it previously did not exist. The beginnings of the strike pushed folks to develop opinions for, against, or even entirely neutral towards union activity. However, with the

⁵⁰ Hicklin, "Tragedy Strike Narrow Mill Lane."

proliferation of violence, these initial publics were destabilized and forced to adapt. Public opinion was beginning to sway against the union due to the violence while union leadership attempted to issue statements and implement other tactics to counter this conflation with violence and maintain its legitimacy. Despite a climate of violence, it was a tactic unavailable to resistive groups due to the commitments to progress that underwrite American society. The delegitimization of the union pushed workers towards further wildcat action, once again evincing its potential as a counterpublic tactic. However, the state's monopoly on violence stifled this counterpublic, reified social stratifications, and ended the strikes in Marion on a tragic note.

Conclusion

This analysis sheds light on why, perhaps, there was such a prevalence of wildcat strikes and violence during the textile strikes of 1929. Workers turned to wildcat action to articulate counterpublic agency, a move made possible and necessary by the prevalence of violence that allowed for their articulation of agency but also for the delegitimization of organized labor in the public sphere. By utilizing public and counterpublic theory, this analysis has been able to bring a new frame for understanding labor unrest to Appalachian Studies that has been useful for highlighting the discursive contours of resistance and the problems posed by underlying ideologies. While industrialization brought about dramatic shifts in the economic and social landscape throughout the South and Appalachia, and Northern unions tried to organize the “cheap and contented labor” in these burgeoning mills, along with the paternalistic hegemony of the New South's industrial elites that hindered the union's political and economic efficacy, workers turned to violence at times, wildcat strikes

at others, and sometimes both, in order to articulate their agency, desires, and discontent with marginalization and to counter these underlying ideologies.

The events in Marion in 1929 highlight the rhetorical possibilities for violence, but also shows its limits when a discursive commitment to ideals of progress and nonviolence serve to reify structural relationships of power and reserve violence as a tactic of repression. This understanding of how violence can have salient socio-political meaning despite popular conceptions of violence as antithetical to modernity and progress helps us to challenge conceptions of Appalachia as a land of violent folk and to understand labor unrest, such as the Battle of Blair Mountain, as a legitimate resistive tactic. In Marion's climate of violence, shootings, beatings, and blastings became powerful rhetorical tools that, as DeLuca claimed, opened up new ways for thinking, acting, deliberating, and persuading for Marion's discontent populace. While violence had been a discursive and material tool for the articulation of agency for publics and counterpublics in Marion, the commitment to nonviolence undercut the counterpublic potential of the union and rendered Marion's millhands voiceless in the public sphere. The wildcat strike demonstrated the ramifications of this commitment to nonviolence. It became necessary for workers to move beyond institutional support and stake their own claim to space in the public sphere. This radical action fully destabilized the public sphere such that the oppression of this counterpublic was the result.

The case of Marion exemplifies how violence can create the rhetorical and material landscape from which we act. Even with a rhetorical commitment to nonviolence evident in the discourses of Marion's publics and counterpublics, every party involved in the strikes resorted to violence at some point during the struggle. However, the delegitimization of

counterpublic violence and the sanctioning of repressive state violence makes it clear that publics on the margins will continue to have difficulty harnessing the rhetorical possibilities of violence so long as an ideological commitment to progress and nonviolence dominates public discourse. While violence can craft new ways of deliberating, acting and persuading, the limits of those possibilities for marginalized groups are difficult to traverse even in climates of violence.

Chapter Three:
Public Memory, Place, and Power:
Vernacular Discourses of The Marion Massacre

Promise that you will sing about me

- “Sing About Me/I’m Dying of Thirst,” Kendrick Lamar

In the previous chapter, I explored the role of violence and wildcat strikes in articulating counterpublic agency for workers in Marion. The ideological commitments to progress and nonviolence undermined the power of the union as it was consistently connected to the violence in Marion in public discourse. However, as the dust settled outside of the gate of Marion Manufacturing, the stories that would be told about that morning were already being crafted by locals, writers, and public officials. In order to further explore the ramifications of ideological commitments to progress, this thesis will now turn to an exploration of public memory, its underlying ideological commitments, and its role in relations of power.

Since it has been almost a century since the Marion Massacre occurred, the event provides an excellent case study for exploring the ways in which events are, or are not, remembered and for drawing conclusions about power and resistance based on how these stories are told. Through an examination of vernacular texts, this chapter will argue that the

Marion Massacre has become largely lost to public memory and often remembered in relation to shame. However, as will be shown, various texts attempt to tell the story, of which this thesis can be considered a part, of the Marion Massacre in order to preserve it for posterity and to forward interpretations of the events that valorize the sacrifice of workers. I argue that these texts constitute a counterpublic memory of the Marion Massacre that promotes rich dialogue about the event and pushes to affirm its place in public memory. In addition, the circulation of public and counterpublic memories can, I argue, craft regional identities in places accordingly. This makes the deployment of public and counterpublic memories more urgent, as the possibilities for resistance and control in these places rely in part on the stories we tell.

Public Memory, Place, and Rhetoric

Acts of public remembrance are social phenomena that not only make possible the forging of collective identities within communities but are interwoven with and fundamental to the very idea of a collectivity.¹ As Kendall Phillips notes, “societies are both constituted by their memories and, in their daily interactions, rituals, and exchanges, constitute these memories.”² Immediately, we are confronted with a conception of public memory as something that is inherently tied to concepts of collective identity, community, and publicity. Public memory thus is intimately connected to both the past and the future.³ While these notions of public memory are constructed based on past events, they are crucial to the

¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

² Kendall Phillips, *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 2.

³ Edward Casey, “Public Memory in Place and Time,” in *Framing Public Memory* ed. Kendall Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

projection of communal public identity as long as they survive. A further examination of public memory and its connections to place will make the implications of this clearer.

Public memory can be conceived of in a number of ways. Its scholarly interpretations are as mutable as memory itself. Edward Casey argues that there are four forms of human memory, of which public memory is one part. First, *individual memory* refers to individual people who are “engaged in memory on any given occasion.”⁴ The individual remembers events, the why and the how behind them, and also engages in reminding, recognizing, and reminiscing. The second form of memory, *social*, refers to the type of memory formed between people who already have some established relationship with each other, whether through kinship ties, neighborhoods, etc. Often with social memory, that which is remembered is often “concerned with aspects of the relationships themselves.”⁵ Remembering a family story, for example, is at least as concerned with the content of the story as it is with the fact that its a story about your family. Casey argues that the third form of memory is *collective memory*. Collective memory refers to the recalling of the same event by multitudes of people who may not have a relationship with each other.⁶ Casey uses the excellent example of 9/11 to underscore this point. While I can remember where I was when I first heard about the attacks on the World Trade Center and you can do the same, unless you were also in Mrs. Frasier’s second-grade classroom or we have some other relational connection, our memory of 9/11 is collective rather than social. We are not reminiscing on our shared experience of the event but instead are combining, comparing, and contrasting our distributed, separate experience.

⁴ Casey, 20.

⁵ Casey, 22.

⁶ Casey 23.

Casey argues that these three forms of memory contribute to our conception of the fourth form: *public memory*.⁷ While never clearly articulating what exactly public memory is in this four-fold, Casey offers many characteristics of it that become helpful to frame our conception of public memory and to push against as we try to further unpack it in relation to the Marion Massacre. First, rather obviously, public memory is not private. Public memory is also highly mutable and subject to constant revision and reassessment. This revision and reassessment can take place either through the discovery of false information or through re-evaluating the significance of the event given its current socio-political context.⁸ Indeed this mutability is a crucial feature of public memory for Casey as he argues it is “a truly constituent feature of public memory, namely, its formation through the ongoing interchange of ideas and thoughts, opinions and beliefs.”⁹ These two features make public memory unique from the other three forms of memory but also constitutive of them. To be *public* memory, it must be elevated from the individual, rooted in the social, and approachable to the collective. Public memory occurs at the intersection of these three other forms of memory through its fundamentally discursive nature and in its relationship to place.

As Casey further notes, “the praxis of public memory is primarily discursive.”¹⁰ In fact, the rhetorical nature of public memory is something that many scholars have brought our attention to. Phillips argues, “these constituted and constituting memories are open to contest, revision, and rejection. Thus, in a very real sense, to speak of memory in this way is to speak of a highly rhetorical process.”¹¹ Indeed, because public memory is an act of a

⁷ Casey 25.

⁸ Casey, 29.

⁹ Casey, 30.

¹⁰ Casey, 33.

¹¹ Phillips, 2.

collectivity, it is inherently interwoven with our conception of publics and counterpublics.¹² Phillips describes two frames through which to interpret public memory in relation to publicity: the memory of publics and the publicness of memory. To speak of the memory of publics, as this thesis will first and foremost, is to argue that “some entity that can be labeled a public exists and, further, that these entities have memories.”¹³ Remembering together, in this frame, underwrites the very possibility of existing as a public. Indeed as Phillips and Casey argue, the public sphere cannot exist without memory.¹⁴ However to frame public memory as the “publicness of memory” is to see these as memories that “have been visible to many, that have appeared in view of others.”¹⁵ These two notions, according to Phillips and as will be exemplified in this chapter, are inseparable and often inform or complicate one another. Under the first frame, the critic's attention is brought to issues like remembrance/forgetting, authority/resistance, and responsibility/absolution. Under the second, appearance/loss, repetition/mutation, and hegemony/instability come into focus. However, as Phillips implores, to think through the first is to invoke and be complicated by the implications of the second and vice versa.¹⁶ This is evident in the case of memory of the Marion Massacre. As our attention focuses on the construction of publics and counterpublics through various processes of memory-making and we explore how acts of remembrance prefigure and inform acts of resistance, we will be confronted with the loss or silencing of memory, the mutation of it, and the hegemonic ideologies that underpin it.

¹² Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian Ott, *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 5.

¹³ Phillips, 4.

¹⁴ Phillips, 4; Casey 31.

¹⁵ Phillips, 5

¹⁶ Phillips, 10.

In addition to being fundamentally rhetorical, public memory is also inseparable from notions of place. Place is more than the physical spaces that surround us. Place is a social phenomenon created by human interaction over time in a space.¹⁷ There is a significant amount of meaning attributed to places that differentiates them from more casual spaces. There is a presence to a place, an influence that a place exerts on those in it that make it more than the “settings for our lives.”¹⁸ Casey argues that public memory always occurs in some particular place because it always occurs at a point of social interaction.¹⁹ Further, Casey argues that public memory, because of its mutability, *requires* a place in which to root itself. Places are the ground, the location, the scene on which the social phenomenon of remembering occurs. Blair, Dickinson, and Ott also recognize the importance of specific places to the possibility and power of public memory. They argue that place is a support for memory in the form of a mnemonic *techné* and also that particular places, much like Casey discusses, are closely associated with public memory, like museums, preservation sites, memorials, etc.²⁰

However, here we encounter what seems to be a trap that has ensnared these scholars of public memory and place and one from which Appalachian Studies seems well suited to rescue them. When discussing the importance of place to public memory, these scholars have consistently fallen back into specific sites of public memory and the ways in which these particular places give rise to the very possibility of such a phenomenon. That is, monuments, memorials, and museums -- places specifically designed to manufacture memory -- are the

¹⁷ William Schumann, *Appalachia Revisited: New Perspectives on Place, Tradition, and Progress* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 9.

¹⁸ Janet Donohue, *Remembering Places: A Phenomenological Study of the Relationship between Memory and Place* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), xi.

¹⁹ Casey, 32.

²⁰ Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, 24.

focus of these studies. As a result, too much emphasis is placed on how collectivities, or publics, are formed around these sites of memory and the stories that they induce. However, Appalachian Studies has explored place as more than these physical and particular locales. For Appalachian scholars, place very often comes to be a marker of identity.²¹ Terman's study analyzes interviews with a number of students who see their place of origin, Appalachia, as inherently tied in with their day-to-day experience alongside other markers of identity like their race or gender. In addition, other scholars and artists in the region have found a strong connection to place to be foundational to their identities like Frank X. Walker, founder of the *Affrilachia*²² art movement and bell hooks, who asserts "While I do not claim an identity as Appalachian, I do claim a solidarity, a sense of belonging, that makes me one with the Appalachian past of my ancestors: black, Native American, white, all 'people of one blood' who made homeplace in isolated landscapes where they could invent themselves, where they could savor a taste of freedom."²³ The implication of thinking about place in this broader sense is that if public memory is constitutive of collective identities, then it is also constitutive of individual identities. The effect is to highlight the importance of public memory-making in terms of reifying structural relations of power and enabling or hindering resistance, not only for collectivities but also for individuals and their own.

This has significant implications with regards to our discussion of the hegemony of progress and resistance. If certain places, with place writ large as a marker of identity more than simply a site of remembrance, are imbued with certain memories, if certain stories are

²¹ Anne Rachel Terman, "Intersections of Appalachian Identity," in *Appalachia Revisited: New Perspectives on Place, Tradition, and Progress* ed. William Schumann (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017).

²² Frank X. Walker, *Affrilachia: Poems by Frank X. Walker* (Lexington: Old Cove Press, 2000).

²³ bell hooks, *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012).

told in and about certain places, if some stories are left out, forgotten, or erased, then the identities formed at the intersections of place, race, class, gender/sexuality, etc. will be fundamentally altered accordingly. Silencing and erasing counterhegemonic narratives reinforces the power of hegemonic ideologies and paves the way for the reification of structural relations of power. However, the conscious telling of oppositional narratives can foster the opposite. Through the circulation of narratives of resistance, people and places in which these stories/memories circulate can become sites of resistance themselves.

Public Forgetting, Silencing, and Counterpublic Memory-Making:

A Framework for Analyzing Identity Construction through Memory

The work of Dana Cloud and Bradford Vivian are helpful for conceptualizing the implications of this chapter. Dana Cloud was one of the first scholars of rhetoric to tackle a project about the labor strikes of the early 20th century in the Southern Piedmont. Cloud analyzes the strikes of 1934 as well as oral histories and documentaries about those strikes in “The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of ‘34.” Through her analyses of these texts, Cloud ultimately concludes, “the silence about the strike is linked fundamentally to a system of combined race-, gender- and class-based oppression and exploitation, in which an ideology of paternalism... made for a muted, though debilitating, segregation.”²⁴ Cloud’s rhetoric of silence deals specifically with *what is not spoken of* in the interviews with laborers, particularly black laborers, who worked in the mills during the strikes of 1934. However, it is possible to expand this silence to the invisibility of these strikes within public discourse as a whole. Oppression, exploitation, paternalist ideologies,

²⁴ Cloud, “The Null Persona,” 178.

and violent suppression are all characteristics of the strike in Marion as well. Because of this, we can understand the forgetting of the violence and strikes in Marion as a product of *silencing* of marginalized discourses. That is, violent suppression leads to silence over the event, which in turn leads to a forgetting of the event within public discourse and memory.

Bradford Vivian has written extensively on the rhetoric and politics of public forgetting. In fact, contrary to popular opinion, Vivian argues that public forgetting can oftentimes be just as productive and empowering as public memory. He does not seek to inverse the relationship between memory and forgetting, but instead to rescue forgetting within theory and praxis as something that can be productive. In order to delineate this productive rhetoric of public forgetting, public forgetting should produce rather than silence deliberation over the value of the past.²⁵ In addition, “the significance of former people, places, and events” should be accessible to the community through archives and other institutions of memory.²⁶ Finally, rhetorics of public forgetting, in order to persuade the public to forget and begin anew, must be clear about the impacts that the past has on the present.

Contrary to Cloud’s focus on silence, Vivian provides an interpretation of public forgetting that can be productive rather than purely a ramification of oppression. However, I argue that it is possible to see these two theories as two sides of the same coin. Violent suppression can produce a silence that is at the same time an instance of the public forgetting in order to move on from the violent event, resisting the temptation to collapse these two theories into a binary. Public forgetting then becomes productive of further deliberation and alternative interpretations of history, challenging silence around important historical events.

²⁵ Vivian, 176.

²⁶ Vivian, 177.

Viewed this way public forgetting and the memories that emerge from it can be seen as resistant to those operations of power that produced them.

In this way, alternative memories and accounts that are produced in the wake of silence and forgetting can be seen as counterpublic memories. Work has been done by rhetoricians in recent years to illuminate the contours and rhetorical effects of counterpublic memory making. John Lynch, for example, argues that public memories are composed in a series of drafts.²⁷ Lynch analyzes two adaptations of the murder of Matthew Shepard to show how one reinforces heteronormative interpretations of his death and the other forwards an oppositional interpretation. Thomas Dunn also analyzes the memory of Matthew Shepard in LGBTQ+ discourse to argue that “counterpublic memories critiqued both heteronormative public memories of Shepard within the wider public sphere and alternative counterpublic memories from within the community itself.”²⁸ For these scholars, the interpretation of memory through a counterpublic frame offers the potential for new possibilities and alternative interpretations that can function towards liberatory ends. When considered alongside the potential implications of identity formation in the places in which these ideas circulate, counter public-memory making becomes especially imperative as a means for crafting the landscape in which potential actors will enact various forms of resistance.

The silence/forgetting of the Marion Massacre elucidates how public memory works to render potentially liberatory narratives invisible. However, through attention to vernacular texts, the mapping of a counterpublic memory of the Marion Massacre highlights the productive effects of public forgetting. In other words, the silence surrounding the Marion

²⁷ John Lynch, “Memory and Matthew Shepard: Opposing Expressions of Public Memory in Television Movies,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31 (2007).

²⁸ Thomas Dunn, “Remembering Matthew Shepard: Violence, Identity, and Queer Counterpublic Memories,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13, no. 4 (2010): 612.

Massacre and the strikes of 1929 has produced, in vernacular discourse, a counterpublic memory of those events that functions to complicate public discourse about the events and foster productive deliberation about state violence and labor revolts in our nation's history and their effects on contemporary society. This has significant implications on the potentialities for continued or future resistance to hegemonic ideologies. Through counterpublic memory making, the rhetorical landscape is altered to allow for ongoing resistance as it crafts identities predisposed towards resisting ideologies that reinforce social stratifications.

In order to uncover this counterpublic memory of the Marion Massacre, it is necessary to analyze texts rooted in vernacular discourses. Examining vernacular discourses carries particular salience with regards to studying Appalachia because the region and the many texts produced here are articulated through vernacular -- both in a theoretical sense in terms of discourse and in a linguistic sense in terms of the local language and dialects. Appalachia as a region, as has been discussed, has consistently been maligned and subordinated with regards to the rest of the country, standing as an industrial sacrifice zone, political scapegoat, and marker of cultural and social progress. This makes the discourses that circulate in Appalachia uniquely marginalized in relation to national discourse meaning they maintain a structural position as vernacular. In addition, many of the texts that circulate in Appalachia are constituted as vernacular texts because of their medium and their language. Protest folk music, something consistently connected to the region and its history of labor struggles against coal, for example, is a vernacular discourse that helps to circulate counterpublic ideas amongst the region's and the nation's populace. In addition, interviews

with locals will evince the vernacular status of Appalachian discourse both in terms of its structural status but also in its dialect.

Analyzing vernacular discourses provides a window into public opinion that can be considered to be more accurate than what may be garnered through statistical analysis or public opinion polls. Gerard Hauser writes:

To revive a rich sense of discourse as the basis for public opinion, the theory of public opinion itself must be informative of how rhetorically engaged actors deliberate over social, political and cultural issues. Such a rehabilitation must widen the discursive arena to include vernacular exchanges, in addition to those of institutional actors.²⁹

For Hauser, the only way to adequately gauge public opinion is through the examination of vernacular discourses, as these are the sites in which we can truly gain insights into the major ideas circulating amongst publics as opposed to quantitative methods like polling.

Additionally, Kent Ono and John Sloop have argued for the examination and criticism of vernacular discourse. Vernacular discourses, for Ono and Sloop, are speech that circulates and resonates in local communities and thus it is not fully accessible or discoverable in the same way as larger discourses. It includes all forms of art and also everyday speech as we experience it at home and in the community.³⁰ Critiquing vernacular discourse is key for Ono and Sloop because it allows further attention to be paid to power relations among subjects.

However, Ono and Sloop caution that vernacular discourses, despite their counter-hegemonic possibilities, are not always liberatory in nature. Thus, a critique of vernacular discourse must also be attentive to upending essentialisms, undermining stereotypes, and eliminating narrow representations of culture.³¹ This involves a process of *displacement* and

²⁹ Hauser, 85.

³⁰ Kent Ono and John Sloop, "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse," *Communication Monographs* 62, no. 1 (1995), 20.

³¹ Ono and Sloop, 25.

contextualization that recognizes the transitionality of vernacular discourses and that these texts occur at moments of those discourses. To this end, this chapter will offer the criticism and analysis of a handful of vernacular texts, with as thorough a contextualization as possible, which will highlight both public and counterpublic memories of the Marion Massacre. Through this analysis, it will become clear that public silence/forgetting of the Massacre has led to the production within the vernacular of a vibrant deliberation of the event that exemplifies the productive and resistant possibilities of public forgetting and counterpublic memory-making.

Remembering Marion: Vernacular Texts of the Marion Massacre

Despite national media attention and a tragic culmination and to a larger extent than Marion's sister-strikes in Elizabethton, Tennessee, and Gastonia, North Carolina, the labor uprising in Marion has in large part become lost to public memory -- glossed over in labor histories, misquoted in some, and forgotten to residents throughout North Carolina. The mills in Marion have been torn down. Residents of Marion rarely speak of the strikes if they even know about them at all.³² Much of what is written in public discourse about Marion references a notion of shame characterizing the public forgetting of the Massacre.³³ As previously mentioned, Dana Cloud mistakenly placed Marion in the wrong state when briefly writing about the strike.³⁴

Through a theoretical framework constructed through the combination of rhetorical theories of [counter]publicity, memory, and power, this chapter argues that this public

³² Lawing, 2.

³³ Frankel.

³⁴ Cloud, "The Null Persona," 184.

forgetting of the Marion Massacre, and even the other labor strikes of 1929, is a combination of public silencing and public forgetting that has ultimately rendered the strikes nearly nonexistent in public memory. However, through mapping a constellation of texts, it is possible to [re]construct a public memory of the Marion Massacre that exists in vernacular texts that have been produced in the near century since the slaying of six laborers outside the gates of Marion Manufacturing. This chapter argues that these vernacular texts construct a counterpublic memory of the Marion Massacre that produces productive deliberation about this country's labor history in contemporary discursive arenas. With an eye towards how public memory constructs our notions and understandings of places and the collective and individual identities formed therein, this circulation of counterpublic memories are crucial to the possibilities and efficacy of resistance against the reification of hegemonic ideologies.

The analysis unfolds in two main steps. The first establishes the dynamics of public silencing and forgetting at play in the memory of the Marion Massacre. This section specifically analyzes oral history interviews with people from Marion at the time of the strikes and an interview with a descendant of an organizer. Through this section, it is clear that public memory of the Marion Massacre is either invisible or tainted with notions of contempt and shame. The second section pushes against this memory by connecting a number of vernacular texts together in order to highlight a counterpublic memory of the Massacre. These texts, including a song by Woody Guthrie and scholarly research, counterpublic silencing/forgetting of the Massacre by committing to telling the story and doing so in ways that eschew shame. For these texts, of which this thesis is a part, the summer of 1929 in Marion is valuable to our nation's history and worthy of remembrance and scholarly inquiry.

Mountain Shame: The Invisibility of 1929

The first texts that will be analyzed will serve to help render the public forgetting and silence of the Massacre more visible. To begin this analysis, we will be looking at the oral histories that were collected from workers in Marion through the Appalachian Oral History Project conducted by Appalachian State University in the 1970s. Two particularly interesting interviews from this collection concerning the silence/forgetting regarding the massacre come from two mill workers in Marion named Dewey Helms and Perry Hicks. Helms' interview is notable for its complete silence across the twenty-seven documented pages of his interview on any matter regarding the violence in Marion or the massacre. Instead, Helms spends the majority of his interview discussing the conditions in the mills and the type of work that he made his career out of.³⁵ This interview is similar to the ones that were analyzed by Cloud and evidences the potential element of public silencing at play in the memory of the Marion Massacre.

Perry Hicks was much more vocal about the union and his disdain for unionization both in Marion and as a whole. Hicks was a non-union worker and ardently opposed the union, which he saw as “the thing that caused us to have the most trouble.”³⁶ His opinions are evidence of the sway of public opinion against the union due to the violence erupting on the streets of Marion and evidence of just how ineffectual the union may have been in recruiting and representing workers. Hicks does actually reference the massacre at the mill

³⁵ Sam Howie and Dewey E. Helms, “Interview with Dewey E. Helms [January 10, 1976],” *Appalachian State University Libraries Digital Collections*, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/37313>.

³⁶ Sam Howie and Perry Hicks, “Interview with Perry Hicks [February 9, 1976],” *Appalachian Oral State University Libraries Digital Collections*, <https://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/37315>, 5.

gate, however, Hicks argues that the union was responsible for the violence. Hicks states “And the union finally at last went to shooting guns... And there was three people killed. One was old man Jonas. He was from East Marion. Old Sam Vickers and I forget the other feller’s name.”³⁷ This short excerpt is the only time during the interview that Hicks references the massacre. Immediately following this statement, he pivots to discuss Sam Vickers’ background before the interviewer then asks another question. Hicks’ interview is notable as it is very detailed in describing the conditions in the mills, the demographics of the workforce, the presence of the union, the National Guard, and many other of his recollections from the strikes of 1929. However, despite his loquaciousness on these other topics, he had very little to say about the massacre. While not silent on the matter, there does seem to be an unwillingness to discuss the massacre in detail. Both Helms’ and Hicks’ silence on the matter are evidence of this public silencing and also exemplify how this public silence crafts a rhetorical landscape that reinforces hegemonic interpretations and ideologies. Within the context of an interview about the summer of 1929 the experience of millhands in Marion, their silence leaves a glaring hole that should boggle the mind of those researching the strikes and the Massacre. The event that defined that summer and garnered national media attention is effectively nonexistent. These interviews reinforce silence or forgetting of the Massacre. When you consider their location in Appalachian State’s Special Collection, the implications become a potential invisibility of the strikes within scholarly research as it lacks evidence within these primary sources. With regards to the construction of place and place-based identities, the proliferation of stories of silence/forgetting reinforce hegemonic ideologies and stifle resistance.

³⁷ Hicks and Howie, 15-16.

Perhaps the most poignant recounting of public forgetting of the massacre comes from Kim Clark who discussed the memory of the massacre in an interview with the *Mountain Xpress*. Clark, who is the granddaughter of an organizer at Marion Manufacturing and produced an audio documentary about the strikes for WNCW radio, says “I think, almost in mountain shame, they just shut the door on it.”³⁸ Clark continues:

The day after the shootings took place, all the people that were out there in front of the mill striking — they saw it happen — they didn't know what else to do, and they just filed back into the mill and went back to work, all but 100 of them," Clark explains. "The people in McDowell County, once this tragedy happened, it's like they shut the lid on a box, and they locked it, and that's it. ... It's like this whole thing has been frozen in time. ... I think one of the big reasons is the community has been in some kind of silent solidarity."³⁹

Clark’s analysis of the silence regarding the tragedy in Marion is remarkably reminiscent of Vivian’s theory of public forgetting and of Cloud’s assertion that suppression can lead to silence. When we combine Clark’s interpretation with the silence regarding labor violence in the two preceding interviews, it becomes clear that there is a silence that surrounds the Marion Massacre.

Stitching together a Counterpublic Memory through the Vernacular

Clark’s documentary, *Strike*, produced alongside Ellen Pfirrmann, however, is an attempt to counter this silence that she experiences regarding the Massacre. This text and a number of others constitute an effort to tell the story of Marion from a more radical perspective. These texts are no more or less accurate than those that embody forgetting and silencing, but they do forward a narrative that is counter to those texts and thus representative

³⁸ Frankel.

³⁹ Frankel.

of a counterpublic discourse of the Marion Massacre. One example is a pamphlet that was published in the wake of the massacre. Written by acclaimed author Sinclair Lewis in 1929 and reprinted by the Marion Tragedy Memorial Fund with help from the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA), *Cheap and Contented Labor: The Picture of a Southern Mill Town in 1929* holds back little in its interpretation of the events that occurred on October 2, 1929. While not written by someone local to the Appalachian region, its recirculation by the Marion Tragedy Memorial Fund brings it to the level of the vernacular. In just the second sentence, Lewis writes, “It is a strike in which deputy sheriffs fired upon textile mill workers, with the unfortunate result that five, so far, are dead and more than twenty wounded.”⁴⁰ Later on, recounting the events of the massacre itself Lewis makes his opinion known about who he believes started the shooting at the mill gate. First Lewis reports that “The forces of law and order... say that the shooting started from the middle of the road, from amidst the force of strikers” and that they believe they were firing in return.⁴¹ Lewis then argues sarcastically, “To an outsider, it seems astonishing that if the strikers were armed and belligerent, none of the deputies was wounded, and *all but two of the strikers were shot in the back*, as though they were fleeing from trouble instead of starting it. Astonishing!”⁴²

Through the writing of Lewis, we can already see that a very different interpretation of the Marion Massacre is forwarded. Lewis is aiming to document the history of what occurred in Marion in 1929⁴³ and in doing so he is ensuring that he is discussing it from the angle that the strikers were killed in cold blood, versus Hicks’ interpretation that the union started the violence. Another note of interest regarding how this text functions in public

⁴⁰ Lewis, 5.

⁴¹ Lewis, 9.

⁴² Lewis, 9.

⁴³ Lewis, 5.

memory is that the UTWA's resolution backing support for its reprinting adopted in 1980 specifically states that they endorse this text because it "describes the Marion strike of 1929, for our posterity."⁴⁴ The deliberate goal of saving this story for future generations evidences the role that public memory plays in the construction of collective, and by extension individual, identities. By recirculating this interpretation of the strikes, there are greater possibilities for resisting hegemonic ideals.

Another text is Woody Guthrie's *The Marion Massacre*, a song written in the classic folk protest song style that made Guthrie famous and defined much of the music that emerged from the Appalachian labor movement. A short excerpt from this song exemplifies how it rejects public forgetting of the Massacre while also forwarding the narrative of laborers who were shot down in cold blood at the hand of greedy industrialists:

Six workers of the textile mills
in cold blood were shot down.
'Tis ever the same old story
With the laborers of our land.
They're ruled by mighty powers,
And riches they command.

It started over money,
The world's most vain desire,
Yet we realize the laborer
Is worthy of His hire.
These men were only asking
Their rights and nothing more,
That their families would not suffer
With a wolf at every door.⁴⁵

Guthrie once again, much like Lewis, is telling a story that differs greatly from that told by the participants in the oral history projects or from that of Clark's recounting of public

⁴⁴ Lewis, Front Matter.

⁴⁵ Woody Guthrie, "The Marion Massacre," *antiwar songs*, <https://www.antiwarsons.org/canzone.php?id=42206&lang=en>.

forgetting of the Marion Massacre. It also exemplifies Vivian's notion of a public forgetting that in turn produces productive dialogue about the forgotten event. Guthrie's song, like many labor songs of the era, preserves the memory of the Massacre from a perspective that clearly counters any narrative of a violent union that overstepped its bounds instead standing staunchly pro-labor. As it circulates, it widens the scope of the counterpublic discourse that it represents.

Amateur historian Mike Lawing's *The Marion Massacre* also functions to counter this narrative of forgetting to tell the story of the strikes. Lawing makes it clear in his introduction that he chose to write the book in order to combat the silence about the Massacre.⁴⁶ Lawing, who had relatives in Marion in 1929, had never heard of the strikes until early adulthood and encountered much resistance when he attempted to collect interviews with residents while researching his book. Lawing's hundred pages contain some inaccuracies. However, his commitment to telling the story of the massacre is a clear instance of counterpublic memory-making that counters both the public silencing stemming from the violent suppression of the strikes and the public forgetting that emerged in a community that just wanted to move on from tragedy. Another potentially impactful fact is that Lawing's book is the only secondary source present in Appalachian State's Special Collection regarding the Marion Massacre. As my own project is evidence of, this can have a significant impact on memory of the Massacre and the work that gets done about it. This was the first source that I came across when I began my research and many of its conclusions, interpretations, and framings of the events of 1929 have continuously colored my own thoughts throughout this project.

⁴⁶ Lawing, 2.

Conclusion

Through examining the rhetoric of the vernacular, it is possible to gain insight into public memory-making and the effects of state violence on it. As six workers were slain following months of violence on the streets of Marion, it becomes clear through the recollections of workers and local descendants, that violent suppression both silenced a community and pushed it to move on, to forget. However, as Vivian urges, public forgetting can be productive, something else that is evident in this analysis of the memory of the Marion Massacre. In the wake of public silencing/forgetting, a vibrant counterpublic memory has emerged and been sustained for nearly a century in vernacular texts. Sinclair Lewis' pamphlet, circulated throughout the region and the nation, Woody Guthrie's protest song that has been covered by numerous musicians throughout the decades, and Mike Lawing's monograph which is one of the only books in Appalachian State's Special Appalachian Collection about the Massacre (which is even missing Byrd's more recent and more researched book published through a university press), exemplify this counterpublic memory and continue to have influence over how the story is remembered and told today. This counterpublic memory is *producing* conversation about the Massacre, reviving it in public memory and challenging the reasons it may have been forgotten in the first place. My thesis project contributes to this counterpublic memory by telling the story of what occurred in Marion, specifically challenging the forgetting of the Massacre and attempting to affirm its importance to scholarly discourse.

It is interesting that ASU's Special Collection is missing both Byrd's book and Sinclair Lewis' pamphlet considering its one of the most prolific special collections on the

Appalachian region in the country and serves many who specifically come here to study the region through the university's Center for Appalachian Studies. It is also striking as the university is one of the closest major universities to the town of Marion. I had to request these materials from Western Carolina University's library, which is further from Marion than Boone and not nearly as big of a player within the Appalachian Studies field and community. The lack of resources within this collection can have a potential impact on the public memory that is constructed about the Massacre as a central location of knowledge about the region lacks the ability to effectively tell complete and detailed stories about it. Much like the museums, monuments, and archives that public memory scholars discuss, this is a place where one would *expect* to find a robust memory of one of Western North Carolina's most prolific and tragic events. However, we may conclude that local and regional silence/forgetting of the Massacre has instead sown the opposite and left the Massacre nearly invisible to even this important regional archive.

A theoretical contribution of this analysis is the assertion that individual place-based identity is just as influenced by public memory as collective identity. While the stories that we tell as a society, what we choose to remember, commemorate, and memorialize indeed have significant impacts on how we see ourselves as a society, it is less clear in the theory of public memory that what we remember impacts how we see ourselves as *individuals* and thus the actions we take and the beliefs we support. By bringing Appalachian Studies' conceptions of place as a marker of identity into conversation with the attitudes towards place in memory studies, this analysis highlights the importance of public memory to the construction of personal identity. This chapter has subsequently forwarded that this move is crucial to the possibilities and efficacy of sustained and impactful resistance. In places in

which counterpublic memories circulate, the potential for resistance to take root and proliferate is higher. This is something that is potentially evidenced by the Appalachian region itself. Appalachia has a long history of resistance, particularly in the form of labor resistance. As a result, many in the region see this as a *tradition* to be carried on. For example, there are many folks who rally against mountaintop removal who see their activism as an extension of the long history of resistance in the region. The ability to craft and circulate counterpublic memories of events, peoples, and places engenders future generations with multiple conceptions of their place-based identities from which to draw and act. With narratives circulating that consistently challenge our collective commitments to progress, we can hope that Americans will never be too comfortable with their current moments, that we will always push to be better, to be progressive, rather than merely claiming it.

Chapter Four:

Martyr's Local

This thesis has explored the Marion Massacre and the strikes that occurred in that small town to understand the ramifications of the ideology of progress on public and counterpublic discourse. The goal has been to elucidate how commitments to progressive ideals serve to stifle counterhegemonic activism and reify structures of power both at the moment of counterpublic activity and in the realm of public memory. By analyzing the case of the Marion Massacre through the lens of public and counterpublic theory, I have been able to explore how progress informs the construction of public discourse in a way that limits the tactics available to opposition groups. However, I have also been able to illustrate how counterpublic discourses can emerge in the memory of traumatic events further challenging the hegemony of progress.

This analysis furthers our understanding of how progress contributes to the formation and function of socio-political structures in the status quo and of opposition movements looking to challenge them. Through the case of the Marion Massacre and an interdisciplinary approach that combined rhetorical theory with historical analysis grounded in the Appalachian Studies tradition, I have rendered more visible the ramifications of progress on resistance movements and techniques of control. Progress impacts the tactics available to resistive groups on the ground and those available to generations of people influenced by it.

The goal has been to better understand how techniques of power like state violence and public silencing/forgetting sow quiescence into Appalachian society but also highlights the potential for “rebellion,” as Gaventa put it, through tried and true tactics like the wildcat strike and through counterpublic memory-making.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two explored the strikes in Marion in 1929 and the eventual massacre at the gate of Marion Manufacturing through the lens of public and counterpublic theory with the hope of better understanding the roles of violence and wildcat strikes in the events of that summer. This examination highlighted the various publics that emerged in Marion due to the strikes. This chapter also explored the ramifications of violence on these publics in relation to the hegemony of commitments to progress. Analysis of the beginnings of the strike developed the contours of publics and counterpublics in Marion, highlighting opinions for, against, or even entirely neutral towards the strikes. However, violence swayed public opinion against the union, forcing discursive and rhetorical adaptations to maintain its legitimacy. Thus despite the formation of a climate of violence, it was a tactic unavailable to resistive groups because of the commitments to progress in American society.

The main goal was to understand how wildcat action functioned to craft counterpublic space where it previously did not exist. Because the union was unable to maintain its legitimacy as a counterpublic entity due to the interplay between violence and progress, wildcat action was a necessary tactic for articulating counterpublic agency. However, the state’s monopoly on violence stifled political efficacy of this counterpublic, reified social stratifications, and ended the strikes in Marion on a tragic note. Chapter two illustrates the

power of ideological commitments to progress in American society and the ways in which it serves to reify social stratifications and stifle resistance. However, while progress may hinder the potential of some tactics of resistance, this chapter has forwarded that violence can and should be understood in a more nuanced manner in terms of its political and rhetorical efficacy. It has also argued that wildcat strikes are significant tactics for marginalized workers to find space and agency in a public sphere whose ideological foundations serve to sow desperation and inaction into its labor. In order to further explore the power of progressive ideals, this thesis then turned to examine the public discourses that have emerged in the wake of the Massacre.

Chapter Three

In chapter three, the role of public memory in reinforcing hegemonic ideals like progress and the potentials for resistance emerging from the deployment of counterpublic memories became the focus. Public memory plays an important role in the construction of collective and community identities by circulating certain narratives, preserving some as important, and memorializing morals. The stories we choose to remember, tell, and memorialize say a lot about who we think we are as a society, what we strive for, and even what we aim to move past. However, this chapter argued that more is at stake than collective identities, like what it means to be *American* or *Appalachian*. Instead, this chapter forwarded that public memory can have an important impact on what it means to be an individual, the beliefs we maintain, and the actions we take as a result. I argue that this has significant implications in terms of resistance and power maintenance because communities and persons predisposed towards counterpublic narratives have a greater potential to recirculate those

narratives and act upon them in practical ways. This is evidenced by the propensity for people in Appalachia, for example, to see modern day resistance activity as part of a lineage of opposition in the region. This makes the need for counterpublic memories of the Marion Massacre more urgent as the longer that silence/forgetting of the Massacre is reinforced the more the potential for counterhegemonic activity to emerge from it is diminished. Thus, this thesis and the work of folks like Kim Clark and Mike Lawing are crucial interventions that affirm the value of this traumatic event to regional identity and scholarly inquiry.

Implications and Contributions

Perhaps the most significant implication of this research is an understanding that the stories we tell matter because of the beliefs we uphold and advocate for through them. Upholding ideals of progress, particularly nonviolence, is not necessarily undesirable. It is something for which we should strive as a society. However, this should be done with an eye towards the context of resistance and with an understanding that eliminating the potential for violent resistance can, in fact, leave many stranded in marginalized positions. There are instances in which violent resistance is not only possible but *necessary*.¹ It is important that we understand that commitments to progress, nonviolence, and deliberative solutions to all of democracies problems can only go so far. More importantly, and more tangible, however, is the assertion that violence should be understood more carefully -- that it should not simply be dismissed as archaic and that scholars should pay close attention to the meaning that violence holds and symbolizes. Both violent resistance and violent suppression are incredibly

¹ Richards; Nahed Eltantawy, "Pots, Pans, and Protests: Women's Strategies for Resisting Globalization in Argentina," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2008); Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (Eastford: Martino Fine Books, 2015).

powerful tools and it serves academics and activists well to more consciously explore the implications and possibilities of violence even as we work to eliminate some of the most egregious forms of violence, like state-sanctioned brutality and economic and environmental devastation.

Thus, it is important that we continue to advocate for *consistency* in our collective commitment to progress as a society. By this I mean, universal condemnation of state violence should be the goal alongside the elimination of subjective violence as we strive for our progressive society. As long as police maintain the right to use deadly force against civilians, as long as millions of Americans are incarcerated, as long as drones strike foreign lands and international assassinations are lauded, as long as corporations strip entire landscapes of natural resources and decimate local habitats, we cannot -- and should not -- make claims to being a progressive society. Whether we are scholars researching and writing dissertations and books, or activists planning our next rally, or simply voters in the ballot box, we have the power to tell the stories we think need to be heard and to challenge assumptions that we think have gotten too comfortable. Consistency in our challenges and in our calls for action will bring about the changes that will further our progressive democratic experiment.

The stories we tell also matter because they can help to counter more popular narratives that circulate about populations and places. As mentioned in the introduction, Appalachia has become a scapegoat for the conservative backlash of the late 2010s. This region has been typified as “Trump Country” by major media outlets, political pundits, and venture-capitalists-turned-amateur-sociologists who should stay away from writing memoirs, at the expense of the work that is done by many people in the region to fight social, political,

and economic inequality, as well as environmental destruction. The longer that stories of a backward land with a backward people circulate about the region, the harder fighting these perceptions and the real-world impact of these stereotypes will be. Instead, pushing narratives about all of the important and impactful work done in the region -- of all the work of activists in Appalachia, from Marion in 1929 to modern-day West Virginia and many more -- help to correct the misconceptions about the region and highlight the ways in which our society is truly *progressive*.

This thesis has also made a number of contributions to our understandings of resistance and control, the tactics at our disposal, and the major points in our society that should be targeted for reform every day. First, I have argued for the viability of wildcat strikes as a method for articulating agency in situations when workers have no other recourse. This worked successfully in Marion to give workers a space in the public sphere in order to articulate their grievances and fight to correct them. I think that we are seeing this today as well as teachers in West Virginia have taken to wildcat action to protest for education reform, a move that has sparked similar protests throughout the country, as far away as Los Angeles.² While teachers may not be, and probably should not be, turning to dynamite blasts to receive higher pay, the wildcat strike has given these laborers, many in states that prohibit or limit explicit unionization, the ability to have public agency rather than be relegated to socio-political impotence.

The second major contribution of this research has been to highlight the importance of counterpublic memory-making in fights against oppressive ideologies that are often

² For an excellent exploration of the West Virginia Teachers' Strike including works from teachers themselves see Elizabeth, Catta, Emily Hilliard, Jessica Salfia, eds., *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers' Strike* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018).

reinforced in public memory. It is crucial to circulate memories and stories that run counter to engrained ways of viewing and interpreting events, persons, and places. This circulation forces us as a society to continue to grapple with many of our foundational collective assumptions. The differences between the types of narratives that circulate about the Marion Massacre highlight this dynamic. One highlights the recklessness of workers who brought death upon themselves through careless resistance. The other instead seeks to valorize workers who risked everything to challenge the hegemony of industry and the precarity of labor. Of course, it is too risky to make the memory of the Massacre that binary, however, in broad strokes those are the poles of the spectrum on which the texts analyzed in this thesis and many others fall. It is important, I have argued, to ensure that we do not allow one side of the story to monopolize our thought on a subject for the rest of time. As our contemporary debates about symbols like the Confederate flag evidence, society is ever changing, morals and desires are ever fluctuating, we must be ready as a society to adapt, otherwise turmoil, chaos, and hegemony are never far behind. By circulating counterpublic memories, we can continuously force a re-evaluation of our society's beliefs and morals.

I have further argued that this has significant importance because these stories do not just influence the formation of collective identity but also of individual identity. With the future of our region and our nation on the line, it is important that we are telling stories that empower people to strive to make a change rather than reifying the status quo. In Appalachia, there is a long history of activism that has inspired many to become activists themselves. Public forgetting/silencing that erases narratives of resistance reduces the propensity for people to fight against structures of power. However, the more that narratives of resistance circulate, the more that people may be inspired to seek change themselves. This makes the

creation and circulation of counterpublic memories, like those that can and should be told about the Marion Massacre, more urgent as these stories have the ability to inspire many in Marion, Western North Carolina, Appalachia, and far beyond to take up this legacy of activism and fight for social change themselves. In many ways, I think that this ability for counterpublic memory to inspire generations of people to activism is summed up rather poetically by a move that UTW Local #1659 made after the massacre at Marion Manufacturing. In an effort to preserve the memory of those massacred at the mill and to inspire people to continue to fight for what they believe in at all costs, the local renamed itself. Their new name: Martyr's Local.

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He returned to Appalachian in 2017 to begin an M.A. in Appalachian Studies and a Graduate Certificate in Rhetoric & Composition, which he completed in 2019. He served as the Assistant Debate Coach and as co-chair for Young Appalachian Leaders and Learners, a sub-committee of the Appalachian Studies Association Steering Committee. He accepted an offer to join the teaching corps with Teach for America and began teaching Secondary Social Studies in 2019.

He hopes to return to graduate school to pursue a Ph.D. after his commitment. He resides with his partner Mackenzie Bruckner and his dog Potato in North Carolina.