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This thesis is focused on a workers' perspective of occupational health and safety (OHS) in eastern Kentucky. Since the late 19th century, labor unions and coal mining companies have competed for the labor and resources offered by Appalachia. To get an idea of how miners form ideological stances about OHS advocate-groups and mine companies, this report features ten semi-structured interviews with miners. Using a chronological narrative timeline, participants' historical and contemporary ideological narratives were gathered. The interviews in this study make it apparent that miners establish experience-based networks of solidarity to make informed decisions about workplace conduct. These peer-groups serve a more important purpose than elite narratives, but in harsh economic conditions, these peer groups value economic activity over just OHS practices.

A LIFETIME UNDERGROUND: COAL MINING AND OCCUPATIONAL

DISPOSSESSION IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

by

Cody S. Allen

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Appalachian OHS Disparities

This paper focuses on the working-class struggles of eastern Kentucky coal miners over the region's turbulent past few decades. It tells of a history informed by the men who are living through the death of an industry in a region with scarce alternatives, a history of the people who have sacrificed their health and well-being in the unsafe mines that supply multi-billion dollar corporations with a source of cheap labor. This paper attempts to inform future research that might suggest how to best offer public health support and just labor practices for vulnerable rural communities. This review, in part, establishes a top-down institutional understanding of the recent downturn in occupational health and safety (OHS) in central Appalachia. It also takes into account the narratives of coal miners and academics who have cogitated on the nature of Appalachia's contemporary public health and labor concerns.

Thirty-eight miners died in an explosion in the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia in 2010 as a direct result of Blankenship's lack of effort towards safe mining practices. The mine was issued 369 citations for flagrant violations in safety practices (Louviere 2011). On December 3, 2015, Don Blankenship of Massey Energy, after a six-

week trial, was sentenced to a maximum of one year in prison on the misdemeanor

charges of conspiring to violate safety rules set by the Mine Safety and

HealthAdministration (Osnos 2015). A recent federal court filing by Assistant U.S.

Attorney Steven Ruby, on the issue reads:

> It shocks the conscience that in the 21st century, knowing all that has been learned from decades of grief in our nation's mines, the CEO of a major coal company would willfully conspire against the laws that protect his workers' lives. One struggles for words to describe the inhumanity required for a mogul like Defendant to send working men and women into needless, mortal jeopardy for no purpose other than to pile up more money. The law, as it stands, offers no adequate punishment for his crime. But what the law does allow, the court should impose: a year in prison and the maximum fine. Don Blankenship owes at least that much to the men and women who worked at UBB (Ward 2016).

The entire reason that watchdog organizations like the Department of Labor and

occupation-specific sects like the MHSA exist are due to strides in rights granted to the

working class made by union advocacy efforts. Many of the battles won by labor

movements (the eight-hour day, the five-day week, minimum wage, child labor laws)

were established through strikes and other direct action techniques used against

complacent firms.

Throughout this paper, I will use the word "dispossession" to refer to a theme that

is connected to, but does not exactly reflect the traditional definition of dispossession, in

an anthropological sense: Appalachian residents were never forced off of their property to

disparate lands, but the land they inhabited was acquired from underneath them by

outside resource extraction firms. David Harvey uses the phrase "accumulation by

dispossession" to refer the centralization of wealth in certain geographies which gather their capital from different regions (Harvey 2010). Central Appalachia, as this paper's literature review will detail, has experienced a great dispossession of its natural resources through primary resource extraction. The bulk of the profits from this extraction have historically (and still) lie in areas that are distinctly *not* Appalachia.

So while Appalachians have been dispossessed of the rich resource capital lying in their geography and many of the land rights that entitle them to exploit those resources, interests from other geographies have been enriching themselves with these commodities. The power of both ownership of the resource-rich lands of central Appalachia and the control of the lands through labor has been, since the early 20th century, relinquished to outside forces. This accumulation of ownership over both the land and labor of central Appalachia eventually led to, I argue, dispossession of the region's working-class culture, a displacement of the solidarity-centric community in favor of a more competitive and corporate spirit. The literature review is the heart of this paper. As a study that focuses on historical perspectives, identifying the dominant academic perspectives regarding these histories will prove useful in comparing the perspectives of the participants to those of those whose contemplations have been published on this subject.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An Introduction to Appalachian Labor Movements

The unattributed adage, "History is written by the victors," speaks volumes about how intellectuals have come to understand the ideological function of narratives. This paper stands as a testament to the power that narratives have over political, economic, and cultural histories, dominated by elite institutional narratives—in popular media and in academia. In central Appalachia, coal mines, by and large, are run by publicly traded and/or non-local energy conglomerates (Energy Information Administration 2014). The political and economic elites have the resources to distribute their ideology and perspective using methods not available to the lower classes. These narratives are distributed among the lower classes for consumption. This social fact is evident in popular dialogues surrounding ideology. Considering the size, profit orientation, and comparative funding of media sources and political entities in the region, the term *manufacturing consent* (Herman and Chomsky 1988) and Gramsci's theory of *Cultural Hegemony* both come to mind.

The energy interests who essentially control the economy of Appalachia have little incentive to invest in the long-term health or economic stability of their workers' communities. However, they have utilized their political and economic capital to garner

the support of the locals in exploiting the region's natural resources. Mining companies once built entire towns, churches, baseball fields, medical centers, and roads for purposes not directly related to mining in an effort to draw more workers to the rural communities during the coal boom. It was an effort motivated by profit, but it was still an effort (Shifflett 1991: 75-78). The period of time where miners were courted by companies with these cultural incentives and benefits was a time when coal was a much more powerful driver of the industrial economy in the United States.

Today, there is a desperately underemployed population of potential workers built into the region— there are more willing workers than jobs. This was not the case during the *company town* heyday, when coal towns were dynamically targeting new workforces (Shifflett 1991:77-80). As America progressed through the 20th century, coal mining became a comparatively less important part of the economy. As a result of an increasingly desperate workforce, the downturn in demand for coal, and a number of other issues, contemporary mining companies have lost interest in investing in their workers' communities beyond the extraction of resources.

In order to gain a better context for the state of public health, labor, and occupational health and safety in Appalachia, I have addressed literature on the demographics, history, and contemporary setting of the region. In order to fit my own research into a larger literature on union advocacy, I have also included research concerning non-mining unions. Understanding health/safety advocacy efforts that different unions and governmental organizations have attempted on behalf of their workers is of great contextual utility. The perspectives of firms on organizing efforts are

telling—how they respond to the concerns of their workers' demands makes clear not only their respect for their workers, but also their sense of power over their workers. Subsequently, this review addresses archival data and historical research regarding institutional (union, company, government) perspectives on significant moments in the region's labor/health/safety movements. Together, these elements enhance our understanding of workers' perspectives on union advocacy, the region's political economy, and the OHS standards of their occupation.

The perspective of heavy-industry workers in disadvantaged communities is an essential component to any useful OHS access model—many of the people underserved by regulatory institutions are distrustful of development efforts or do not understand how to fully take advantage of the resources and opportunities they provide. Further, understanding how worker ideology affects local institutions will be a vital step in the process of developing better access to OHS utilities. Among the sources used in this review are archival data from regulatory/union agencies, books on the subject of coal mining and labor movements, prior interviews and analyses on the region's political economy and labor movements, industrial data and publications, and demographic data from regional and national research organizations. Everything in this report has been directly impacted by the interviews I have conducted—this literature review builds context, enriches, and verifies the stories of the men I interviewed.

Demographics

Appalachia is one of the poorest regions in the United States even though it supplies the US with the majority of its coal, the fuel of the industrial revolution. Several longitudinal and quantitative studies showed that the heaviest mined areas of Appalachia have the poorest socio-economic conditions, which contribute to the significantly heightened mortality rates (Hendryx 2009: 543-5). Comparative analysis has also determined that Appalachian coal-mining communities faced "fewer healthy days for both physical and mental health and poorer self-rated health" (Zullig 2010: 551-3). Socioeconomic factors, such as access to healthy and high quality food, lack of exercise, ability to afford quality health care services, smoking rate, and education were taken into account as plausible origins of poor health in these regions in addition to the occupational hazards of mining. Economic disparities and lack of public health infrastructure further contribute to the public health crisis in central Appalachia.

The Appalachian Regional Commission releases yearly data on the demographics of the region. Among the statistics for 2009-2013 (the most recent analysis available), lower economic status, higher poverty rates, higher unemployment rates, lower personal income rates, and some of the worst health reports in the country were recorded in Appalachian counties (Hendryx 2009: 548). Appalachian regions producing the most coal maintain the poorest socio-economic conditions (Hendryx 2009: 548-49) in addition to the highest mortality rates. There is, of course, no moral equivalent to be found between life lost and economic profit, but strikingly, the statistical value of life lost is not even equivalent to the economic benefits provided to the mining communities (Hendryx 2009).

The people of Appalachia are woefully underemployed and those who are employed face disproportionately high risks of injury and/or death on the job. Despite this reality, there is a harsh social stigma against those *on the draw*, or taking advantage of social aid programs such as disability (Meng 1993: 511).

Contemporary Ideological Influences

Appalachian workers have a more diverse past than many have come to expect from the now monolithically white bible-belt region. There have been vast cultural and demographic changes following a history defined by capital drain and regional bouts of depression, which have deprived the area of a stable community (Harvey 1986: 81-3). Now, Appalachia is largely dominated by conservative ideology and Judeo-Christian (Protestant) values. This was not always the case; at least, not *everywhere* in Appalachia. Kentuckians and other Appalachian natives fought in the civil war with the Union to end slavery and settled in relatively diverse ethnic communities as the regional economy became more integrated with the rest of the country's at the turn of the 20th century (Billings, Blee 2004: 31-33). Appalachians were also at the vanguard of early U.S labor movements. Since its colonization, Appalachia has never been particularly liberal on social issues, but when it came to labor rights and access to healthcare, the region was instrumental in passing progressive legislation and using direct-action tactics to demand changes from an unwilling government, who took the side of big industry (Curarrino 2006: 23). A combination of factors is responsible for the movement towards conservatism in the region's contemporary setting. The first is that in a region with such

recent economic, health, and social woes, conservative ideologues set out to appeal to the white working-class sensibilities of Appalachia while liberals generally ignored the region as a "social problem region" (Reid 2005: 168). Corporate globalization in media also paved the way for reactionary economic/political ideology to take hold in depressed and disconnected communities such as rural Appalachia (Reid 2005: 169-71).

Beyond the ostensible appeal of conservative politicians, there has been a consolidation of media sources in the region (Merritt 2005: 227-8). Since conservative politicians and mine companies are the primary political groups looking to garner support from the local population, information in the region is often tailored to please those politicians, companies, and their supporters. In addition to these companies and politicians capitalizing on the relatively inactive progressive mobilization efforts in the region, there are a variety of conservative faux "grass roots"[1] organizations gaining momentum. *Friends of Coal* and the *Liberty Council*, for example, function to promote the mining industry and economic adjustments which favor the wealthier members of their communities. These organizations, and the Republican Party, target white low-income areas—a large portion of eastern Kentucky (Roarty 2013). High school football stadiums, license plate covers, business storefronts, and highway billboards are all plastered with advertisements from the *Friends of Coal* or other pro-coal corporate interests; the organizations even sponsor sports teams and provide scholarships to

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[1] These organizations are funded, by in large, by energy conglomerates and conservative business folks such as the Koch brothers. Organizations such as these are often called "astro-turf."

Kentucky residents (Transportation Business Journal 2011). Today, advocates of the coal industry are everywhere in eastern Kentucky, but advocates for the rights of coal miners are few and far between.

Union Advocacy

Worker-led initiatives have been at the forefront of modern advances in occupational health and safety in the United States. Unions are responsible for many of the generalized work-place standards that have shaped the culture of western nations—weekends, paid holidays, and other entitlements have allowed much more time for workers to develop freely and in their own ways outside of their primary occupation. The 8-hour working day, 2-day weekend, and minimum wage owes its implementation to the historical labor movements who demanded the adoption of such standards (Donado 2012). These principals have been applied to *all* workers in the United States even though many of the campaigns began as trade-specific battles. Larger firms and businesses traditionally oppose the improvement of OHS standards simply because it is costly for them to provide healthcare and safe working conditions to their workers. Safety and health standards set by unions and followed up with governmental intervention (when necessary) have been proven to be the most effective way to increase the welfare of laborers and even their output (Donado, Walde 2012).

Workers' compensation benefits is one of the most elementary forms of advocacy that unions have worked towards. Economic literature indicates that unions play a statistically significant role in workers' ability to receive workers' compensation benefits

(Meng 1993: 508-12), but it is also important to understand *how* unions work to secure

the likelihood of this receipt of benefits in order to evaluate a worker's perspective on

such efforts. Unions hire lawyers to represent the well-being of their workers in courts,

act in solidarity to advocate better working conditions by striking or raising awareness in

other ways, and directly act in workers' best interests on a number of trade-specific

issues. Conceptually put: an organized labor force advocates for itself by providing

bargaining power for workers by eliminating the competition between workers in a

market. That is, unions unite workers in the fight against market practices contradicting

their best interests (Müller-Jentsch 2012: 9-11).

At the turn of the 20th century, the Women's Trade Union League formed

federations such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and Amalgamated

Clothing Workers of America to campaign for women's suffrage, safe working

conditions, and securing representative political conditions for workers—especially

women (Plumb 1951). The Industrial Workers of the World organized the strikes of more

than 20,000 textile workers in 1912 over egregiously unsafe and unfair working

conditions. The IWW's populist mobilization of these textile workers was successful

largely due to a confrontational sentiment between the working class and the owners of

production. There were many disasters around this time surrounding textile factories and

other industrial settings and the IWW offered a community for workers to fight the

unsafe conditions which plagued the industry, touting the phrase "Safety first, live up to

the book of rules!" as a slogan (McGuckin 1987:76-91). In a time with such a politically

adversarial relationship between workers and owners with such little institutional

protection for those with negligible political capital, the IWW offered a strong

message that catalyzed large swaths of industrial workers.

Early campaigns to secure basic rights for workers were successful largely due to the

ability of an organized work force to shut down the productive capability of entire industries

if the conditions of the organized labor force were not met. Early labor unions overwhelmed

industry-elites through general strikes. Few governmental protections for workers existed at

the turn of the century, which offered a world of potential to solidarity networks campaigning

for legislative changes. The climate of labor markets today is much more fractured.

Governmental agencies such as the Department of Labor and Center for Disease Control

offer protections for workers across all industries, but these resources are often stretched thin

and not suitably applied to all of America's diverse industries. Solidarity has also been

maimed by elitist-favoring political legislation such as

"Right to Work".

Right to Work states exemplify the owner-favoring stance that many states have

taken in labor arbitration. "Right to Work" states employ a set of statutes that essentially

outlaw collective bargaining between a company and its workers. In Right to Work

states, employees cannot be required to hold membership in unions as a condition of

employment (Shermer 2009), though even without Right to Work laws, unions can be

voted out of a company if the workers so choose. These laws gained momentum via their

marketing as promoting more democratic and economically-beneficial work spaces

(Shermer 2009), but these changes end up placing complete power of labor conditions in

the hands of management and regulatory agencies, which are prone to corruption and

inefficiency (Currarino 2006: 23-5).Ultimately, Right to Work legislation has cut back on workers' ability to exert their collective power in order to promote change in labor practices—in fact, the set of regulations were drafted as a direct top-down response to worker mobilizations in unionized industries (Schermer 2009).

Labor unions have not always been successful in their quest for unity and representation among workers. In more modern political contexts, labor unions have become increasingly vigilant in their pursuit of their own political capital, alienating a portion of their workers in the process. In the 1950s through the 70s, the United Auto Workers aimed to secure production methods which provided job security and safety to workers across the powerful American industry. In 1998, a dispute with GM over their *leaning* of production methods arose: the union came to believe that the new production methods undermined the relationship between workers and their methods of production in favor of top-down supply chain control (Herrod 2000: 523-27). This dispute occurred on the grounds of worker job security and production relations, as the change in GM policy allowed for further executive manipulation of production without input from the shop floor. However, as Herrod would later (526-9) note, this new form of production actually offered more interaction between workers and opportunities for disruption in times of heavy production—potentially placing workers in a more powerful position for bargaining.

Occupational Hazards in the Mines

As healthcare infrastructure access has declined in recent decades, Appalachia has faced new public and occupational health concerns. Pain clinics which prescribe opiates and intense painkillers rose as a quick and easy fix to lack of healthcare infrastructure woes. This has, unsurprisingly, resulted in an epidemic of opiate abuse and addiction (Quinones 2016 86-88). Morbidity and mortality among coal miners is up, as are incidences of progressive pneumoconiosis (Black Lung), while healthcare outcomes and outreach efforts are down (Morantz 2012: 6).

It is difficult to do social research on healthcare itself because there are a host of socio-economic issues that contribute to quality of health: access to healthcare facilities in rural/poor areas is, of course, a huge component, but so too are factors such as access to healthy food, smoking habits (more popular among poorer populations [Layte 2009: 400-1]), and even environmental conditions in coal-mining areas affecting the entire population, not just the miners (Prus 2007: 286-9). There is, however, a preponderance of evidence that displays a significant association between mining and elevated risk of respiratory illnesses and a number of other risks to the health of miners.

Data from the Enhanced Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Division of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) report this fatal condition is appearing in miners at a younger age than prior records indicate. Miners with less than 25 years in the mines are starting to experience the symptoms of pneumoconiosis, also called *Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis (CWP)*, or more briefly, *Black Lung Disease*, at rates never before documented (NIOSH 2011). There is also a NIOSH database

concerning chest radiographies of miners around the country from the 1970s up into the mid-2000s. The lung opacity of a given radiography is noted in this database after being determined and double-blind verified by medical professionals. This database has over 5,000 data points for Appalachia alone, with a majority of the data being from northern Appalachia. Though it is well established that coal dust has a direct relationship to rapidly developing respiratory pneumoconiosis, NIOSH also has a team taking dust samples from different coal mines and has correlated them with lung opacity data.[1]

Coal mining is, quite obviously, a dangerous industry. Workers are often overlooked by large organizations such as OSHA, that monitor working conditions, and even miner-specific programs such as the Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program. With their current budget structure (Justice, 2014), these organizations do not have the resources to constantly monitor the operations of these mines, especially since the mines are most often located in rural areas far from cities where watchdog organizations are housed. In central Appalachia, in fact, the largest contributor to the increase in black lung diagnoses, according to a 2011(Suarthana, Laney, Storey, Hale, and Attfield) epidemiological investigation, are likely mining practices, specifically mine size and low seam mining. Both of these practices are most prevalent in central Appalachia when compared to the rest of the country. In addition to the mine conditions themselves, miners

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[1] It is no surprise that environmental exposures from coal mining could also contribute to higher rates of lung cancer (Christian 2011:794-6).

in central Appalachia, on average, work more hours than those in other

regions (Suarthana, et al.).

It has been determined after years of study by the American College of

Occupational and Environmental Medicine that coal-producing counties in central

Appalachia are at a substantially higher risk for mortality for a number of chronic health

issues (Woolley, Meacham, Balmert, Talbott, Buchanich 2015: 693). This article also

found that the counties which produced more coal had higher rates of mortality and non-

malignant respiratory illness (Woolley et al. 2015: 689-90). Issues like poverty, smoking

habits, and accessibility contribute to the mortality and respiratory illness rates in the

region, but these problems persist elsewhere in the country as well. Even taking into

consideration the other issues, central Appalachia faces higher morbidity and mortality

rates than other regions, with coal mining regions in central Appalachia facing the highest

degree of risk. Targeting at-risk workers, labor unions actively combat poverty and

accessibility issues among laborers. Mine-workers, even non-union members, in regions

of the United States with higher union participation rates are at lower risk for the

development of black lung and other morbidity/mortality-related issues (Morantz

2012: 6).

The Knights of Labor

One of the first mobilizations towards an organized labor force in Appalachia was

their regional branch of *The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor*. This

movement arose out of an era when the plight of the worker in most heavy industries was

largely ignored by U.S. political structures. In the late 19th century, the demand for coal in the more industrial north was growing rapidly; this resulted in an expedient land-grab in Appalachia (Hendryx 2009). While land was quickly being sold and mines established in the region, the centers of capital were far from the communities with mines (Nyden 1970). Thus, while miners in the region were having their land bought out from under them, the area's economy was transforming from a self-sufficient rural/agricultural system into wage-labor in heavy industry (Salstrom 1994). The rural communities of Appalachia were being dispossessed of their land and becoming dependent on an outside force establishing a new economic framework, and the Knights of Labor (KOL) rose to prominence out of necessity.

Communities around central Appalachia were facing the harsh realities of unfettered exploitation by the time the industrial revolution spread its influence to the rural south. The KOL formed in 1869 but became relevant during the living wage movement of the 1880s (Hallgrimsdottir, Benoit 2007). This movement arose out of a shift in labor ideology in North America: the effects of centralized forms of production and declining wages were felt disproportionately by skilled and semi-skilled artisans. Industrial capitalism brought wage-labor and centralized industry to regions where independent craftsmen were once the prominent producers of goods. After the industrialization of these regions, once-independent workers were forced into factory wage-labor (Hallgrimsdottir, Benoit 2007). During this transition, the KOL appealed to the masses using producerist language in the wake of corporate minds, circulating an inflammatory quote often attributed to Jay Gould, "I can hire one half of the working

class to kill the other half," in their early literature during the great southwest Railroad strike of 1886 (Foner 1987). In resistance to this classist notion of what amounted to wage slavery, the KOL promoted labor-based control over methods of production through governmental limitations and regulations on employers (Hallgrimsdottir, Benoit 2007) rather than a shift in an economic system towards socialism or anarchism, which was more prevalent in organizations such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

In Central Appalachia, the KOL utilized feelings of dispossession in its many forms to gain a hold of the working populace. The region had faced capital dispossession through the exploitation of its natural resources and the introduction of wage-labor; the KOL sought to allay miners of the Jeffersonian ideology—one arguing that individual entrepreneurship was a better approach than industrial wage-earning. They advocated for infrastructural change through a process of reform schemes such as agrarianism, greenbackism, and producers' cooperatives (Dick, Reily 1980). The wage-slave rhetoric used by the KOL hit home with workers in central Appalachia who felt out of control of their communities. The methods of organization proposed by the KOL were also bold enough to build a sense of empowerment in the region, but not so radical as to detract from the sense of national unity.

Anyone who has spent a significant amount of time in central Appalachia understands that community solidarity is a very important part of the working class experience—story-telling is central to cultural reproduction in the region, the sharing of agricultural and hunting bounties is a staple of kinship, and self-sufficiency has been woven into all of these regional forms of cultural and resource exchange (Salstrom 1994).

Needing to resort to a dependence on wage labor with sources of capital far out of the reach of the rural communities in central Appalachia was, in some sense, a surrender to a new form of societal organization—a form which abandoned the region's self-sufficient tradition.

The KOL specifically targeted anti-capitalist rhetoric used by other labor organizations such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Posing themselves as "labor republicans" (Weir 1996), the KOL was interested in pitting exploitative capitalists against responsible entrepreneurs. At the same time, they largely discouraged workers' struggles to control the means of production and the atmosphere of labor relations (Dick, Reily 1980). The KOL, more than the AFL, was interested in promoting an enlightened working class that would fight for its rights through legal reform and campaigning rather than direct action efforts such as striking or economic sabotage. This was made apparent in the literature, songs, speeches, and other cultural artifacts of the KOL's struggle to prominence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Weir 1996). Instead, the KOL focused heavily on methods of building working-class solidarity and a more inclusive organized labor group than the AFL, its primary rival (Dick, Reilly 1980).

In communities as newly touched by industrialization, dispossession, and wage-labor exploitation as the central Appalachian underground coal mining communities, morale was at an all-time low (Lone 1995), the nature of the changes in social/capital exchange in Appalachia having resulted in a decline in trust among community members. Consequently, the solidarity of the once tight-knit communities declined to a point of wage-competition and class-based infighting among members sharing both

socioeconomic and geographic position (Bell 2009). The KOL of Central Appalachia

aimed to fill the lapse in community involvement in newly-industrialized Appalachia

through community organization around progressive ideals: meetings where workers

could discuss their community needs and how improving their conditions through reform

and abolishing the wage system could help mitigate issues of environmental degradation,

health woes, and/or economic injustices such as the *scrip*[1] system (Dick, Reilly 1980).

The leaders of the KOL envisioned relations between workers and owners of production

as a "network of worker-owned cooperatives" (Hennen 2015). While this notion acted to

unite many workers under the cause of bettering their economic predicament through

legal reform, it did not correspond with the harsh realities that workers in the region

faced. Most workers saw themselves not as independent producers of value, but instead

as perpetual wage-workers (Hennen 2015).

The KOL's insistence on the producerist rhetoric which alienated owners of

production but made notable strides in organization efforts weakened the group's

platform significantly by the turn of the century. In the early 1900s, the group began to

target reform more heavily. The KOL's own president, or Grandmaster Workman, was

the mayor of Scranton, PA and would downplay the importance of powerful forms of

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[1] Scrip was a currency in which coal workers were often paid.This currency was only valid for use at stores set up by the coal mine companies, where workers were often gouged and restricted in the consumer choices they could make. In 1918, the U.S. supreme court ruled that scrip must be redeemable in cash. State legislatures and even federal enforcement agencies still did not offer much assistance in enforcing these new regulations (Fishback 1992).

direct action such as strikes (Hallgrimsdottir, Benoit 2007). As their language (and demands) became more reform-based, the KOL evolved into a much more bureaucratic organization and reneged on their former commitment to the abolition of wage-slaves (Hennen 2015). The AFL continued to gain momentum throughout the KOL's fractious change in praxis and rhetoric. As the AFL's model of organization was far more focused on fighting specific campaigns with unified workforces rather than organizing under a group of community-specific committees (Currarino 2006). Additionally, at the turn of the century the AFL also focused much more on direct action tactics to build awareness and solidarity while campaigning for reform in the way of political rights such as collective bargaining (Currarino 2006). The AFL would become particularly influential in Appalachia in the 1960's, when it began training community organizers in Appalachia, even contributing resources to the UMWA (Zeller, Miller 1968: 15-17).

The UMWA and the Shifting Focus on Health and Safety

In the discourse surrounding how central Appalachian communities have been affected by the UMWA, its organizational structure is of important note. The UMWA officially formed in 1890 but took years to come to prominence as an effective negotiating organization. It was organized under a structure intended to politically represent the interests of mineworkers who felt that they had no control over their industrial relations. The UMWA took inspiration from the community-based KOL which, at the end of its life, would turn into its own bureaucratic political force which drew

funds and support from the smaller community groups (Weir 1996); however, the

UMWA was more significantly inspired by the AFL's organizational structure. Opposing

more radical forms of working-class organization, the AFL's position was that promoting

capitalism was the way to the betterment of labor standards (Smith 2014).

The AFL's primary method of organization in the early 20th century was to

unite laborers through craft unions and use their voice to promote political candidates

(Weir 1996).The AFL was far from radical in comparison to contemporary groups such

as the IWW, who proposed industrial solidarity and industrial democracy as an

alternative to capitalism and utilized much more worker-centric organizational

structures (McGuckin 1987). Laslett (1996) concludes that the UMWA has not acted as

a model of industrial solidarity and democracy in action; instead, he proposes that the

UMWA has acted as an effective tool for publicly addressing the working conditions in

the mines through the support of political representatives, which closely aligned with

the AFL's system of organization.

While miner support for the specific community initiatives proposed by the KOL

waned, other forms of organization began to spark in Appalachia. The United Mine

Workers of America converged as a single organized group of coal miners and workers in

adjacent positions after miners spent years split between community-operations set up by

the KOL and the National Progressive Miners Union (Fishback 1992). The UMWA arose

out of the dissolution of the National Progressive Miners Union (NPMU) and the KOL

(Laslett 1996). The NPMU opposed many of the methods and perspectives employed by

the KOL. This antagonistic relationship acted to detract from both organizations' goals of unity among the working class.

The UMWA's constitution addressed several health concerns. As described in Maier's work on the construction of the UMWA (1990), raising awareness of the hazardous working conditions was of the utmost importance. Public pressure on mine companies to use the latest technology to keep the mines safe for workers was the anticipated result: the constitution included specific mention of Black Lung. One point in the constitution even noted concern for the reliability of dangerous support systems for the roofs in the mines. Additionally, other parts of the constitution published concern over contaminated air and water. Another focused on establishing a proper system for reporting injuries that occurred in the mines. Unions had not previously ignored health and safety, but it often took a back seat to a focus on larger economic reform. The new and more powerful UMWA was now able to focus further on occupational healthcare and safety, with several points concerning OHS in the first pages of their constitution (Maier 1990).

The newly united UMWA was able to more effectively focus down on specific campaigns targeting different aspects of labor rights. The primary focus of nearly all early labor unions very generically targeted the mitigation of broadly structured economic inequality: higher wages, fewer working hours, and more protections covering wage abuse by employers (Donado, Walde 2012). While the UMWA contributed to the general discourse surrounding employer abuses, they also raised awareness for specific concerns about the health of mine workers through direct action campaigns. By 1894, the

first national strike fronted by the UMWA had occurred. The ostensible goal was the reversing of cuts made to miner salaries, but the primary objective of the strike, to the UMWA leadership, was to establish the UMWA as a nationally cooperative unit which could effectively exert its power (Fishback 1992).

One of the first displays of large-scale collective action among the newly organized laborers was the Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902. A mobilization of over one hundred thousand workers participated in a strike during a time of heavy demand for anthracite coal (Derickson 1991:784). This effort brought numerous issues to light, but a special focus was given to the safety conditions of mines. The strikes resulted in a political effort to resume production: a hearing of the union's demands in Scranton, PA. At the hearings, the president of the UMWA, John Mitchell, addressed the human cost of coal mining: Black Lung, explosions, hazardous gases, poor medical care, and other various work hazards were discussed in view of the general populous (and media) for the first significant time in the history of mining in the region (Derickson1991:784).

In the years following the series of strikes at the turn of the century, the UMWA worked diligently to advocate for the health and safety of mineworkers. History has made it evident that government actions protect the interests of capitalists over wage-earners unless pushed by non-governmental organizations. Throughout the 20th century, the UMWA campaigned on some level for OHS reform, but the leaders of the union became increasingly concerned about destroying their company relationships and thus consequently outcomes for mineworkers, as time progressed closer to the 21st century.. For example, as detailed in Nyden's report on UMWA advocacy efforts (1970), even

going as far forward as the 1968 Consolidation Coal explosion where 78 miners died, there were weak or nearly non-existent pushbacks from the UMWA. This despite the fact that the disaster was nearly identical to a 1907 explosion in Monongah, WV that killed 361 miners and a 1951 explosion in Frankfort, Illinois that killed 119 miners. The very mine in which the 1951 explosion occurred failed 24 inspections for rock dusting and 25 inspections in other areas. After the explosion, the mine and other mines in the area continued to fail inspections (Nyden 1970). Tony Boyle, the UMWA president at the time, said only that Consolidation Coal was one of the *safer* coal companies and, in a hand-wave that offended many miners of the time: "… as long as we mine coal, there is always an inherent danger of explosion (Nyden 1970)." It would be a reasonable expectation that, though there are risks associated with mining, a trade union allied with mineworkers would attempt to push the envelope and promote further safety regulations paired with stricter enforcement, but instead the UMWA has fallen victim to bureaucratic posturing.

Despite some inconvenient realities regarding union posturing in the hopes of sustaining positive company-relationships, the UMWA has been a loud advocate for government programs that target the industry as a whole rather than focus down on one mining company. Governmental organizations such as the Mine Safety and Health Administration arose out of demands made by the UMWA. The UMWA has been described as "most ambitious" in their pursuit of health care facilities in rural Appalachian coal company towns (Hall, Lancho, McGuire 1998), those which would never have the resources to form substantial healthcare infrastructure. The UMWA

worked with renowned medical programs at universities such as Johns Hopkins to determine the best trajectory for a miner-centric healthcare community. This planning converged on the opening of 10 hospitals with over 1,000 beds—an entire system of hospitals created for the mineworkers named "The Miner's Memorial Hospital Association." This system eventually became the "Appalachian Regional Hospitals" (Hall, Lancho, McGuire 1998:44-5). The UMWA was also at the forefront in establishing the Black Lung Association resulting from the "Wildcat Strikes" of 1969, which established the largest wage increases the UMWA had ever negotiated—a raise of $7.00 over a 3-day period (Nyden 1970). These pay increases had widespread effects across multiple industries in the United States.

The modern socio-political climate in central Appalachia has brought about different challenges. In particular, the growing public health disparities, anti-union sentiments among politicians, media, and therefore citizens, and a population of desperate workers. The UMWA discusses fighting for access to quality healthcare for their workers as a top priority (UMWA website, "About Us") and represents healthcare workers as well as miners in their efforts to maintain relationships between coal mining towns and healthcare professionals. The website also lists the necessary information to receive federal benefits for Black Lung and briefly discusses its close ties to the National Black Lung Association. In 2002, the UMWA lashed out against the MHSA's $4 million-dollar budget cuts for 2003 after already having trouble meeting the standards of the 1969 Mine Safety and Health Act (Business Source 2002). Since these cuts, the UMWA has put constant pressure on federal and state governments to increase safety measures in the coal

mines of central Appalachia. Morantz (2013) found that unionization has been significantly associated with a sizable and robust decline in both traumatic injuries and fatalities, which are measures least prone to reporting bias on behalf of the mines. It also appears that more nonfatal injuries are reported when union membership is present (Morantz 2013: 104-6). This displays an obvious disparity in the way that accidents and injuries are reported in the coal mining industry: mines with union workers are feasibly placed under much more political pressure to report all injuries that occur under their management. Workers in unionized mines also presumably have more legal recourse in the case of an occupational injury legal dispute.

Miners' Perspectives

Contemporary Appalachian culture owes a lot to the coal mining industry. The coal mining industry has experienced rapid changes in the past few decades that have resulted in rapid changes to the area's culture and demographics, diversifying Appalachia (Conner, Jensen, Ransom 2014). Technological advancements in the industry have required more educated and technologically-experienced workers to move into the Appalachia and/or for the region with its crumbling educational infrastructure (Morrone, Buckley 2011) to spend resources on educating its population. Most often, management hired foremen and technology associates who were educated far from the communities which housed the mines (Smith 2014: 571-2). The influx of educated and skilled workers into the region introduced another element to the class-structure of the region—Reza Nakhaie (2016) contends that changes to the class structure of regions with low

prosperity and opportunity structures aid political and economic elites in dividing the communities and breaking down working-class solidarity. This coincides with the history of Appalachian coal mining: very small primary sector businesses (logging, small mining operations) and local craftwork were eventually taken over by energy and natural resource conglomerates (Salstrom 1994: 72-4).

Kentucky itself is not a Right-to-Work state, but due to corporate pressure, Kentucky lawmakers are attempting to adopt the statutes that neighboring Right-to-Work states (Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina) have adopted (Bowling Green Daily News 2016). Nonetheless, mining unions have retreated in a major way in eastern Kentucky in the past 15 years. There are many reasons for the recent decline in unions in Appalachia, including the political propaganda and identity politics which have permeated the region. Most recently, Donald Trump, donning a mining helmet and awkwardly holding a pickaxe, promised to bring coal mining back in a significant way at the Charleston Civic Center during his 2016 presidential bid (Reuters 2016). This act pandered to the proud working class voters of the region. During the same campaign season, Hillary Clinton made comments about putting the coal industry out of commission (Carroll 2016) as a display of her dedication to the environmental movement. Appalachians have gotten used to empty political appeals and being used as political props. There may be, however, a rising tide of unrest in the region as internet penetration persists and the availability or freedom of information makes it easier to track the methods of their exploitation.

The poorest regions of the country often serve as talking points to American politicians looking to convince the local population that they will act to right the wrongs that have damaged these regions, but ultimately, it is usually private industry that acts to exploit the human and natural resources of these regions as a result of a lack in regulations or infrastructure (Harvey 2010). These industries have a vested interest in convincing both the inhabitants and politicians of the region that they are going to revitalize the destitute infrastructure of poverty-stricken areas and that too much government oversight or worker agency hinders their ability to set up shop. This ideological alignment has been integrated into the talking points of modern politicians in the area who have demonstrated greater interest recently in de-regulation and new industrialization efforts. These efforts are mostly outlined through practices like hydraulic fracturing and further "low-skill" harvesting of the region's natural resources (Wiseman 2010: 236). Unsurprisingly, politicians and corporations interested in the region are attempting to further exploit the natural and labor capital of the regions, but are not as interested in developing other economic or educational infrastructure (Wiseman 2010: 232).

I focus on a worker-centric understanding of the role that organized labor plays in their communities' health because it is *their* health, *their* communities which have been affected by the withdrawal of healthcare infrastructure. I posit that understanding the specific regional experiences of Appalachian workers is vital to proposing solutions to the disparities suffered by the region. As social researchers, we delve into the subjectivity of historical events and political mechanizations. The modern Appalachian coal miner is

a largely ignored identity in the wake of a greatly decreased demand for coal. Statistics and policy analysis can tell us the magnitude at which illness, unemployment, and crime have struck the region, but only voices from the region itself can help us understand how these workers interpret the ways that companies, labor organizations, and governmental authorities affect their agency in determining their future.

The exploitative history of coal companies in Appalachia runs deep. Too many coal mining towns have stories of outside interests introducing themselves only long enough to take off with the bountiful natural resources of the region without aiding to set up urban or modern infrastructure to support further economic growth (Suefert 2004: 334-7). As discussed before, and perhaps more pertinent to this work, the mine companies themselves also failed to set up proper healthcare infrastructure in central Appalachia. It would require action on behalf of labor organizations to build the infrastructure necessary for a healthy working population. In a 1998 interview, one Appalachian miner experiencing a debilitating back injury said:

> I tell my boys not to be fooled. It's tough out there in the world, and it's tough here, too. We've got little here except ourselves. [The mine companies] came here and bled us dry. They took everything, our coal, our land, our trees, and our health... Of course it got better with unions and with some protection workers got through the government (Coles 1998: 54) …

Another set of interviews included views expressed by miners who worked the coal fields from the 1930s throughout the 1950s. The most frequent negative attitudes include, "Miners had to endure very poor working conditions prior to unionization in October 1933," and, "There were major difficulties getting black lung compensation"

(Lone 1995: 92). Many of these workers also noted the strong sense of community in the coal fields and at home. If someone gets hurt in rural Appalachia where there is little in the way of medical care, their well-being is left up to the community itself. There is little question that the lack of healthcare infrastructure plays a role in this system of solidarity.

In eastern Kentucky, where there are no union mines in operation, the sentiments on union advocacy, mine companies, and mining in general are complicated. Interviews conducted by the University of Kentucky in the 1970s found that workers were generally proud of their heritage, stating that mining was "in their blood," but they would never want their children to get into the industry (Shackelford, Weinberg and Anderson 1977: 172). This report also contained an interview with a miner discussing how the company-owned general store attempted to run a local tradesman out of business. Anyone caught doing business with the local store was warned that it would cost them their job (Shackleford, et al.: 1977:225). According to the miners interviewed in this study, the exploitative practices would never have come to an end were it not for the rise of the coal mining union (225-6).

Historically, the UMWA utilized an "us vs. them" pedagogical stance that greatly influenced the nature of the interactions between union-workers and non-union workers, often called "scabs". One miner from Harlan County, Kentucky, interviewed in the 1989 said "even a devil can't stand the smell of a cooking scab on a griddle in hell" (Hao 2015: 78). This sentiment could be echoed throughout eastern Kentucky from the origin of union organization to a modern context. The difference is simply that there are not as many union-mines left in central Appalachia today; as a result, the anti-scab and

combative union rhetoric have died down (Hennen 2015: 246) or begun to focus on *Coal vs. Anti-Coal* rhetoric instead of focusing on actual labor issues, as can be seen with the escalation of Friends of Coal and other energy-centric community initiatives (Transportation Business Journal 2011).

The modern coal miner in central Appalachia and especially eastern Kentucky is focused primarily on rekindling a semblance of economic activity in their depressed communities. Unionized labor markets do not endear themselves to big businesses focused on cost-reduction; this means that building momentum in labor-justice movements in depressed communities is difficult. This review has made it abundantly clear that eastern Kentucky and the rest of Appalachia face great economic and public health disparities in the shadow of the formerly booming coal industry. Most working-aged people in the region have concerned themselves with job-availability over fair labor practices (Ezzell, Lambert, Ogle 2012: 26). Moving forward, it will take great effort and tremendous resources to build the momentum that the UMWA once had, while the workers in the region are allocating most of their concern to the fact that there are so few employment opportunities available in the first place.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Methods

Appalachia's public health disparities have spiraled out of control in recent years. The economically depressed region faces dismal quality in occupational health and safety (OHS) despite harboring a rich history in labor justice movements. This study is organized around 10 face-to-face interviews with experienced miners from eastern Kentucky. Eastern Kentucky is an historical place for union advocacy efforts, the coal mining industry, and unfortunately, poor healthcare standards. These interviews took place in or around the city of Pikeville, a significant region for several reasons. First, the UMWA district 17 office for Kentucky lies in this city. There are also several mines surrounding this central location in eastern Kentucky, making participant recruitment convenient. I selected miners whose knowledge and first-hand experience of mining equipped them with appropriate voices to represent the Appalachian coal mining community. These ten interviews were conducted with men whose experiences provide them with a wealth of first-hand knowledge about mining, heath, and health care delivery. Following each interview, analysis and coding was conducted. I utilized a grounded-theory approach in carrying out this research. Each interview's outcomes affected the questions that I asked in subsequent interviews and the ways in which I interpreted the participants' answers in the coding schema (Birks, Mills 2011).

Quantitative analysis has provided a detailed exploratory investigation outlining some of the structural causes of declining OHS outcomes in the region. Instead of contributing to the growing quantitative analyses on healthcare disparities in the region, I will add a more subjective, experienced-based, and personal dimension to the academic understanding of inequity in Appalachia. It is my hope that this contribution will give context for further investigation to central Appalachia's specific geographic problems in occupational safety and healthcare. At its core, this paper is utilizing a social epidemiological understanding of occupational healthcare disparities in Appalachia to investigate Appalachian coal miners' perspectives on occupational health in the region. Social epidemiology is an interdisciplinary field that looks at the complex intersections of social, economic, occupational, political and environmental effects on human well-being (Berkman, Kawachi 2000). I specifically inquire about how social networks (unions, mining companies, government programs) impact socio-political understandings of union and company occupational health efforts.

Interviews

I chose to utilize semi-structured interviews as my primary data source. Questions in ethnographic semi-structured interviews most often aim to "… identify the variables that are the constituent elements of the factors and sub factors within the domains in the formative model (Schensul, Schensul, Margaret 1999)." Marshall's (1998) guidelines on qualitative interviewing indicate that participants' roles in their community ought to leave

them equipped with the ability to discuss their place in their community and their community's place within the broader regional network of communities. My research explores miners' working lives, inside and outside of the mines. Every question targets the participant's perspective on the relationship between unions, mining companies, and their own health and safety. In following Schensul's outline, I hope to identify the factors which have contributed to the fall of union solidarity in the region. I am interested in understanding how the miner's identities might conflict or work together. For example: how one might strongly advocate for the expansion of mining activities in Appalachia, but oppose the environmental damage that the mining does. How do these perspectives clash or work together in the mind of a coal miner from the region?

My 10 semi-structured interviews were centered on key informants. These are individuals with years, in many cases decades, of experience in mining. This means that they have interacted with union reps, company managers/foremen, other mineworkers, and watchdog groups. The men interviewed in this study have an advanced understanding of how all of these groups work together and oppose one another because they have literally occupied one or more of these roles. These interviews allow for an inquiry about the ways that the miners assimilate information and values from different social sources to come to their own conclusions about their OHS. Nearly every Kentuckian coal miner is familiar with organizational tactics used by unions, mine health and safety practices, and the regulatory bodies which act as watchdogs over mining operations

(Hennen 2015). These social realities are mundane to the mine workers of central

Appalachia and miners face regular interaction with these organizations and practices.

Participants

The miners have a unique cultural and geographic experience with which they

confront their political/economic realities. I believe that by targeting community centers

in Pikeville, Kentucky, I have targeted a community with a strong narrative regarding

labor history and the current trajectory of public health. These folks have (under)ground-

level experience in dealing with health/safety issues, working with or against mining

companies to secure their health, safety, and jobs. The miners have struggled for years to

evade the dismal morbidity and mortality rates associated with their industry while

experiencing the economic downturn of the only meaningful economic activity in their

communities. This reality all but requires miners to craft a unique perspective on the

realities of the industry. The participants have a story to tell about their personal

experience and their community's legacy. The miners range in age and experience in the

mines—I interviewed foremen, safety officers, automatic miner machine operators, and

more. The only requirement was that they had spent at least five years of their life

working in underground bituminous coal mines.

I talked to six hourly miners[1], three foremen[2], and one MSHA mine

investigator[3]. All of the participants were recruited from a local Church of Christ near

Pikeville, Kentucky. This church houses dozens of coal miners and the minister was once

himself a coal miner. Places of worship now act as the strongest centers of community in

central Appalachia. People come together to pray, discuss local and regional issues, and

gather to support folks who have fallen on hard times in the churches of Appalachia

(Coles 1998).

All of the participants are retired miners, there are two reasons for this: the first

concerns job security: active miners are less likely to talk to investigative researchers or

community organizers out of fear that a manager might hear about a conversation that

could possibly paint the industry in a negative light. This concern was expressed by

nearly every retired miner that I talked to; many of them told me that if they were still

active in the mines, they likely would not have done an interview and it would have been

discouraged by their management. The second reason simply concerns quality of data:

retired miners have had more time to reflect and communicate with their friends, family,

absorb media concerning the industry, and so on. I believe that retired miners offer a rich

wealth of data concerning the way that central Appalachian miners feel about OHS in

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[1] Ray Duvall, Reggie Archfield, Rudy Peters, Rupert Randleton, Jeff Dipatrio, Phil Gabriel (Pseudonyms)

[2] Bob Reginald, Roscoe Cavens, Randolph Steffield (Pseudonyms)

[3] Robert Kingsley (Pseudonym)

their industry and may be better equipped with the language to discuss their feelings than their active counterparts.

This project is exploratory in nature—the goals of this research are to identify and categorize the emotional and logical associations that miners have made with the economic and political actors in their community. I believe that the insight into how miners have adapted their ideological stance based on information made available by mine operators, media outlets, and other community members will be useful in the process of making sense of how rural and vulnerable communities construct narratives about their political/economic predicament.

Analysis

The experiences unique to each key informant are integral to building an understanding of the interactions behind the outlined social domains (Eisenhardt, Graebner 2007) in this study. Social domain theory establishes a model to explain how individuals "…identify, evaluate, and coordinate domains of social knowledge when judging socially relevant actions (Richardson, Mulvey, Killen 2012: 4-5)." I have identified several social "points of interest" in the interview data; all of which have been organized into categories which represent how mineworkers have interacted with their coworkers, bosses, and external entities over the years. Using qualitative data analysis software, I have taken a look at how often participants evoke the different realms of their community and how they feel about these realms in different contexts. The domains

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outlined in this study are union, company, healthcare systems, government, and coworkers. There are several different concepts and value judgments that became a trend among participants throughout the course of the interviews as well. Among the most popular are dispossession, good value judgment, bad value judgment, and neutral value judgment. It is important to outline both the domains and the workers' relationships with the domains in order to get an understanding of just what the Kentuckian coal miner believes about the current state of political/economic affairs in their region of the country.

I utilized egocentric instruments in my semi-structured interviews to measure the impact of organized labor on the participants' occupational health and safety. "Egocentric measures pose questions about individual alters and relationships rather than asking respondents to make summary judgments about their networks (Oakes, Kaufman 2006: 272)." Since I am evaluating miner perspectives on the effectiveness of unions in advocacy efforts, I first established the participants' ties with the two relevant domains of study: unions and mine companies. This method is often used to define role-relations and magnitude of involvement, for example: The National Health and Social Life Study asked about sexual practices with primary versus secondary sexual partners to establish the level of involvement before continuing to ask specific questions about the relationships (Oakes, Kaufman 2006: 273). Do those workers with stronger ties to unions feel that they are/were safer while working in the mines? What network ties might those workers who had not worked in union mines for a majority of their career had?

Social organizations (unions, mining companies, government programs) shape Appalachian miners' perceptions and understandings of occupational health and safety as well. The first step of most grounded theory research is to collect a purposive set of data (Birks and Mills 2011: 11). This research has utilized published epidemiological, historical, and ethnographic data to make assertions about the OHS standards of coal miners. These assertions have been categorized and compared to the perspectives shared by the participants. Throughout this process, I have concurrently related coded data to a theoretical understanding of how people internalize heavily politicized events which affect their lives (Birks and Mills 2011:5).

Community narratives are intertwined and braided together in ways that are difficult to illustrate through a linear telling of each individual's story. A chronological narrative map (Tracy 2013: 217) was utilized in this study to organize the miners' individual stories into one community narrative. This community narrative has been put together by identifying the common themes, contentions, and experiences that the miners shared. This narrative sheds light on the impact that the events detailed in the literature review had on the inhabitants of Coal Country and how they internalized the external conflicts carried out in their community. The chronological narrative map registers how the miners' associations with the unions'/mine companies' changed over time. The chronological narrative map organizes the community narrative into a chronological sequence and helps to display the braided nature of the mining community's struggle to obtain stability and justice. The approximate sequence of developments as told by the

participants in this study combined with their perspectives on these sequences and

personal events connected to these events will provide a deep understanding of changes

in the ideology of Appalachian coal miners with the ebbs and flows of the coal economy.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Findings

Participants' interpretation of historical events seems to be tied to the social and

occupational roles they inhabit. Their experiences underground have culminated in a

wealth of knowledge about the role each domain plays in the integration and practice of

OHS standards and other labor rights. The narratives gathered in each interview neatly fit

into one chronological narrative timeline. The interviewees stories, passed down through

the generations, clearly relate to one-another, and put on display the many conflicting

viewpoints held among workers in eastern Kentucky. The opinions and values espoused

in this section belong to the participants; my analysis and perspective is available in the

conclusion and discussion of this paper.

All of the ten interviewees discussed their relationship with the UMWA, MSHA,

and the mine companies; nearly all of them fostered *both* negative and positive value

judgments. The participants' nuanced understanding of the institutions that govern their

livelihoods emerged throughout the process of these conversations. The men openly

admitted that they had problems with a lot of things that mining companies have done in

the past, but were hesitant to characterize the industry in a negative light. *Worker vs.*

owner rhetoric was more common in a time with more economic options for the miners:

now that jobs are more scarce, unreserved condemnations of the industry by ground-level workers are too. These veterans of the coal mining industry patiently walked me through many of the more technical aspects of their occupation and more importantly for this research, how those ins and outs affected OHS. All of the workers mentioned in this section, from the hourly workers to the foremen, were united by the historical narratives passed down by their family members. The participants based their value judgments chiefly on the narratives passed onto them by their family, friends, and coworkers. Perspectives on media were also shared, but oral histories and narratives took precedence in this conversation. The following section contains the chronological narrative timeline: the story that links together all of the participants in this study. How they interpret social acts through different ideological and social lenses has had major effects on what they believe the potential solutions to their community's growing public health disparities.

Throughout the process of interviewing the miners, I began to understand how their community narratives related to their community's culture. The participants demonstrated a strong sense of attachment to their identity as miners: to them, being Appalachian meant being a coal miner or supporting the industry in some meaningful way. The narratives shared in this study did not lack criticism, but despite critical perspective on the industry, the participants unilaterally viewed coal as an integral part of Appalachian culture—as if it were the only way *to be* Appalachian. The ways that elite regional interests have marketed identity intersects with Gramscian and Chomskian theory: the elite-organized *friends of coal*, conservative ideologues, and primary industry elites all capitalized on promoting this identity as inherently *Appalachian*. Regional

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elites have managed campaigns to manufacture consent for the further exploitation of the region's natural and labor resources.

Chronological Narrative Timeline

The participants in this study have rich and varied backgrounds. Some trace their family history to Kentucky before the transformational invasion of the coal industry. Some trace their ancestry back to other southern states, New York, or even eastern Europe. The coal economy brought a surfeit of outside workers to central Appalachia. As history has put on display, coal country has the potential to make outstanding innovations in many respects—coal miners were a vital component of the industrial revolution. Coal country has also been at the forefront of the U.S. labor movement, but unabridged support for unions or even increasing labor protections was rare among my participants. Detailed in the literature review are the many abuses that coal miners have faced in their day-to-day operations. Over the years, those challenges have evolved: labor regulations and practices have been transformed with every new technological advancement or political trend. Even only between the golden years of the Knights of Labor to the first strike staged by the UMWA, there were great transformations in mining OHS standards. The participants, even the management, acknowledged these as valuable advancements that required workforce solidarity to achieve.

The narratives of the participants in this study begin at the turn of the 20th century when the Knights of Labor were falling out of popularity and the UMWA was beginning to gain traction. The men I interviewed were obviously not alive during this time, but

their family histories tell a comprehensive and linked story: one which sheds light on the shared struggle of the miners of eastern Kentucky. The miners all relied heavily on historical narratives to identify the consequences of socially relevant actions, to coordinate with each other to determine contemporary solutions, and to weigh the consequences of tackling modern regional issues. Rudy set up his family's genealogy with a story about their frontier spirit and fine craftsmanship. He described them as being scattered about Appalachia before the popularization of heavy-industry (logging, mining) in the region:

> One of my great grandfathers sold all of the mineral rights of his property off for 13 Hogs and 10 rifles, legend has it. That was before the turn of the century. My family has been in this region since the late 1700s, early 1800s maybe. They lived off the land, homesteaded. These guys came in and made a deal with him. If you think 13 hogs and 10 rifles sounds like a lot… that's how many kids he had. (We start laughing here.) Timber rights, they came in and tore up all the forests, got rid of all the ways you could sustain yourself off of the forest, then you can't farm that land any more: the soil wasn't doing that great. When they did come in and start to offer you the ability to start buying food, having a car, get a store of grain, and all of that, that's when they won. My family, at the point, wouldn't have to worry about not having enough food to last throughout the winter if they sold off the rights and had their children working in the mines. Crops failed and so on, it became something that paid the bills and was a way to just go on. Where you find poor and desperate people, you find good workers. My second great grandfather Peter, he had a blacksmith shop, sold chimneys, even pulled teeth. They lived off of the land and supported their own communities. For generations they did this, but his son got into logging, bought him a steam powered saw mill and just went into that industry.

Rudy judged the introduction of these industries as an intrusion, not as an opportunity. Interestingly, Reggie, another man who drew his family's roots to eastern Kentucky, made a statement that greatly contrasted what Rudy had to say about the coal

mining industry: "There [wasn't] nothing here. Coal mining built these towns throughout this area." The dispersal in knowledge about the labor history of Appalachia was very strong among the participants, but so, too, were the discrepancies in the interpretation of that history.

The interviews reflected the diverse history depicted in this paper's literature review. Rudy, Randolph, Ray, Reggie, and Rupert and Jeff's family lived in Kentucky well before coal companies began to develop the region. Their families worked in a variety of trades; at times, multiple trades were worked by one person. These family trades ended when mine operations expanded and began to acquire property. Rudy talked about the stories passed down to him about living off of the land and autonomous Appalachian communities working to support one another. His grandfather was the first to venture into the mines and move into a company town. Unfortunately, Rudy also talked about how this abandonment of frontier-life and adoption of wage-labor led to familial problems: "…that led to his suicide. He had to abandon that life because there were no other choices at the time." Bob's parents came to the United States through Ellis Island. They were distressed Montenegrin immigrants from Yugoslavia looking for opportunity. They found work in the eastern Kentucky coal mines at the crest of the industrial revolution and that tradition continued for generations. All of the participants indicated a very strong bond to their family and the coal miners of yore. Family members and historical mining figures (union leaders, mine company owners) were brought up by every participant throughout the interview process, even without being prompted with a historical question.

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Mining communities were once composed of long-time natives and people from disparate backgrounds, as Bob told me. The uniting factor was the company town. Nearly all of the participants (8/10) discussed the company towns when asked about the culture of miners. They talked about how people from different backgrounds were brought together not only to work, but to live together. Single men were brought into common-houses, Mexican families might live beside migrant Italians or native Kentuckians, Mormons might visit a Catholic church for a Sunday service or baptism. While the company towns enabled many forms of economic and cultural exploitation, they also offered an experience unlike anything these rural communities would have experienced without them. Discussing the unity that coal company towns brought, Bob Reginald said:

> In this area, coal camps are not located in metropolitan areas. All of these areas are pretty close together as far as community and the mines. They are located close to the mines. That's the heart of this town, Pikeville, Logan, and so many other Appalachian cities. We have been through a lot over the years… disasters, the downfall of the economy here, people moving away, all that. I think that our sense of community and the diversity that the industry brought to the area has really made us resilient and proud of everything that we have accomplished.

Another cogent point regarding coal camp culture was raised by the former miner turned minister (Randolph): in a pre-internet and pre-mass media world, there were much fewer options for culturally diverse members of the working-class to interact with each other.

Randolph would go on to explain the importance of television and mass media for mining regulation:

> …seeing [the strikes and mining disasters] on TV, in a way, began to lobby congress and so forth. I think that was a really big factor to getting the laws passed because the Bureau of Mines had been around for a lot of years. 50/60 years but nothing. No power. No bite. No teeth. TV really brought attention to our issues… really got people fired up about the injustices we face.

The miners interviewed in this research unanimously viewed the cultural diversity brought by the company-towns as a positive result. Five out of the eight who brought up company-towns also referenced an enhanced line of communication and networking between management officials and ground-level workers in the mines during the company-town period of eastern Kentucky. The statements ranged from mildly condoning the actions of company development to openly praising it. Bob Reginald, who talked at some length about the positive aspects of coal towns, said:

> Lynch was very ethnically diverse, really. Had 18 homes just on our street. It was a company town until '63. It was pretty cool; diverse. When you turned down my street, there were the Irish and the Scots. Then we had different Hungarians, Czechs, and Poles. On the very end we had the Domingus family, who were Mexicans. We had Germans right near us too, who my dad was close to. Lynch was divided into subdivisions, we used to call them camps. There were 6 of them. Number 1 was the first you'd come to going up, 2 and 3 were across the creek there, 4,5,6 were up near the top. There were some areas where ethnic groups, especially single men, went to the boarding houses so they could get a room as a group. There'd be different nationalities went to get a room and work and all that, but when you got married… there were probably about 1,600 homes, well duplexes, at that point, in Lynch or something like that. Housing was limited and over 10,000 lived in Lynch at its peak. Now there are about 600 people here, last I heard.

Even beyond the cultural diversity that the company towns offered, at least one positive value judgment was associated with company-towns for each miner who mentioned them; and for half the eight participants, exclusively positive value judgments were associated with company-towns. The company towns not only brought in large numbers of culturally diverse workers and their families and unified them under an occupational identity, but also brought organization and solidarity to the community. For example, in the houses provided to all of the mine-workers, everything from the plumbing to the roofing was kept up by the company's workers. They kept, according to Roscoe, "the entire town up…": they built water plants, sewage systems, swimming pools, baseball fields, and etc. A majority (7/8) of the miners had at least one positive value judgment attributed to the company-towns, and most of these judgments were based on city-maintenance and the health clinics run by the companies. This outcome was unexpected: nearly all of the historical narratives I have encountered in academic and non-academic literature discuss company-towns in an exclusively negative light.

The miners I interviewed compartmentalized the negative and positive outcomes of the coal-company towns. However, they were not around to experience the context of the founding of company-towns; and the loudest advocates for company towns in my interviews did not trace their parents' roots to where the company towns would eventually spring up. To evaluate the company-towns based on their diversity/community-based merits, miners seemed to draw on information from their parents, grandparents and fellow miners. Management officials seemed to default to a positive evaluation on the healthcare quality offered by company clinics, two of them

even calling it "some of the best in the world" and attributing the region's resistance to an

influenza outbreak in the 50s to the quality of company healthcare. This perspective

seemed to again be drawn from the participant's orientation with the company itself. The

participants filled in details and used narratives that aligned with their institutional role.

Management officials would preface a positive value judgment on the company clinics

with "I have no way to prove this, but…" or "Now, I never experienced this, but I

heard…" The experienced hourly workers, on the other hand, defaulted to generally

negative perspectives on the healthcare quality in the company-towns, drawing on

historical demands made by the UMWA and governmental intervention to prove their

points. The one MSHA professional interviewed in this study remarked on the

ineffectiveness of OHS implementation by the companies on their own accord. He based

his judgment on the emergent need for governmental organizations and cited the lack of

oversight as being problematic—an MSHA institutional perspective. He did, however,

offer some criticisms of the regulatory agency's top-down structure. Interestingly,

Robert spent most of the interview espousing institutional perspectives; here he

contradicts those perspectives and interprets MSHA bureaucracy through a worker-

centric lens.

> … I mean there are union reps and mine advocates through certain steps of the
> regulations being incorporated… How those regulations get incorporated into the
> every-day workings of the inspectors doesn't really get translated as well, and
> that's the problem. It may be okay, but how the legislation is actually translated
> into action on the part of the inspectors can be lost, sometimes. You have a
> bureaucrat who has sometimes never done an inspection—you're sitting there
> going, as a ground grunt, "that's stupid." The people who work in an office and
> have maybe never inspected a mine are dictating how we do our job. They place

these artificial barriers and thresh holds that you, as an inspector, have to work around. It becomes a real problem when people who have been out of the front lines and have forgotten what it's like to get on your hands and knees and crawl 30-40 breaks carrying 30 lbs. of gear on your back. They'll go like "do this" and that sounds nice sitting in an air-conditioned office in Arlington, but that ain't how it works underground. As an inspector, it just feels like *they don't have a clue.*

Hourly miners nearly unanimously interpreted institutional acts in this vain. In a discussion about modern OHS standards in the mines, Reggie Archefield compared the fall of modern coal unions to the historical rise and fall of the auto manufacturing and steel unions throughout the late 21st century. He stated "The UAW and all that fell apart because of the democrats' greed. It's about votes and money, not us or our community." The rhetoric Reggie used to discuss OHS standards imparted a heavy alignment with the historical *worker vs. owner* rhetoric, indicating strong ties to worker solidarity movements and weaker ties to management structures. However, late in his interview, he relented that the unions would eventually get too greedy and cause their own collapse. This corresponds with claims and rhetorical posturing made by Rudy and Jeff. As Jeff put it, "We got the screws put to us by people with more clout." The workers interviewed in this study worked in the mines from, at earliest, the late 1950s. Still, they used terms like "we" and "us" when discussing coal miners from the Knights of Labor, the early UMWA, and miners during the Harlan Coal Wars. This rhetoric suggested that participants took ownership of their community's past. They took ownership of the future, as well: every participant acknowledged the dismal OHS, economic, and educational infrastructure in eastern Kentucky, but every solution the workers suggested

was community-based. There was a mutual hesitation among the participants to trust the government or private institutions to solve regional issues.

The eastern Kentuckian workers I talked to indicated that community agency was required in order to solve the societal problems they face. Reggie Archefield, for one, was skeptical of the idea of more outsiders coming to eastern Kentucky to introduce alternative energy manufacturing:

> How long would that take? To develop that industry around here? If you've got all of this coal and all this energy here… why not use it? Most of the people around here say "if you've got it, why not use it?" And could you even get enough power from solar panels and wind and all that? I don't know if you could or not. Now I'm just an old dumb hillbilly, but I am just not sure if you could or not. Then what would the cost of that be and how long would it take to set up? I mean we already have the coal here. I don't know how many seams of coal there are under me [he points down to the ground] right now. And Obama and Hillary are just using that as an excuse to shut it down. What good is it going to do?

Looking forward, the hourly workers I interviewed relied predominantly on their experience, not institutional narratives, to make value judgments. Their predictions about which politicians would pander to who, the trajectory of the union in eastern Kentucky, and the potential changes in OHS legislation were based on their experience and allegiance to their domains. All of the hourly workers replied with a negative value judgment when asked if the mine companies would make improvements to OHS in the mines without a threat to their production (through either strikes or citations written by MSHA). They drew on their experience in non-union mines or their friends' and familys' experience in non-union mines to give examples of what mine companies had done in the past: Ray Duvall explained that the non-union mines had insufficient air

ventilation, increasing the potential for disaster. Rudy talked about how the locals are so stuck in their support of coal that they think it's the *only* future that the region has, so they resist alternatives. He says, "That's the PR machine and the government rigging machines intertwined."

Institutional perspectives deviated when it came to OHS and labor rights. Though the men who worked in management positions in the mines made an effort to display their attachment to the hourly workers, they did so through non-occupational means. They talked about knowing the hourly workers from high school, marrying their sisters, and their children playing basketball together. When it came to work, however, the distinctions were clear. The narratives on OHS and the intentions of mine management particularly in non-union mines, widely differed between hourly miners and management. Miners were confident that management in non-union mines were driven by production, pushing miners to work unnecessarily long hours in needlessly dangerous conditions. Two miners even suggested that management actively worked to impede the improvement of OHS standards. The relationship between miners and management was not quite adversarial, but there were some significant differences. The low level managers (foremen) I interviewed were absolutely concerned with safety, but their idea of safety was almost purely based on protocol from the upper management of the company. Hourly miners did not always trust that this protocol was legitimately proven to be safe, but the foremen indicated much more confidence in the protocol.

Occupational Dispossession

Acting to counter the alienation perpetrated by the mining companies, the unions themselves acted as a tool to mitigate coal miners' lack of agency of their workplace and their communities. When I asked Reggie Archefield if he had ever received orders to perform unsafe mining activities, he told me that he had a foreman who asked them to walk through an area without curtains to keep unsafe levels of coal dust and fumes from entering their airways. Reggie expanded:

> …he'd want us to go right back through the path that the machine made, following all of that dust. If it hadn't been for the union, the boss could have got away with that. Instead, when he did that shit, we'd all just sit there in the fresh air until the dust settled and he couldn't do nothing about it. He'd say "get back up on under there", and I'd tell him "I will walk up onto federal, man." And you'd hear no more out of him after that point. If it hadn't been for the laws and the union both, we wouldn't have a choice or we'd be out of a job. There ain't many other options for us out here, so we'd be screwed.

Elaborating on his relationship with his fellow workers, *federal* (MSHA), and the union, Reggie expounds on how he interacts with the management of the mine. The workers acted together as a group to resist management demands. In effect, they were acting to exert their control over their own workspace, their own community.

Diving further into the historical narratives shared by the miners, I discovered numerous technological advancements, yet a majority of the miners I talked to brought up a drag in the implementation of these technologies in their mines. The social networks of miners did not have the capital to demand changes in technology, safety practices, or healthcare infrastructure from mine management, so in non-union mines, they were

forced to push for change through a bureaucratic system of managers, foremen, and ultimately owners. Unions gave the network of miners the capital to interact with mine management through developing a process of arbitration between workers and management. The introduction of remote-controlled miners introduced a revelatory step in miner safety, but it also allowed the potential for a more cavalier management. According to Ray Duvall, who spent 2 decades working in both union and non-union mines:

> …every safety meeting that we ever had told us to not go past the last roof bolts. But once we got those remote controlled miners, it was almost, I mean, you could take the miner out there and no human lives were in any danger. Instead of getting a 20 foot cut while you were sitting on the miner, you could get a 40 foot cut with the remote controlled ones. As long as you had 2 rows of roof bolts past the edge of where you were cutting, you were fine. But the non-union mines would cut several different extensions into the pillars which was definitely a no-no. Very seldom did that happen in union mines.

I also asked him and the other participants to describe the origins of the union. Every single participant's response was centered on a theme of dispossession: miners talked about being subject to mine owners and management who didn't understand their jobs or way of life. Even though they were mining the minerals and creating the product for the mine company, they were not incorporated into the mine company's management or governmental programs regarding OHS in any meaningful way. Randolph said that *union brothers* made life more tolerable when time off and agency over your own labor was a rare commodity. The participants with union and non-union experience noted that community and agency in the workplace were much stronger in union mines.

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When asked if unions are relevant in a modern context, all of the participants used historical context to qualify the union under its modern context—this exemplified their intricate understanding of the political and economic atmosphere of their community. All of the men I interviewed said that unions were integral to gaining access to basic rights and establishing basic OHS guidelines. Jeff Dipatrio, a miner for 3 decades, spending 5 years in union mines and 25 in non-union, when asked about the unions place in modern Appalachia started his answer with a historical contextualization:

> Well the MSHA laws where the inspectors have to come into the mines, the coal protection act, a lot of safety legislation, wage stuff, all sorts of stuff, man. The whole industry was transformed by what they did in the 60s and 70s. And if you go way back, of course, things like minimum wage and child labor laws. Long story short: The working man needs representation. The politicians can't be trusted, the companies can't be trusted, and now the damn unions can't be trusted but they used to be. The union was an important institution to getting a lot of basic protections passed for us….

The participants' reference to the region's history indicates that oral histories are tremendously important to their development of contemporary perspective. Again, they indicate their affinity for their peer groups over institutional narratives. The participants learned about prior advancements in OHS and union activities through stories told by their parents, grandparents, and their fellow miners and trust them over mine company, government, or union narratives.

In this discussion about control and agency in the miners' lives, the relationship between miners and their management must also be discussed. I interviewed several foremen along with the hourly workers discussed above. The relationship between the

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workers and their managers seems strained based on the interviews I conducted. Many of

the foremen and lower administrative people working in the mines *are* actually native to

eastern Kentucky. Miners, however, feel that much of the time, the men who end up as

foremen have forsaken their working class community for the luxuries offered in the

comparatively cushy management roles. Even with native managers, even with the 10

interviews I conducted, I noted a significant divide in culture between management and

ground-level workers. Both of the veteran foremen that I talked to mentioned going on

golf trips with other management officials. On these golf trips, according to Roscoe,

there were *occasionally* discussions between foremen about lower level workers who

were demanding too many concessions from management. there was even a golf course

in Lynch, KY that was for the exclusive use of company managers and executives. Bob

said, however, that:

> For the biggest part, and I can only speak for our team, we all got along. I am
> sure there were a ton of disagreements once you got above me, but when it
> came down to my job, for the biggest part, we had a good working relationship
> with everyone involved.

The miners I interviewed, by in large, did not echo the sentiment of these managers.

Most miners admitted that they didn't have problems with foremen or even upper

management until they got injured or refused to follow through with directions to do

something they were uncomfortable with. As autonomous miner operator and Vietnam War

veteran, Ray Duvall, put it, "they didn't have any sympathy for you." After you got hurt,

demanded too much time off, or refused to do work that you felt was too dangerous,

they would "make your life hell." A younger miner who recently quit to attend college,

Rudy Peters, indicated that mine managers would force miners who came back from a

costly injury to do the toughest work in an effort to convince them to quit or to find a

justification for firing them:

> Well, the [mine management] always told everyone that if there was a problem or if the foreman tells you to do something unsafe, for us to come outside and it'll be taken care of. The superintendent always said that. But the thing is, they'd never tell you to do anything unsafe, but let's say… You're working in a non-union mine in a right-to-work state where they can hire or fire you for any reason—there are 200 applicants waiting for you to leave outside. I know they're there, I waded through them to get the job. So some people are a bit more abrasive and they'll stand up to the company a bit more if they have a good skill or seniority. But if you're new, they'll just knock you down or get rid of you.

Rudy and other miners had come to terms with the economic situation in their

community. They took inventory of their community and what would happen if they did

stand up to improper orders or working conditions. These men logically weighed the

consequences of demanding to be treated fairly in an uncertain economy. The fear of

losing their jobs outweighed their allegiance to labor justice movements and their

community of workers. During these economic downturns, Rudy asserts, it's easier to

divide and conquer. Historically, according to Jeff and Rudy, workers valued justice

over certainty of occupation. However, Reggie, Randolph, and Rudy argue that the

unions of the 1930s throughout the 60s existed in a very different economical context,

however, argued Reggie, Randolph, and Rudy.

Rudy and Jeff argued that the eventual downfall of the union would be due to

solidarity-breaking tactics used by mine companies and the short-sightedness of the

miners themselves. Randolph talked in some depth about how miners would strike over relatively inconsequential things, such as "not having a bar of soap in the shower" or "not having a new pair of gloves every other month". He said that the miners "hurt themselves" by asking for too many changes and they would take advantage of the workers' unity in striking for no reason other than just wanting some time off. Some miners resorted to *Doghole* mines during times of low community employment. These mines were independent and smaller. Miners had "no privileges, no rights, low wages." The union offered higher wages, and what he characterized as the most important asset: more agency over the occupation. Randolph was forced out of two positions due to a sequence of circumstances out of his control:

> One company I worked for, for six years, I missed two days for funerals. One of them was my brother's funeral. And so one weekend, my son was in the army. Hadn't seen him for about three years so I asked the company off… My other son was still in high school. He played football. He had plans to go to the Friday night game. So they said, "Okay, just get somebody to work in your place." So Thursday night I was coming out, the guy that was supposed to work in my place said, "I can't work in your place tomorrow." So Friday night came, I wasn't there. Nobody worked in my place. Monday morning I got fired. So I went and I argued... And so I just went down to sign up for unemployment. And they blocked it. That's when I began to find out you got some miner's rights.

He would later attribute the attainment of these rights to battles won by unions in Kentucky. He and other miners repeatedly asserted that the rights won for the entire industry were a result of union advocacy.

All of the miners remarked on how union mines were responsible for the higher wages at non-union mines. They had to offer competitive wages, safety standards, and

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benefits compared to the union mines in order to stay in business. According to the

participants, however, the non-union mines offered slightly higher wages. The union,

however, was never perfect. In later years, especially, my participants contended, the

union became a power unto itself. The UMWA evolved into an organization less

interested in solidarity efforts and more interested in political power.

Their Union?

To the participants in this study, the UMWA is not the be all end all of worker

solidarity. On one hand, workers note that unions have pushed for advancements in

technology, legislation, and provided a sense of empowerment, but these interviews

revealed to me the many ways that workers have come to feel disenfranchised from

unions in recent years. Fascinatingly, Ray brought up his different experiences with

union and non-union bosses. Though he was a staunch advocate of unionization among

workers (he repeatedly condemned the lack of OHS standards in non-union mines in his

interview), he told me that he would rather work for non-union bosses. Puzzled, I

inquired further; this is what I learned:

> Well because the non-union bosses, if they told you to go take a cut 60 foot, you'd
> have to go take that cut. In the union mines, if you did that, you had to go take
> that cut. It was easier to get rid of the non-union bosses. A lot of the bosses would
> tell us "I'd rather have y'all walk out of there than get an extra ton today."
> And stuff like that, but really, who knows the truth of any of that?

As displayed in the above quote, hourly workers' ties to their bosses or foremen were not

nearly as strong as ties to their peers. As much as the management of the mines discusses

their dedication to their communities of miners, the miners themselves do not see it that simply. The hourly miners' language indicates a need to separate themselves from management, even the lower-level foremen. When the miners discuss performing an action inside of the mines, they say "the foreman asked me to…" or "management wanted us to…" The foremen and management, in my interviews, used more uniting language like "We all had quotas to meet", "We usually didn't use the pillar system", and phrases of that nature. The hourly miners, in reference to their management, always distinguished between the two domains while the managers attempted to qualify the workforce in a more lateral organizational structure.

Rupert had one of the most detailed reports on life inside the mines—union and non-union. He said that both union and non-union mines operated essentially the same way: the workers doing the mining, belt loading, rail works, and the physical labor would perform their tasks while the several foremen would walk around and inspect the operations to ensure that production standards are met. They were around to help if something bad happened, he confessed, but he and his coworkers felt the sharp divide between management and hourly worker. He admitted that foremen were many times more reliable and trusted than upper management, but the rhetorical and occupational divide persisted throughout his career. In non-union mines, he said, that if you disobeyed an order by a foreman or other management, you would be fired. On the other hand, in union mines, he said that the foreman would be fired if he made unreasonable commands. All of the foremen that I talked to were not union-affiliated: they all proclaimed to have "a good working relationship" with the UMWA. All 3 of the management professionals I interviewed indicated this relationship with an

awkward grin and declined to talk in much more detail about their relationship with the union. When strikes or arbitration in a contemporary setting were brought up to these participants, however, they responded with a negative value judgment every time.

Unsurprisingly, managers in the mining industry are reluctant to support a unionized workforce. While they acknowledged the progress in OHS that was made by the unions, their contemporary concerns were with production. One battle that displayed the allegiance of the management officials was on the topic of *face to face retreats*. Essentially, as the foremen I interviewed put it, hours of accumulated production time were lost during the travel of workers exchanging shifts. As one worker left his post deep underground, he would have to travel 5 or 6 miles back up to the surface to exit. This took 45 minutes to an hour away from production time—several tons of coal, according to Bob. The foremen often got bonuses for producing a certain percentage over their quotas; in order to hit those bonuses, the management established a rule that required miners to be met face-to-face at their posts. This cut down on production-loss due to commuting in and out of the mine, but it also made a lot of the workers angry. The management, according to 4 of the hourly employees who answered a question regarding this topic, passed the *face-to-face* rule into practice by cutting the union officials in on the extra profits made from meeting the bonus criteria.

The hourly miners believe that backroom deals such as the one detailed above became commonplace during the 1980s and continued throughout the UMWA's remaining decade in eastern Kentucky. Reggie discussed signing a misleading contract:

When we got to work, [the deal] was a whole lot different than what we signed. We started raising cane when we heard all of the changes… The union officials said "If anyone tries to start trouble with this contract we're working on, we'll ban them from the union."

Whether or not the allegations regarding corruption within the union are true, the miners I interviewed indicated they felt as though the union abandoned them. Every participant mentioned their appreciation for the regulations resulting from union advocacy, the arbitration done by the UMWA in the earlier days, and the importance of worker solidarity in the early Appalachian labor movement. Today, however, the miners feel the union has become greedy for political power and money to sustain itself as an institution. This alienated the miners and positioned them as, in their eyes, a tool of the union rather than the members. The management used the miners' lapse of attachment to the union in order to offer alternative incentives (slightly higher salary) to the disenfranchised workers. Contemporary workers do not indicate any higher level of affiliation or aptitude to trust mining companies, but they do show less trust of unions than the literature review and historical narratives told by participants indicated.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Conclusion: a Lifetime Underground

The experiences, ideologies, and stories that were generously shared with me in these interviews greatly enriched my understanding of Appalachia, the working class, labor, and the pursuit of healthcare infrastructure in rural and distressed regions. Every miner, foreman, and regulatory expert I talked to was willing to patiently explain the complexities of an occupation that the outside world knows little about. I learned, in great detail, the ins and outs of working the mines. As expected, each group's narratives largely depended on their position in the institutions in the domain analyses: hourly miners had more allegiance to their peers and so on. The miners' interaction with the coal companies themselves depended predominantly on their position in the company, as well. Even the foremen I spoke to indicated that they did not have a whole lot of power to change any of the OHS practices beyond reporting outcomes, and their positions were chiefly dedicated to ensuring high production outcomes—not OHS outcomes for hourly miners.

The miners recounted their issues filing for time off after an injury, corrupt MHSA investigators, faltering union advocacy efforts, and more. Out of the many things

that I learned from these miners, one thing stood out above everything else: they feel an inescapable sense of dispossession. They indicated to me in no uncertain terms that they felt that they had lost control over their own occupation, their economy, and their culture. The dispossession that these folks feel does not fit the traditional meaning: the people who have stayed behind after a majority of the coal mining industry abandoned the area have come to realize that the mine companies have exerted their power over the local political systems and have affected the cultural systems as well. Without the power that unions brought to a united workforce, the miners interviewed in this project unanimously felt that the companies have taken advantage of the miners in the area through bribes, sheer job-market control, and political coercion.

Ultimately, it worked: unions no longer operate in the mines of Kentucky, and they are getting weaker elsewhere in Appalachia. In terms of the interviews conducted in this study, miners *and* management agree on what brought on the downfall of the mining unions: greed and a deviation from what unions were initially about: solidarity among the workers and establishing practices that protect the men doing the mining. In the eyes of my participants, many miners lost sight of these principles due to their own greed, the union lost sight because of power-hungry political elite aspirations, and the mine company leadership now has tighter reins over their operations—because of this, their ability to exploit their laborers is higher.

It is safe to say that mass media has not done a good job, contemporarily or historically, covering the political intricacies of OHS and labor regulation. Historically,

miners got much of their information about labor regulations and mine practices from union meetings and publications circulated amongst the miners. As union membership died down and eventually ceased in Kentucky, miners were forced to get their information from other sources or be left in a void of information about these issues. Today there are still many (retired or veteran) workers in the mining communities who have experience with unions. These workers pass their experiences along to the younger generation of workers in the region. I suspect that as these veterans are phased out, sentiments on union advocacy will deteriorate unless a historical perspective is evoked by some sort of populist movement in the region. I suspect this due to the extreme importance that the participants in this study place on oral narratives, especially regarding history.

Miners seem to value personal experience and community narratives regarding ideology over elite institutional perspectives. I say this due to the rhetoric used by nearly every miner: their perspectives on the mechanics of mining, the economic and political structure of solidarity efforts, and even regarding healthcare and safety in the mines are extremely reliant on the perspective of experienced miners or the oral histories passed down by family members. There are countless examples of this displayed throughout the transcripts of the interviews: miners of disparate backgrounds are brought together through the experiences of their predecessors. Above the perspective of academics, highly-trained business people, or engineers, the ground-level miner appreciates the input of the experienced ground-level miner. Above the pontification of academics from prestigious schools, journalists from renowned media outlets, or politicians with noble

intentions, miners trust locals with roots in the community to make real changes moving forward.

The impoverished communities of eastern Kentucky have experienced exploitation for well over a century: they have a distrust for the intentions and mechanizations of outside help. The union, whose foundation was by-and-for miners, turned into a lobbyist-run organization centered in Washington, DC. In the eyes of the miners I interviewed, federal watchdog organizations have been bribed or otherwise manipulated to work against the interest of the working miner. Public health programs such as the Black Lung Compensation program have gotten increasingly difficult to access, and public health and education initiatives have failed. This project was exploratory in nature: conclusions from this research are nebulous, but offer insight as to the direction of further research in the regional disparities faced by central Appalachians.

When asked about the historical roots of mining, every participant, including the one regulatory professional and two foremen, referred to the intrusion of northern capital as the spark that ignited the entire industry. Even if not by name, Capital Drain is well understood by working class Appalachians. Oral history has passed down the stories of the corporate settling of coal country during the industrial revolution. While the miners recognized that the companies entered the area to exploit the resources and desperate labor force, they also took advantage of the communities that the coal companies helped form. The complex set of views held by the participants displays how ideologies are formed around political topics such as OHS regulations and union advocacy. These

participants still value the owner-producer rhetoric that was pioneered by the Knights of Labor, but distrust institutional perspectives that use the rhetoric due to decades of alienation from union advocacy efforts and other forms of political representation.

The most concrete conclusions to be drawn from this study regard the importance of experience and oral tradition in organizational efforts. Miners in Eastern Kentucky feel out of control of their economy and occupation—especially in respect to OHS practices. The interviews in this study make it apparent that miners establish experience-based networks of solidarity to make informed decisions about workplace conduct. Whether or not those informed decisions are put into practice is up to the institutions themselves, due to the alienation from the decision-making process that the ground-level workers face. This seems to extend to the political and advocacy realms as well. Rudy told a story about kicking several UMWA workers off of his property. He noted that they

didn't seem to have any idea what his life was like—they came from different worlds:

> I thought they were insurance salesmen. They came up wearing polo shirts, button up shirts with sweaters over them, and leather shoes. I mean they looked like something out of a damn insurance company. One of them had highlights and pearly white teeth… they just did not look like workers.

Coming out of these interviews, one thing was certain: miners in eastern Kentucky no longer trust unions because they are not organized by workers who genuinely understand or value their perspective. The same goes for the government and the mine companies themselves.

Discussion

Knowing what we know about the demographics and ideological stances of rural Appalachia, it would be interesting to expand this project to include more interviews. I am particularly interested in the miners' support of the historical diversity brought into rural Appalachia by the company towns and if this ideological stance which embraces diversity extends to modern Appalachia. Beyond this question, I am interested in further exploring the ways in which rural working-class communities evaluate and make decisions about their current OHS conditions. I suspect that mass media has begun to play a bigger role in recent years as 24-hour news and non-profits like the Friends of Coal began to target the region. This project was limited in scope, but I believe it was successful in demonstrating some of the ways that the workers in this unique regional context view their history and future. How these folks understand their political and economic predicaments will inform their participation and support (or lack thereof) of future efforts to build public health and economic infrastructure.

The discrepancies in the ways that these miners interpreted their region's turbulent past are ripe for further investigation. Appalachian miners have been deprived of their agency historically and contemporarily. The land was mapped and settled by outsiders based exclusively on its wealth of natural resources. The capital drain and private acquisition of the lands that were once commons dispossessed the region of its frontier-based economic structure, affecting the culture of the region as well. Unions were formed to as a response to the loss of community agency in the region, but eventually they would

also act as an agent of dispossession. In order to solve the unique regional issues in Appalachia, institutions have to work with locals and develop long-term plans to ensure that locals are in control of the institutions working to make change. Establishing systems that can better serve Appalachians means understanding their apprehension to trust these systems.

       This study was exploratory in nature. As such, the conclusions are suggestions for further research. The perspective of ten miners in eastern Kentucky gives great regional context to an international labor struggle. Capital drain affects the developing world in a relentless manner not unbeknownst to Appalachians. More regional research needs to be done on how working-class ideologies can be used to manufacture consent for the development of infrastructure for resource and labor extraction by non-local elites. This study focused on the perspectives of coal miners in eastern Kentucky, but I have a feeling that loggers in the rainforests of Brazil, rare earth mineral miners in South Africa, and more international members of the working class have similar stories with very different ethnic contexts. The coal miners in eastern Kentucky are one example of many who have experienced dispossession from their labor, culture, and healthcare infrastructure due to economic reliance on elite players. For international labor movements to regain momentum, they must integrate an international understanding of the challenges different working class groups face and use this understanding to build an infrastructure that works for everyone.

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