

**Conflicts of Interests:
Revealing Black Women's Perspectives on Coal Industry Disputes**

Submitted to the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia

March 1, 2003

Karaleah S. Reichart, Ph.D.
Visiting Assistant Research Professor
Department of Anthropology
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

During the turbulent labor struggles of the twentieth century, the coal industry in the United States was marked by significant contests over union organization and industrial power. Many historical interpretations of labor-management strife in Appalachia have dismissed the participatory roles of women as stakeholders in these contract negotiations and strikes. By using ethnographic research methods and narrative analysis, my previous work as a scholar affiliate at CSEGA has demonstrated that women were indeed an integral part of the bargaining process. Tangible outcomes of various labor disputes clearly depended on community involvement and women's activities, and I rely on these findings as the foundation of this new research project, conducted during my tenure as a Rockefeller Fellow in 2001. Given the substantial sociological and historical literature that calls into question the dichotomy between women's ("domestic") and men's ("public") spheres of activity, women's roles in coal communities cannot be conflated into a universal set of tasks performed by all women at all times as a means to the same ends. By the same token, racial and ethnic divisions serve to further splinter the interests of members of coal communities. Because of the complexity of these issues, my research centers on understanding the fundamental intersections of race, class and gender in these communities. As a result of this fellowship opportunity, I was able to glean new forms of information from life history interviews and participant observation by conducting an ethnographic study among black women in southern West Virginia today to evaluate their multifarious interests and differing strategies for participating in conflicts associated with the coal industry. In this project, I collected and analyzed narratives from black men and women who have been affected by these conflicts and have specific strategies of coping with these disputes. The results of my research contribute to a greater understanding of community dynamics at the nexus of race, gender and class during industrial conflicts in Appalachia today.

Introduction

On the cool autumn afternoon of October 1, 1920, Mrs. Ben Fullen, a black woman from Merrimac, West Virginia, quietly stole away to the home of Mrs. G.C. Cline, a white woman who was married to a mine foreman. Mrs. Fullen, whose husband had long since stopped attending the regular meetings of the United Mine Workers of America, visited Mrs. Cline to warn her of a pending attack from the UMWA against the coal company operators. Mrs. Fullen informed Mrs. Cline that “the company had better keep the soldiers here for the Union men had already made their threats...just as soon as the soldiers were taken out they were going to kill all the operators, or make them recognize the union” (Cline 1920). Mrs. Fullen was so frightened that she believed that if anyone found out she had discussed the union plans, the miners would surely kill her.

The above narrative, excerpted from legal documents housed in the West Virginia Division of Culture and History, depicts a situation in which a black woman risked her own life to warn her white friend of impending labor conflict. This is only one example of the rich array of data that has helped to inform the complex gendered interactions that took place during industrial disputes throughout the twentieth century in southern West Virginia. For my term as a Rockefeller Fellow for the Fall Semester of 2001, I turned my attention to an ethnographic analysis of black women’s roles in current issues facing southern West Virginia, including the current state of the coal industry, fluctuations in coal demand, high unemployment levels and the ongoing mountaintop removal debate.

Women’s activities in coal communities have often been portrayed as being limited to the home, in which these “private,” domestic sphere activities were supportive of the functioning of the industrial economy, as in the case of the reproduction of the

mining force in southern West Virginia from generation to generation. Overly simplistic interpretations such as these are complicated when strikes and conflicts occur, as women's "domestic" duties immediately serve a contradictory purpose. During labor disputes, the economic investments of coal town women are no longer directly centered upon aiding in the reproduction of the labor force for mining coal; rather, women's labor often serves to prolong the efforts of unionization and the bargaining process. This participation and support among women allows strikes to continue until, as participants and strike organizers hope, a more favorable outcome is reached.

Women's domestic labor in coal towns, thus, cannot be assumed to be a set of tasks performed by all women at all times as a means to the same ends. It cannot be questioned that gender roles were affected by early geographic and economic conditions resulting from the idiosyncrasies of the coal mining industry in southern West Virginia. What remains a more interesting issue, however, is how ethnicity mediated these conditions, allowing black women to negotiate their own power within the maintenance and operation of the household, while simultaneously using this power to wield considerable influence within the "public" domain of labor negotiations. As my previous work demonstrates, I argue that this expression of power was structured by the social norms of gender and ethnicity within the cultural framework of coal towns.

As history reveals, more than ever before, women are assuming pivotal roles in situations of industrial conflict. Throughout the past century, women's roles in labor disputes have evolved and grown, and have been shaped by historical, social, political and economic factors. My research encompasses a comprehensive ethnographic and

historical study of women, gender dynamics, community involvement, and the politics of industrial conflict in this mountainous region of the United States.

Even with unprecedented levels of coal production over the last century, much ethnographic research in this Appalachian region has continued to operate under the assumption that the area is characterized by economic stagnation and the regressive pursuit of "traditional" ways of life. For example, in her book, *A Space on the Side of the Road* (1996, 16-17), anthropologist Kathleen Stewart describes this region as "a place grown intensely local in the face of loss, displacement, exile, and a perpetually deferred desire to return to what was always already lost or still ahead, just beyond reach." In another popular scholarly work, *Power and Powerlessness* (1980, 48), John Gaventa argues that Appalachia was "founded upon a determination for independence, based upon a relationship to nature and to the land; and it developed a particular culture quite different from that of the industrial society developing around it."

Such condescending and romanticized portrayals of life in the coal mining regions of Appalachia (and more specifically, West Virginia) have been the primary obstacles for the serious scholar attempting to understand the dynamics of conflict and political economy in this region. This popularized view of Appalachia as "wild country" often implies that the residents of coal communities were powerless, or indifferent to wider political economic issues. To the contrary, disputes between labor and management have often precipitated the use of a diverse range of well-orchestrated local bargaining tactics, including strategic work stoppages, protests and pickets, media and stockholder campaigns, and acts of civil disobedience conducted by residents of coal towns as a means of obtaining political and economic high ground. In turn, management has

historically utilized a variety of tactics to maintain high levels of production, such as the implementation of replacement labor during strikes (called “scabs” by picketers), physical and psychological intimidation against miners and their families, and deliberate acts of violence.

Prominent regional historians have written extensively on the subject of the Mine Wars and the involvement of men in the recurrent conflicts surrounding the coal industry (For example, see Corbin 1981, 1990; Lane 1969; Lee 1969; Lunt 1992; Nash 1992; Savage 1990; Sullivan 1991). A select few scholars, however, have attempted to analytically examine the role of women in these conflicts, particularly within the context of the regional political economy. Nonviolent protests in the single industry communities of southern West Virginia have often invoked violent and repressive responses from company enforcement officers, called the Coal and Iron Police (or more simply “company police”). These guards are hired by members of company management to maintain order during periods of labor unrest. When confronted by company retaliations, women protesters have historically turned to violence and armed conflict, political action, and community mobilization as a means of impacting negotiations between company management and union representatives.

The espousal of union ideology and the views expressed toward management in this region have tended to be conflated by the news media and local scholars with the views of residents in the surrounding coal communities. The key finding of all of my research to date is that, while women are part of the industrial community and are both directly and indirectly influenced by the legacy of the coal mining industry every day, many of their interests in these labor and industrial disputes are distinct and sometimes in

conflict with the desires of both the company management and the United Mine Workers of America. While I seek to not automatically conflate all women into a single group, the social and political economic idiosyncrasies of the gendered coal industry do provide for some problematic divisions along both gender and ethnic strata.

My research examines the multifaceted and dynamic roles of women in acts of protest and civil disobedience; violence and retaliation against company officials; and the political maneuvering involved in industrial conflicts at the community level. This study of gender, ethnicity and conflict in southern West Virginia is a fundamental and unique contribution to the greater understanding of the involvement and impact of women in the machinations of industrial dispute resolution. It furthers the study of the anthropology of work and the unpredictable repercussions of women's involvement in conflict on their families and local communities, and it contributes to a greater understanding of the power of industrialization and unionization on shaping gender roles in the United States throughout the past century.

I have investigated the roles of coal camp women by conducting ethnographic and archival fieldwork during my tenure of affiliation with CSEGA since 1997. The results of my ethnographic work have in turn been synthesized with local coal company data, which elucidates the changes in women's participation in regional disputes over time. By combining archival and ethnographic information with company records and historical data, my work seeks to systematically reconstruct information from the past 100 years of political instability in southern West Virginia.

Methodology

The primary setting for this research is Logan County, West Virginia, in which ongoing interviews and field observations have been conducted since 1997. The labor movement of the twentieth century witnessed some of its most turbulent events in this area. Given the rich history of Logan County as a principal coal-mining region and hotbed of company and union strife, in addition to its continuing influential role in the production of coal today, the ethnographic setting of this area is ideal.

Historically, company towns were constructed and unionization efforts began following the establishment of coal companies in the area. Logan County witnessed some of the bloodiest events of the Mine Wars and the labor movement, including the Armed March on Blair Mountain in 1921. For three days in late summer of that year, thousands of miners descended upon Lens Creek, just south of Charleston, and formed a “citizen’s army” intending to march through Logan County. They planned to hang the county sheriff, Don Chafin, and blow up the county courthouse along the way. They would continue on to neighboring Mingo County, where they would overthrow martial law and liberate their union brothers in the county jails. Throughout this process, they intended to abolish the mine guard system and unionize the entirety of the southern coal fields (Corbin 1981, 218).

Approximately 4,000 miners gathered at Lens Creek, and their ranks grew along the way to Logan. A sizeable proportion of the marchers (nearly two thousand) were veterans of World War I, and served as field commanders and instructors in military tactics. The marchers had their own hospital facilities complete with doctors and nurses, who wore UMWA insignia instead of Red Cross headbands. Patrol systems were

implemented, and special passes were distributed in an effort to keep out infiltrators and spies. The UMWA Local at Blair dug trenches in preparation for the miners. An advanced patrol of eight hundred miners cut down lines of communication, including telegraph and telephone wires, in addition to wiping out a sixty-five mile area of Baldwin-Felts guards (Corbin 1981, 221).

The Battle of Blair Mountain in August, 1921 raged for nearly a week, and to this day retains its place in history as the largest armed uprising on American soil since the Civil War. Indeed, President Harding deemed the insurrection a “civil war,” and placed the entire state of West Virginia under martial law. The miners ignored the declaration, and continued their march to Logan. A desperate coal operator wired a local congressman saying, “unless [President Harding] sends soldiers to Logan by midnight tonight the town of Logan will be attacked by an army of four to eight thousand Reds and great loss of life and property sustained” (Corbin 1981, 224). Troops eventually arrived, order was forcefully restored, and the fallout resulted in the indictment of 550 marchers for treason.

Aside from the historical richness of the county, I gained access to a variety of resources pertaining to Logan County, most notably the Logan Coal Operators Association Collection of the West Virginia State Division of Culture and History in Charleston. The Logan Coal Operators Association (LCOA) was founded on January 22, 1913, under the original name of the Guyan Valley Coal Operators Association. The purpose of the organization was to promote the welfare and interests of coal management in Logan. It was particularly active in issues pertaining to freight rates, railroad car supply, and labor, industrial, and government relations (Thurmond 1964, 42).

The name of the organization was changed to the Logan County Coal Operators Association on January 19, 1918. Melvin Triolo, a lifelong resident of Logan County, was elected to the Presidency of the organization, and upon his death, donated the records of the organization in their entirety to the State of West Virginia. On average, between 80-90% of coal producers in the County were members of the organization until its dissolution in the early 1990s (*LCOA Historical Notes* [1991], 10-13).

I also have personal and logistical reasons for selecting Logan County as my research setting. Every member of my family has been touched by the coal industry, in one way or another. As a lifelong resident of West Virginia, I have developed many relationships with residents of Logan County and southern West Virginia, both through familial and professional ties. My mother's grandfathers were both coal miners, one employed in the northern coal fields of Monongalia County, West Virginia; and the other in the Logan Coal Field. My maternal grandmother was raised in the Mallory coal camp, (just a few miles southeast of the town of Logan), and my mother was born in Logan General Hospital. Even my father, who moved to West Virginia in his twenties, is the descendant of a long line of Welch coal miners. I grew up listening to the stories of the coal camps from all of my grandparents, and knew that the distinct history of the industry lent itself to further study. This unique history of industrial strife and labor disputes in Logan County, coupled with my personal and professional ties to the area, makes this an ideal setting for the ethnographic analysis of women's political and economic alliances in the face of community conflict.

In 1997, I began this research project by delving into several archival repositories in both the state of West Virginia and around the central and southern Appalachian

region. At the Rockefeller Foundation Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia (CSEGA) at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, I was able to obtain rare original documents pertaining to my research topic from the West Virginia Collection at the Morrow Library. Most relevant were the comprehensive production and coal company reports collected over the past century and housed in the Marshall collections.

I discovered some of my most useful background information from the CSEGA collection in the Oral History Archives at Morrow Library. The oral histories, collected by sociology students at Marshall University during the past 25 years, include detailed primary information about coal mining technology (Brooks 1973; Henson 1975; Miller 1973; Perry 1973; Warrix 1973); local politics (McGuire 1974; Payne 1978); life in coal company towns (Collins 1974; Hensley 1973; Messer 1974; Mullins 1976; Payne 1973); and women's issues (Rule 1973; Thornbury 1974). I also visited the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services (CASS) Archives at East Tennessee State University, as well as the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. The CASS houses such archival resources as the Marat Moore Collection (oral history interviews with women in coal, many of which reside in West Virginia), manuscripts, local institutional records, pamphlets, brochures, and reports on Appalachian topics. The archives also contain an extensive collection of video and audio tapes, including oral history interviews and original recordings. I reviewed several of the CASS collections, including the Marat Moore collection of life histories with women miners, and the Jeanne Rasmussen Collection of photographs, essays, and personal records. Ms. Rasmussen served as

assistant in the 1960s to “Jock” Yablonski, who was murdered along with his entire family in a conspiracy plot instigated by then-president of the UMWA, Tony Boyle.

Finally, I conducted research at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. I obtained several historic film clips documenting the coal fields of West Virginia, including the infusion of federal troops during the Mine Wars of the 1920s, interviews with unemployed miners and their families, and footage of the devastation following the Buffalo Creek flood in the early 1970s. I also reviewed a collection of over one thousand still photos, captured in the 1940s throughout southern West Virginia, which documented such long-past institutions as the company stores, housing, and recreational facilities. I also filmed contemporary footage of southern West Virginia and co-produced a short educational documentary, entitled *We Walk the Line*, with Eva Egensteiner of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Following the collection of information from these regional archives, including census and demographic information, production and work stoppage data from 1900 to the present was obtained. The data was coded from its raw form and analyzed to provide comparisons across companies in Logan County. By connecting quantitative demographic and management information with ethnographic perspectives offered by the men and women involved in union-company disputes, I was able to evaluate some of the specific relationships pertaining to the impact of community labor disputes on company production over time.

Ethnographic research, the central focus of my project, was conducted to provide rich documentation of the extent of women's involvement in situations of industrial conflict in Logan County, and to elucidate some of the factors which contributed to their

decisions to engage in these disputes. Following from the ethnographic work of Catherine Riessman (1993), I conducted a series of life history interviews with my informants from the region to elucidate the progression of gender roles in Logan County over the past century. Because individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives, life histories are most applicable for this endeavor.

According to Riessman, human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded in narrativization, how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean (1993, 2). A storyteller, or a woman recounting a life history, usually organizes her conversation around consequential events, and recapitulates what happened then to make a specific point, often a moral one that reflects the dynamics of the context of the situation. Given that industrial conflicts in southern West Virginia are often interpreted by outside observers as dyadic disputes between labor and management, narrative analysis aids in my fundamental task of "interpreting the interpretations" of my informants (Riessman 1993, 5; Bruner 1990, 51). Individuals make sense of their experiences by casting them in the form of a narrative, particularly in times of difficult life transitions and trauma, characteristic of labor conflict events in southern West Virginia.

Because of the collaborative nature of life history research, these interpretations are specifically framed within the context of the interview process. For example, special awareness was granted throughout the process of data analysis to my role in shaping the collection of data, given my position as a "native" West Virginian studying my own culture. Because life histories and narrative analysis give prominence to human agency, imagination, and perception of critical life events, this form of ethnography is well-suited

to my research project. In personal narratives or life histories, "it is precisely because of their subjectivity -- their rootedness in time, place, and personal experience, in their perspective-ridden character -- that we value them" (Riessman 1993, 5). Historical contingency, gender inequalities, and practices of power are particularly illuminated through the use of life histories in this research.

Between 1997-2001, life history interviews were conducted with a range of informants from various communities across Logan County. My interviewees included retired coal company officials; elderly widows of coal miners; black and white women currently engaged in union and/or community organization activities; an elderly couple currently facing the politics of mountaintop removal; and black and white women of various ages who are current or previous residents of coal communities. The topics covered in these ethnographic interviews explored such issues as gender and ethnicity among coal community residents of the present, generational differences in gender and ethnicity, and the extent of female participation in political violence and resistance. I also questioned informants about the factors that possibly served as motivators for this participation, and queried regarding shifts in women's resistance strategies following the decline of the coal industry after 1950. In this fashion, actors at various levels of the regional political economy today were consulted to examine diverse longitudinal perspectives on the motivations and impacts of women in industrial disputes within the central Appalachian coal industry.

With few exceptions, these interviews were audiotaped; four were simultaneously videotaped and audiotaped. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by either my research assistants or myself. Videotaped interviews were later utilized to support the

development of my short ethnographic film completed in 1999, entitled *We Walk the Line*.

Research Results: 1997-2000

The work I conducted with women in southern West Virginia revealed their many roles in conflicts throughout the region, and traced many of the volatile community alliances and coalitions that emerged during the twentieth century. By evaluating women's roles in these disputes, this research contributed to a greater understanding of the fluid dynamics of the political economy of coal, and the positions of relative power women have held in situations of labor conflict.

Based on this research, it is clear that coal company towns have identifiable structures and institutions that have historically been used to construct, maintain and monitor power relationships in single-industry communities. The economic and social institutions that many Americans simply took for granted during the early part of the 20th century; including grocery stores, schools and churches; were all controlled, funded and maintained by coal companies and their carefully-selected employees. In addition, the spatial arrangements of coal company towns, with ethnic ghettos and centralized coal company stores, have been demonstrated to facilitate the monitoring and discipline of members of these communities (Jones 1996). Because, ordinarily, all members of a particular ethnic group were assigned housing on a single street or area of the town, uprisings and agitations were often preempted by company espionage. The central location of the company store further reinforced the "centrality" of the coal company in the lives of the coal miners and their families.

The economic organization of these communities was certainly a defining factor of women's experience during the Coal Age in West Virginia. The ownership of property was completely controlled and overseen by coal companies, and because elaborate rent and credit schemes were devised to keep miners economically dependent on the coal company, this level of control also determined the organization of the rest of the town, including the families of the coal miners. Coal companies employed various techniques to ensure that their power was essentially built into the structure of the towns, right down to the strategic positioning of company management houses such that the operators houses would be on hills that overlooked the community below. Strategies of ensuring power over the miners and the associated community, while often subtle or unspoken, proved to be very effective in maintaining order across southern West Virginia.

While companies were able to sustain relative control and “discipline” over their workforces and members of coal communities through the 1920s, the alternatives placed in front of miners and their families during the ensuing labor movement proved irresistible. Union representatives, when their efforts were not preempted by company guards or company espionage, presented economic realities to miners and their families that were shocking, disappointing, and ultimately agitating. The influential words of Mother Jones also contributed to the tensions between miners and companies. For many years, companies continued to provide all the items and services to the community that were necessary for its survival. Once the unionization effort began in southern West Virginia, the self-contained, panoptic system of the company town was doomed to fail from the inside out, and companies knew that the end was near.

The violent uprisings and armed resistance efforts of the early twentieth century were not only in response to the contradictions in resource distribution, but also to the potential abandonment of the way of life characteristic of company towns. For years, coal companies had invested time, resources and energy maintaining perfect operations, so-called “model towns.” Allowing this effort go to waste was not something any coal company wanted to witness in the 1920s, and as a result, companies often brutally retaliated against dissatisfied miners in an attempt to maintain order and discipline in the communities. This retaliation was also clearly an act of containment, an attempt to keep the union “plague” from spreading to other towns in southern West Virginia. The consequences of this conflict, manifested most dramatically during the Mine Wars and the labor movement of the 1920s, resonated throughout the historic development of the political economy of coal during the twentieth century. Even in the present conflict over mountaintop removal, the symbolism of the Mine Wars and Mother Jones continue to evoke powerful emotions from all parties of the conflict.

The social systems of the southern part of the state have been transformed dramatically over the course of the past 100 years as a result of conflicts and tensions in the coal industry. While the first half of the century was characterized by coal company towns and the strife associated with the unionization effort, the second half of the century was marked by an increase in relative power of unions and members of coal communities. Although these stakeholders have not yet been able to enjoy the political and economic power that has consistently been held by coal companies, each new dispute has witnessed the increased participation among women and non-industry stakeholders in the community.

Throughout the twentieth century, women have increasingly become involved as active participants in coal conflicts. Their role as stakeholders in the local political economy has evolved over time, such that today women have formed powerful coalitions against some of the strongest political and economic forces in the state, and have been quite successful in doing so. In the early days of coal company towns, the household economics were sometimes quite overwhelming. Women were charged with being at once responsible for childrearing, maintenance of a clean house and clean children, cooking all meals, gardening, and in some cases also working outside the home. During the 1920s, women participated in the violent Mine Wars of southern West Virginia, although very little narrative exists of these activities. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, very scant data exist with regard to women's activities in coal conflicts. By the 1970s, however, women clearly assumed an active role in the conflicts of the coal culture.

The wildcats of the 1970s demonstrated that women (as decision-makers and stakeholders) played an important role in the development and resolution of impromptu unauthorized work stoppages. If women threw their support to the wildcats, the community would likely follow and support the wildcats as well. This strategy often resulted in enough pressure on the coal companies to grant concessions or at least continue negotiations. By the late 1980s, women were not only working *in* the mines (thanks in part to the work of Betty Jean Hall and the Coal Employment Project), they were also actively organizing themselves to help support the miners outside of the mines during the Logan Pittston strike of 1989. The UMWA, for its part, did not immediately accept the aid of the Logan Friends and Family, and given the resources accumulated by the LFF, was a strategic mistake on behalf of the miners. The fraternal structure of the

UMWA, as many women have reported, was consistently a barrier to entry and direct support, even in the current mountaintop removal debate. The United Mine Workers chose to ally themselves with coal companies for the first time in the history of the union, which was disastrous for both the public image of the organization, as well as the ultimate legal resolution to the environmental issue of valley stream dumping. The case studies presented throughout this dissertation; including the Logan wildcats, the Pittston contract strike, and the current mountaintop removal issue; clearly demonstrate the active involvement of women as stakeholders in industry disputes throughout the history of coal in West Virginia.

By examining the context of women's participation in labor disputes, this phase of my research contributed to a greater understanding of the anthropology of work and labor issues, and has further contextualized situations of conflict in studies of microlevel political economy. By analyzing conflict as a locus of structural change, this research has evaluated not only the role of labor conflicts in the historical evolution of the Appalachian coal industry, but also turned special attention to the oft-forgotten role of women and community stakeholders in this process.

Research Goals

The previous pages reflect a brief summary of the work I conducted during my tenure as a student/scholar affiliate at CSEGA, and it is worth clarifying that the women to which I refer in the previous pages are white women of various ethnicities and countries of origin, but none are black. The remaining pages of this paper represent a summary of the work I conducted in the black community with women from Logan,

West Virginia during my tenure as a Fellow at CSEGA. Their experiences and narratives reveal a very different experience in southern West Virginia, which is mediated by class and color, as well as gender. For my Fellowship project at CSEGA, I turned my attention to the historically black communities of southern West Virginia. Black coal-mining communities flourished here throughout the twentieth century, including many churches, community groups, and political and civil rights organizations. Most notable of these groups was the indigenous creation of a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), tirelessly promoted by women like Memphis Tennessee Garrison. The work of these black women contributed to the creation of antilynching legislation, integrated juries, and the nullification of clauses in real estate deeds that pledged white buyers never to sell their property to blacks (Bickley and Ewen 2001). Much of this story, however, remains to be told. In an excerpt from the book *Memphis Tennessee Garrison*, a striking relationship between community organizer Garrison and coal company management was illustrated as follows, in her own words:

I started working for the company somewhere about 1931 or somewhere along in there. I worked until 1946. Then the political picture changed to the fact that unions were coming in. That made a difference in the whole setup, everything. I didn't work for them any under the union. The union came in and they were organized and I wasn't any more a part of it after that. They had new people and a new setup of rules for the laborer and the whole picture changed. Any role that I might have had was either obsolete or it was taken over otherwise. I knew that it was time to quit and when that year was over, that was it (Bickley and Ewen 2001, 124).

Contrast this story, then, with a narrative from one of my life history interviewees, a white woman married to the president of a UMWA local:

We had a long, long strike in 1948, 1949. And I can remember so well, I had a little four-bedroom house, with three children at that time. And my husband, being the president of the union, he had, they brought the stuff, clothing and food and stuff to our house, and we handed, and I helped him hand it out the window. But women didn't take part in it, but we had to usher things out you know, had to help. And it was about a 49-day strike that year. Now the mines have changed since way back then. I can remember when he worked in the 40s, it was terrible. The union hadn't been in too awful long, and there was nothing anybody could do about it. Because they had to work and make a living....and make very little money. And then when the union came in, they put a stop to all that.

The heart of this research project rests in the discrepancy between these two stories; vastly different interpretations of unions narrated from a black woman's and a white woman's perspective. Both women lived in southern West Virginia and were directly impacted by the coal industry, but I argue that ethnic differences and fundamentally dissimilar social and class experiences in their communities contributed to the divergent perspectives on unions and labor disputes expressed in these life histories. Using the research time afforded by the fellowship at CSEGA, I endeavored to seek answers to several key questions pertaining to the incongruities of narratives such as these, including:

- 1) What are some of the ways in which experiences of black women and white women in unionization efforts and labor disputes in southern West Virginia differed historically, and how has this contributed to divergent perspectives on the role of unions in their community today?
- 2) How have women's perceptions of the coal industry shaped their views on current issues facing southern West Virginia, including increased unemployment and environmental issues stemming from the process of mountaintop removal mining?

- 3) In what ways are black women participating in coal community issues today? How are these problems conceptualized differently by white women and black women in the coal fields?

To answer these questions, I began the project in August 2001 by reviewing the relevant literature pertaining to blacks in Appalachia in the Special Collections of Marshall University. I then established a working relationship with New Empowerment for Women Plus in Logan, West Virginia. The organization, a project of the American Friends Service Committee, was initiated in 1979 to assist women in obtaining employment in Logan County and the surrounding area. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace, and humanitarian service. Its work is based on the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) belief in the worth of every person, and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice. Founded in 1917 to provide conscientious objectors with an opportunity to aid civilian victims during World War I, today the AFSC has programs that focus on issues related to economic justice, peace-building and demilitarization, social justice, and youth, in the United States, and in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Today, NEW Plus works with both men and women on complex social problems. NEW Plus staff members provide assistance to individuals facing personal crises, and they conduct workshops on a range of topics that affect individuals and groups in the Logan community.

I maintained a considerable amount of involvement with the organization during my fellowship. I attended meetings, volunteered at the AFSC annual conference, and participated in the group gatherings, including dinners and presentations. To facilitate the completion of my ethnographic work, I conducted interviews with several members of

the black community in Logan County, via connections I made through my involvement the NEW-Plus Center in downtown Logan.

Summary of Ethnographic Interviews: Fall 2001

Throughout the course of conducting interviews, several issues and themes emerged from the life histories of my informants, the results and excerpts of which are presented in the following pages. These themes included topics ranging from the influence of the coal industry on contemporary issues, to the multifarious origins of racism and ethnic discrimination in Logan County today.

Coal and Culture

The influence of coal has long been a factor in the social, political and economic interactions across the Appalachian region, but particularly in southern West Virginia, where the political machinery and local economy have been based in the industry of coal mining for over a century. Class differences wrought by the idiosyncrasies of the company town system, combined with ethnic discrimination, contributed to a very distinct experience for blacks in Logan County. One of my informants recounted what life was like for residents of the typical coal company town.

We had whites and blacks, but we were divided into sections. We had doctors, dentists, post office, movies. Everything in that community belonged to the coal mines. If you wanted furniture, you went to the coal store and that's where you got your furniture. You couldn't go out of that little community to get anything, so the coal mine controlled all of that. You go get your payday, and you may get a 50 cent piece, because you put everything back into the coal mine through the store.

Other interviewees discussed how ethnic discrimination was institutionalized and structured by coal company housing assignments.

The community we moved into was mostly whites. Most of the people we played with were white. That's the way we grew up. This was the strange thing about the communities. We lived in the upper camp, it was mixed. Then down below that was what they called the colored camp. Then below that was called the Hunkie camp, and it was foreigners that lived there, but it was all white people. Then down below that was where the bosses and more white people lived, and they called that the white camp. But that was just the way it was set up, and we didn't think anything about it. It was a way of identifying where each person lived.

Whitman was mixed – you could be living next door to a white family, there may be one or two black families together, one or two white. But it was 50-50, a mix. Island Creek, around the main office and that area, was dominantly white. But out in the coal camp of Whitman and Holden, I would say, a third was black population. Back at that time, there were what you call immigrants, polish immigrants, there too.

During the course of this research, I was interested in determining the extent to which the class divisions propagated by the coal industry contributed to the institutionalization of racism and discrimination in modern coal communities, and how blacks in Logan County typically experienced racism on a day to day basis. Two interviewees provided the following responses:

It's hard to describe racism and classism down here, because it's such a thin line between the two. But you cannot get the two races to see that. This just seems to be the culture down here. When coal mines first trained people here, they didn't bus them, the communities are still segregated because that's the way they did it. You had a black community, a few Mexicans, and the Hungarians owned the stores. Then you had the white community, the Italian community, and so on and so forth. Well, when people could finally buy these houses, they had lived in them 20-40 years, so they just stayed in that community. This is the way some people like it, that's the way they grew up, they were comfortable with that, and it stayed like that. Then you have the who's who children that can do an infraction in school and get away with it. When a low-income white or minority kid did that, the penalty was much different. They are subtle, been done for years, to the point where I don't even know that some of them even know they're doing it. This is just the way it's been done. That's the hard thing

to change. The divide and conquer mentality is still here, it's still alive and well.

Money is everything. That's the way Logan County has always worked. It's not just against the blacks; it's against the poor whites too. They [company owners] don't want them to advance, either. They make life so hard. You can walk down the street and if you stub your toe they'll probably put you in jail. Logan is like a little mafia, that's about the only way you can put it -- I rule, my money rules, my money talks, what I say goes. If you're not part of that group, you'd better watch out. When I was growing up in the 60s, Logan was still the same. The old men die, and the sons take it over.

The economic landscape of modern West Virginia is at once complex and contradictory. Coal production in West Virginia is at an all-time high, while employment in the industry is at an all-time low. In 1996, the annual production of coal from the state was 174 million tons, while the industry only maintained 21,296 employees. By contrast, employment in the state's industry peaked at 125,669 miners and workers in 1948, while production that year was at 168 million tons. The stark discrepancy in employment reflects a fundamental shift in mining technology, beginning just after World War II and continuing to the present. Most mines today rely on mountaintop removal and/or strip mining techniques, and as a result, very few contemporary underground mines remain profitable. For example, in 1996 Logan County was the third largest coal producer in the state. Its forty-four underground mines accounted for 3.5 million tons of production, while its twenty-four surface and mountaintop removal mines accounted for 14.25 million tons of coal (West Virginia Coal Association 1997, 19).

Given the context of coal production and its interaction with the culture of Logan County, I asked interviewees for their opinions about the future for black men and women in the mining region. Two responses are included below.

They had to leave. See, the jobs back here for blacks are not that great. In order to live, you have to get a minimum wage job. But if you want to make any money, you have to leave. I would like to have my kids within an 8-10 minute drive sometime, but my closest is 3 hours. I would rather they be there with a decent job, because they had the opportunities that I didn't have. But the coal industry will never be great again. At one time the population of Logan County was almost 55-60,000 people. There will never be the number of people here again, number one, because of the union. The management will never allow that number of men to be so big that they can't control it. All the mines any more will be a small number of men mining the same amount of coal that two or three hundred did, because of mechanization. Because of that, they can keep the union down. Management is taking while we're sleeping, because he's got to make money to show his stockholders, and he doesn't care who he's got to walk on or step over, he's got to show a profit. And the little man's always the one to get hurt.

The coal mines have gone down. They needed something to bring some jobs down here, they couldn't bring any factories so I guess [Wal-Mart] is the closest thing they could bring in. And education, they've whacked it to pieces, with consolidation and closing of the schools. Teachers have to leave and retire. We need more teachers that don't think our children are retarded, because they are not retarded. My little grandson was having a problem with his teacher, and it was a communication problem. You've got to talk to him, you can't just throw something and give him a halfway direction and think he's going to get it, because he wasn't raised that way. We talk, directly. I had him tested, and he did 98% on everything but hers, so they told us she was the problem. In slavery they always said we were ignorant and stupid, so maybe that's it. When they realized that we could be taught to read and write, I think they got scared. It's just something that's been passed on down.

Occupational and Housing Issues

Although the region of southern West Virginia today remains an important resource base for extractive industry in the US, the once booming coal-mining populations of southern West Virginia have all but disappeared. The mechanization of the coal industry following World War II led to mass unemployment and the emigration of thousands of miners and their families to northern urban industrial centers. While mining jobs fell from 125,000 to 65,000, big coal companies benefited more from the

shift than anyone else. With dozens of small firms in West Virginia going out of business because of high wage and equipment costs, large companies began aggressive programs of expansion. Company towns were now more of a nuisance than a convenience, particularly after full-scale unionization effectively wiped out their disciplinary power. By the 1960s, most company-owned communities were dissolved and the buildings were liquidated (Williams 1984). Plants were modernized, surplus workers were expelled, company houses were sold off, and miners who were permitted to remain working in the mines received high wages, but paid the price for this prosperity with black lung, a deadly respiratory disease that increased in incidence following World War II due to the high levels of dust thrown by new mechanized mining equipment.

When I asked various members of the Logan community about the major social issues facing Logan County, many responded by discussing poor prospects for housing and employment in the area, as reflected in the following excerpts:

We do have issues that need to be followed-up on in Logan County. It's not just one or two, but it's several. You walk the streets of Logan here, it's like a ghost town. You know there's blacks out there that want to work. My son did come here and he tried to get a job, but they didn't want to pay him anything. He had been used to making a lot of money, and here he can't make it on what they offered so he left.

Housing and jobs are the two biggest problems facing Logan County today. If the jobs were plenty, and they didn't discriminate against those who don't have an education, and if they didn't do all that, there wouldn't be so much crack dealing going on. Give everybody equal opportunity to work and make their own living, don't just think about drugs as an easy way out. Labor by the sweat of your brow, but there's no jobs here in Logan. And if there are jobs, you've got to have a high school diploma or equivalent diploma, and some have neither. If someone would just sit down and open up a wide range of opportunities, and have a meeting for the young, old, middle-aged, that's uneducated, and open up a building or something to help you get educated or get your diploma, so you can go out

there and get you a decent job. If they had something like that, you'd be surprised. Maybe a whole lot of people would come off the street, maybe a lot of them would come off drugs, maybe a whole lot of them would stop dealing drugs. Then there's no decent houses around here. People are living in shacks, I mean, they take what they can to live in. They can't hardly get any help to fix it up. Oh, honey I could tell you some stuff, because I've been there. I've been there, when I was on welfare, I had to go in there and ask, and she said, 'the truth hurt, don't it,' and I said I sure does. Go in there and be honest and you don't get nothing. You've got to go and lie to get something. So I went in there telling the truth and being honest, and didn't get no help, and needed help. I was laid off, no money was coming in, I needed some help. The truth is supposed to set you free, but I guess the truth also hurts you too.

Blacks have to always leave to get jobs. You want to find work, you usually left. Once they leave, they don't come back.

Education and jobs are the two main things – get your education, and you get a job.

Union Activities

While the post-World War II increase in mine mechanization technology and corresponding decline in employment opportunities greatly impacted white coal miners, the loss of jobs was felt even more significantly by black coal miners in Logan County. According to the West Virginia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "the historical pattern of job segregation had a far-reaching impact. Since blacks were concentrated in the unskilled category of hand-loading, the adverse impact of introducing mechanical loaders fell primarily on blacks...since blacks were concentrated overwhelmingly in unskilled jobs and seniority was a retention factor only within classification, black employment became a casualty of mechanization" (WV Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1995, 9).

According to one scholar, the United Mine Workers of America was a mixed blessing for black miners in the years following mining mechanization. The UMWA apparently "did relatively little to protect black miners when coal companies laid them off in greater proportions than white miners" (Nyden 1974, 300). The life history interviews I conducted reflect a fundamental ambiguity about the role of the United Mine Workers for black miners. Younger men and women are less satisfied with the modern UMWA, while older black men feel very strongly about the importance of the union for improving conditions for black miners. The following excerpts from three older interviewees reflect the positive perception of the union among elderly black miners.

He was in the union. At that time, it was better for them to belong to the union, because before they union, they worked in dangerous situations, and sometimes they would have to work overtime, and they weren't paid well. After the union, of course the working conditions improved, the pay improved, everything. Even before then they stopped the young boys from going in the mines, some were going in at 8 and that was just too young. And I remember studying some of the things about the mine before the union developed, and a lot of times they'd have the black damp, and they would have pigeons, and if it would die, they knew they had to get out of there because the air was bad. If they didn't belong to the union, the work conditions were horrible. They didn't get fair treatment, sometimes they had to work extra hours.

They joined the unions, because let's get it into perspective. If there was not a union at the mine, they weren't going to be hired anyway. So you sought out a union mine so you could at least have some bargaining power in order to get in. But then you were not always sensitive to minority male and female issues when they came up.

My father was in the United Mine Workers, in fact he was the President at one time, and was the Secretary at one time. My Dad was the type of fellow that didn't believe in violence. He believed that there wasn't any issue that couldn't be settled with reason. He was a union man, but most of the time, the men listened to each other, they'd sit down and talk it over. They very seldom had a strike. Unless a wildcat strike came through, they went on to work. Because they sat down and talked it over. A whole lot of issues that men struck over weren't worth striking over. Even today,

one or two men jump up, a lot of people have a lot of confidence in people. They jump up and, "we're going to go out on strike." Well, first you ought to sit down and talk about it. Then you have a whole lot of people sitting out here, and their idea of what they're thinking might be different, but they don't speak up because they might create a riot. But everyone's equally entitled to his own position on what he thinks. That's the way I always believed.

Other black men and women, on the other hand, felt very differently about the role of the union, and its activities regarding women and minorities in Logan County today.

They had their panel lists. They used them to keep blacks and women out of the mines. They put your name on there based on the most experience and who had done which job in the mine, which made it very easy to exclude, because the last hired were either blacks or women and the first fired would be them. It finally came to bear with the women's issues brought out that this was happening also to black males. The elder blacks believed strongly in the union, and had official capacities in the union during their time, so they thought the union was a great thing, until they were made to realize also that might have been right then, but now it's a different story. Especially when they started making big bucks in the coal mines, then blacks were generally phased out. We found out that in a five year period of time when they started rehiring men after the bust period, only 5 African-Americans in the state of West Virginia were hired. Then you saw the systematic elimination of jobs in the mines. It became more specialized and technological and the African-American miners were not trained for that, they were like general laborers.

At that time, there wasn't a difference. At that time, most of your labor in the mine was black, almost 50-60%, in some instances maybe a little bit higher. Because most of the time, you used to not have all this mechanization, and most of your bosses were white and most of your labor were black. So therefore they had more folks in the union. Most of the union of Logan County, most will tell you that the Presidents of the locals were black. Very few locals weren't, because of the disparity in the workforce. But I'm 73 years old, I've seen a lot. So I would say that even today, I've watched things over the years. At this time now, most of your union has driven the black man out. I don't know why. That's one question I can't put my finger on. You search your records from the auto workers, the mine workers, you won't find a black President. I would say right now, there are maybe 5 black miners in Logan County. When the money was low, my Dad worked for \$5 a day, they don't work for that no more. When the money was low, and the job was hard, then the black

man was in position. But when the money got better, then they weeded the black man out. You might find that hard to believe, but I worked for coal one time, and there was a riot. They thought the only way you could change anything was through violence. So, this man that I worked with walked up to me at work one day and said, "what do the black people want?" The only way I could answer that question was, "I may not answer it the way you want me to answer it, but I'll answer it the way that it ought to be answered. In order for you to know what I want is to be in my shoes for one week." See, one day in my shoes he couldn't take at that time. I respected people, and I demanded respect in return.

In 1930, West Virginia claimed over 22,000 employed black coal miners, which accounted for almost a quarter of the miners in the bituminous coal industry across the state. By 1980 that number had diminished to less than 1500 (Lewis 1987, 170). In 1990, Logan County employed a total of seventeen black coal miners, only 0.7% of the mining workforce. Given this drastic decline in employment, coupled with reactions from my interviewees regarding the role of the Union in hiring and supporting women and minority hires, the future of the black coal miner in Logan County is uncertain.

Origins of Racism and Discrimination

In the early 1900s, the social activist Memphis Tennessee Garrison organized a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Gary, West Virginia, in an effort to combat the proliferation of racism and discrimination across the state. She later established branches in both Raleigh and Logan Counties, but she was very much aware of the limitations of such an organizational base. In her words, "the local branch of the NAACP didn't touch the discrimination in the coal mines. They would talk about it at the meeting, but there was nobody who was able to move in on it. We hadn't come to that time" (Bickley and Ewen 2001, xvii). When I

questioned interviewees regarding the current state of discrimination in Logan County, and the corresponding role of the NAACP in addressing these issues, two respondents discussed their views of the efficacy of the modern organization.

[Men and women] were being deliberately pitted against each other. "If it wasn't for those blankety-blank women, we could hire you." When we first started, we had it with the NAACP, because we were taking black men's jobs. I went to a meeting one time and I said, I'm sorry, but if you were going to be hired you would have been hired by now. The women are not taking your jobs – you don't have them. We need to join together and stop fighting each other, and eventually they began to see that. It's in the school systems the same way.

We did not have a very strong NAACP in the early 1980s, and it's still struggling and having problems now, especially with young men. But they did gradually begin to see that the panel list was a way of keeping the miners out, but their voice was just not that strong. Right now, we're 3.5% of the population down here. When the older people died out or got sick and could not continue it, there was a lapse period of no NAACP. They started it back up 3-5 years ago, but it's still not strong. Now you know why the black men came to [NEW-Plus], because they have no where else to turn.

This lack of efficacy and coherence in the contemporary incarnation of the local NAACP is troubling for many blacks in Logan County, particularly because of the long history of racial tensions in local communities. According to my interviewees, many of these tensions are expressed in three primary arenas: institutionalized job discrimination, confrontations with and provocations by local white police officers, and latent racism among white primary and secondary school teachers towards black children. All of the black community members that I interviewed had comments regarding the origins of racism in Logan County, and many tied this directly back to the coal industry. Selected interview excerpts that specifically address the historical dimensions of racial tensions are included below.

We got more flack from whites and blacks, because they would call me yellow. In our race there's a group that's called mulatto, if you're mixed, and you're looked down on by the blacks. Actually, you are too black to be white, and too light to be accepted by the blacks. I was a victim of double discrimination. The children would just say, we don't want to play with her because she's yellow. I thank God for my parents, because they said, you know who you are, and God made us all equal, and I learned that I had to accept myself and not let anybody put me down. And that's what I try to tell people – know who you are, and if they have a problem with you, don't let it become your problem, it's their problem.

You know, coming from South Carolina, you would think that I would have encountered more prejudice, but I had not heard the "n" word until we came to West Virginia. The first time I heard it, I asked my mother what was it, why did they call us that. And I remember what she said. She said, oh, that's a word that people ignorantly call black people and it means a low-character person. And we had a Webster's dictionary, and we looked it up, and it did say that. A low-character person. That was one of the meanings. The second meaning said that some white people call negros that, and that was the second meaning. Then later, they dropped that from the dictionary, and they always put it as having reference to the black race. I haven't checked it recently to see if they have changed it.

Down here on the corner, they had a restaurant that had a black side and a white side. I've been through those times, so I know. It's the same now, only the element is a little subtle. It's there, but it doesn't seem as bad. When you've seen things, you know where you can go and where you can't go. Now you don't know. Sometimes when you walk in, then you face the issue. If you've been in that element or been around that kind of stuff all your life, it doesn't take you long to tell it. You get to the point where you can see things that white people might never see.

Many of my interviewees had been raised in the Logan County school system, both when it was segregated and following school consolidation and racial integration. One older interviewee, a retired teacher, discussed the advantages to having separate schools with only black teachers and students, as opposed to integrated classrooms.

We had a black principal, black teachers, but we were allowed to do things. You could participate in glee club, dance team, basketball,

intramural games, drama. There were a lot of things that we could participate in in the black school. When integration came, a lot of our children didn't have the opportunity to participate. Some of them wanted to participate and had the ability, but they weren't given the opportunity. When they were picking someone, they would always look over the black child. After a while, the black child decided they're not going to pick me, and they didn't try. And that was one of the bad things that came out of integration.

The same interviewee also provided the following response to a follow-up question pertaining how best to deal with contemporary issues of racial tensions facing the Logan schools.

I've always told my children, and even my students, they're my children too, but I have the same message: you cannot be prejudiced, because when we limit others, we limit ourselves first. We can't become what we want to, because when you limit someone, you have to stay down to make sure they stay down, so neither one's achieving.

According to one mother, whose three sons as well as herself graduated from Logan High School, observed: "There was racial tension in 1958 as integration was just beginning. Racial tension to this day is still a domineering factor in Logan County schools as it was then, if not more so" (West Virginia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1995, 20). Members of the community interviewed for this project, including parents of children who are either currently enrolled at or recently graduated from Logan High School, recounted several incidents of discrimination by white teachers against black students, two stories of which are included below.

My son really had a talent on saxophone. There was some kind of a trophy or something they give each year to the ones that were graduating, and they didn't want the black child to have it. They didn't want a nigger to have that trophy at the school. They gave it to him because I told them he'd better walk away with it, because he had the first chair every year that he went to Logan High and he went to Marshall and played second chair down there, and I said he'd better walk away with it or I'll know why.

From what I heard, it was band parents calling the board, saying 'that nigger better not walk away with it.' He went to Marshall in music.

Most African American students when they walk across the stage in high school, they have their suitcases packed and they're ready to go. But I have taught that they need to come back to their homes and give something back.

Logan High School, for example, did you ever notice the proportion of students in special education? The Federal government has an investigation going on in Kanawha County for the same thing, because there are so many blacks in special education proportional to the population of white students. I think the money is three times more for that, so when you track more into that, more money comes in from the federal government. If you leave children alone, they can always get along, but somewhere down the line, they get told things. If authority doesn't take care of that, it gets out of hand. Say, if I get by with it today, I'm going to do a little bit more tomorrow.

Because of the persistent racial tension in Logan schools, the West Virginia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recommended in 1995 that a race relations council be established to deal directly with schools that repeatedly encounter disruptions attributed to racial problems, and that Logan County teachers be trained to be better prepared to deal with the issues of a diverse community. The same committee recommended that law enforcement personnel also be required to undergo training to better understand community race relations (the West Virginia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1995, 27). This recommendation, in part, was based on a well-publicized incident that occurred in 1991 that resulted in disciplinary actions against white police officers in Logan. The story, recounted in its entirety by the woman involved, is included in the interview excerpt below:

[The police] came and searched the house, kicked the door in, and went in there and searched for drugs. They didn't find drugs on him, no nothing. So one of the men I asked, what are you doing. That is my house, you don't have to kick the door in, I have the key and I'll let you in there. I

said, by the way, do you have a search warrant? You have not put a search warrant in my hand or his hand, and according to the law, you have to produce that search warrant. So the other officer said, shut up. My Dad and Mom lived right there, so I started walking and I looked around and this officer came around from behind me, and I said, don't you touch me, because you've got no business putting your hands on me or touching me. I started walking, and he grabbed me and picked me up and slammed me on the ground and then he fell on me, and shattered my hip. Then he handcuffed me with a broken hip. You talk about prejudice, honey, that was prejudice. Because the man said, I can't stand black folks. There was so much hate in that man that came at me, just to do what he did out of the ordinary. They didn't have any reason. Then he snatched me up after he put that handcuff on me, I mean, he didn't treat me like I was a woman, just snatched me up like an animal. I hollered, you done broke me up, you done broke me up. They didn't want to do it, but they had to call the ambulance. They had to take me to the hospital, and then when I got to the hospital, the hospital people started working on me and the police officer told them not to give me any help. You talk about Logan County prejudice. Very prejudiced. They took my husband to jail, but they had to release him and let him go. They didn't have nothing. They planted stuff in the house, but my uncle was sitting up watching the police. They went into their trunk and came back with stuff they planted in the house. They came out with a bag of stuff they analyzed and it was nothing but flour. It was all in the paper and everything. Two of the officers were fired, but the other one they never did fire. This took place in July 1991. It just made them mad when I told them about the search warrant. They think this badge gives them authority and power over you – they hide behind the little thing they wear on their chest. Without that, they ain't nothing. They're just like anybody else, ordinary, without the badge. Some of them take it too far. The badge is to help and protect, not to harm and lie. There was one policeman that came forward and helped me and my husband out. He was good. He knew what they were doing, and he started bringing all this stuff out.

Upon questioning about race as a factor in job discrimination, many interviewees discussed both latent and overt discrimination in their day-to-day interactions of the workplace, as reflected in the excerpts below.

They didn't want me to have a daycare outside the home, they wanted me to put it in the home. I didn't want to put it in my home. When I bucked the system, I didn't get the daycare. So that's how I got involved. I'll never be away from it, it will always be there. If it's outside the home, it

won't start until the next day. She never did say why I couldn't have it outside the home, she just said you can have it here.

I was the only black person that worked for the company. I've been to conventions, and all of the 1250 people there, all but two of them were white. I was the first black bonded truck driver in the state of West Virginia. That's why I say I've been a whole lot of places and seen a whole lot of things that people wouldn't believe went on.

Mountaintop Removal

Mountaintop removal is a relatively modern mining process that involves the demolition and “reclamation” of mountaintops in coal-rich areas of Appalachia. The process involves the blasting of mountains with large quantities of dynamite to uncover the valuable low-sulfur coal seams from underneath the rubble, or the rock and soil overburden of “spoil”. Once the mining operations on the new surface are complete, leftover rock from the mountain is either dumped into the valley below, thus covering streams, or it is “reclaimed” by putting the displaced hilltops back onto the mountain and covering it with sod and grass seedlings. In some cases, livestock are grazed over the new terrain to facilitate the regeneration process, although many of these operations are unsuccessful because of the sterile rock below the surface sod layers.

The current debate regarding mountaintop removal is centered upon the process of valley dumping, or covering mountain streams in surrounding valleys with waste rock from the blasting and mining process. The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMRCA) of 1977 provides for a general set of standards for mountaintop removal, including “as a minimum to restore the approximate original contour (AOC) of the land” following the termination of surface mining operations. After the mining process is complete, however, not all of the earth and rock removed is needed to restore the AOC,

and the waste material is dumped into valley fills. These valley fills are composed of excess spoil, and because the topography of the coalfields dictates that valleys contain streams, this waste is generally placed in streams and streambeds.

To alleviate this environmental problem, the language of SMRCA provides that a buffer zone of 100 feet must be created between the streams and surface mining operations, such that any valley fills that may be required are not disruptive to the “normal flow or gradient” of the associated stream. It is specifically this language regarding the stream buffer zone that initiated the current debate among coalfield residents and representatives of West Virginia’s state government (*Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act 1977*).

I asked black members of the community for their views on the state of modern mining in Logan County, including the prospects of employment, techniques of mountaintop removal, and the effects of reclamation. Samples of their perspectives are included in the following excerpts.

You have people that want to protect the environment, and then you have people in the same community that are concerned about the job, especially the younger families that have to support themselves. They should find common ground, because it can be done in a productive way and restore the balance of our communities also, if they would do it properly and if somebody would hold the coal companies accountable. We've gone through this reclamation stuff for years, and if they would reclaim the area like they found it, it would be a different story. Now the way they've been doing, it takes us back to the very beginning – neighbor against neighbor. It's that old divide and conquer, and we have a Hatfield and McCoy mentality, instead of finding common ground where both of us can work on the same issue and find common ground respectfully. We're never going to do anything – you get on your side of the fence and I'll get on mine.

When you're not getting the jobs anyway, what side does that put you on? It would be different if [blacks] were being included, but they're not. We

are so into the issue of survival, that other issues become minute. They just want a job so that they don't have to leave their community. [Coal companies] are taking my community. They're flattening the houses, there's about five houses left in the camp.

Mountaintop removal, it's been around so long. There are some people who will never get out of this area because they profit so much from it. You get this flood insurance; a flood's not a pretty thing, but when you profit \$100,000 what are you going to do? Business is a racket – them that got, get. Them that don't have, don't get.

Right now, the future of Logan County is very dismal. It will never be what it has been. There's some possibilities here, but it will never be what it was. The laws of the state are so archaic and ancient, you go to Kentucky you see a whole different state of mind. The state of WV always keeps themselves in the clear... West Virginia is good at driving businesses out, because they always pick on things that can't fight back.

Jobs in Nontraditional Fields

Most of the interview data presented thus far has addressed issues that pertain to both black men and black women. The emphasis of this research project, however, rests in the problems that are uniquely black women's issues in Logan County, including nontraditional jobs, sexual harassment, and women's roles in community activism. Most associations of "nontraditional jobs" for women include firefighters, welders, construction workers, mechanics and machinists, and so on. For black women in Logan County, however, having a "nontraditional job" takes on new meaning, as reported in the interview excerpts below. The first excerpt, from a member of NEW-Plus, assesses the experiences of a black women in Logan with respect to finding local employment.

We deal with a woman's life from the womb from the tomb, and anything that comes in between. Anything that has to do with a female's life, whether it's entitlements, or welfare, or social security, in the court system, we deal with it. If your children are being snubbed or abused in school, or just neglected, we try to gear it toward housing issues, job issues, and education, but it's so broad and the line is so thin and it crosses over. All

three of those things are connected, so we started a holistic approach. When we started in 1979, we had a little grant from the Women's Bureau Department of Labor and Action program to give women "jobs in non-traditional fields." In Logan we found out, that's the coal field or no field. We were getting women jobs and go back 6 weeks or 6 months later, they were no longer there, because we had not prepared them for harassment and all the other things they were going to have to endure. So, in 1980, the American Friends Service Committee picked us up, we had to scrap that, and that's when we took a more holistic approach. She needs training, education, and if her children are hungry today, first we have to find a way to feed the children, then deal with getting mom trained and an education for a job, then job placement, and then dealing with sexual harassment as well as other issues. And we found out that non-traditional meant one thing to a white female and another thing to a black female.

The remaining interview selections are from black women in the Logan area that answered questions regarding what they would consider both typical and atypical jobs.

It was the coal mines, to black women in Logan County, even being a secretary was non-traditional in most offices because they just didn't get the jobs. You would look back at that as a traditional woman's job, but not necessarily for the black woman.

Housekeeping, and maybe very few if any clerks in the stores, fast food restaurants. These were traditional jobs. We have five black teachers who are now under the age of 50. When they integrated and shut down Aracoma High School in 1962, it was a different perspective. Up until 1962, you would be able to say that teaching was a traditional job, but after that no, because our teachers were phased out. I do a mentoring program for African-American female students in Logan High School, because there are no African-American female teachers there, counselors or anything, so the girls have no where to go. This will be my seventh year, so they have someone to talk to. I'm very proud of that program. I even have a girl that's a junior in college. I think we have one African-American teacher at Logan Grade School, and one African-American man in the middle school. They're spread very thin. I didn't realize that until my son was in 8th grade and finally had a black teacher, after going to school for nine years. We were watching television during Black History month, and he looked and said, "Mom, back in y'all's days, you had black teachers." It hadn't dawned on me that my child had been in school nine years, and this was the first African American teacher that he had ever had.

Sexual Harassment and Coal Mining

During the decade of the 1970s, the number of women coal miners in the United States had risen from 0 in 1972 to nearly 2,000 by 1979. Betty Jean Hall, a lawyer in Buckhorn, Kentucky and the organizer of the Coal Employment Project which helped to facilitate women's access to coal mining jobs, successfully made a national issue of the discrimination women faced when attempting to enter the coal mining workforce. According to one of her allies and fellow lawyer from Tennessee, Neil McBride told the *Williamson Daily News* (2 January 1979) that, "if women get the chance to work in the coal industry, where the pay is high, all the marginal industries they have been working for will have to offer better wages and working conditions."

For black women, the new opportunity of entering the "nontraditional" field of coal mining presented almost as many problems as gains. Women in Logan County discussed their perceptions of their own personal experiences with coal industry in the excerpts below.

Financially they were better off. A lot of my women were welfare recipients who wanted off of welfare, stuck in those dead-end fast food jobs, and they could not support their families. They had medical benefits, and plus they were making good wages. Some of them learned to deal with the harassment, others did not, but that's just like in anything. We had one African-American female, who they called me and told me they would like a hundred just like her, the only complaint they had with her was she worked too long and she worked too hard – took all the overtime she could get. She's now working at Shoney's because she got hurt in the mine. A lot of them would not prefer the mines because of the harassment and things they had to put up with. It not only came from the men miners; the wives were just as bad, and I couldn't understand that. I had a confrontation with one of the wives who came down here and told us we were against God, against the Bible, everything. I told her, I can't understand how you would let your husband go to work in an office where a female secretary is working, smelling good, dressed nice, but you're worried about a woman crawling around in a mine with him, thinking

about whether the roof is going to cave in, rats running around, and your concern is that woman is going to take your husband? She left here with a puzzled look on her face, and I never got a response, and she never did come back.

You always have the undercurrent with women, and I've never understood it, and until we overcome it, it's going to continue to be a problem. You would think if you suffered something, you would not want another woman to go through it. "I did it, that's my badge of courage, how come she can't do it," instead of making it easier for her. And I have a serious problem with that.

We had the only all-women deep mine class. The things that they had to put up with, just to come and get the training – two of them, their husbands beat them. Another one's husband took the child and ran off to Tennessee and wouldn't bring him back until she quit the class. All that mental anguish that men don't have to put up with, that the women are home taking care of the children, nobody's going to threaten him, they just will not compare to that. Before the classes start, we have a three-week training to get them prepared for their class. Training for the training – it's pitiful, but it's the truth.

Coal mining was a macho thing. I think that they feel threatened because they would come home from working all day and want to pass out on the couch from all this hard work. Then you have a woman in the mine pulling a shift just like you, and has to go home, cook, and take care of her children because a lot of them were single mothers. It's threatening. I no longer get to say how rough my job is, I'm so worn out, and here this little woman is pulling her 8-hour shift, coming home, taking care of a house and children, and doing all the other chores that she was doing before she went in the mine.

Women and Community Activism

Community involvement among women has transformed the political economic landscape of modern Logan County, and has risen to the forefront of local political conflicts during the past decade. This is particularly true in terms of community organizing during labor conflicts, and women's participation in special interest groups regarding the proliferation of mountaintop removal mining across the southern West Virginia coal fields. For black women, however, community activism takes a different

form than most social participation practiced by white women. In the following excerpts, black women interviewees discuss what "community activism" and "being involved" means to each of them.

It kinda fell on me, it wasn't by choice. In my younger days, I had some clashes with racial issues and women's issues and found out that the most important thing needed in this community to women was information, to know who to go to and where to seek help and to know what your rights are. You can get oppressed and abused for so long that you think that's the norm. It's a cultural thing here, handed down from generation after generation, and we feel that because we've been doing it for years, that's just the way to do it. And when I had issues that I needed help with, there was no one to help me, and I had to find out myself, and I started helping others, so when this job became available, they said you need to find me, and that's how it happened. I was doing it on my own without pay, and then it just kinda fell in my lap through my own personal experiences. I was a family planning counselor for three years, and I found out just how much women did not know, and how controlled they were by men.

In the 1980s, we had to open our doors for black males – they had nowhere else to go. We did the same thing on racial issues, age discrimination, and we also threw in the fact that instead of fighting each other, we should be working together. Because if you don't work with the oppressor, oppressed people will be oppressed more, because your power is with the oppressors, not the people being oppressed. You can organize them forever; they're in one mindset anyway. You've got to change the other people's minds – that's where the hard work comes in.

You can go in some places where there are poor white folks just like poor black folks. They don't have help either. It could be better. Why Chicago, or New Jersey, or New York, or South Carolina – there's plenty of jobs, blacks profiting as well as whites. Now, paint the picture back here in West Virginia and tell me why. Jobs here pay five- something an hour – they keep you down right here in West Virginia at the bottom of the totem pole.

Conclusions

Power resides, in the case of coal mining communities, in the effective formation of strategic alliances among multiple stakeholders. Women today play an essential role

in this process in that they are currently a major support base for anti-mountaintop removal environmental groups, union support groups, and community improvement. History tells us that no major union effort, even if it is backed by the most economically and politically powerful parties to the conflict, can survive without the support of the surrounding community. Historically, when women have allied with the United Mine Workers of America, the conflict was prolonged, negotiations were extended, and the union usually received more favorable outcome than when women did not support their efforts. This interpretation of labor disputes and community conflicts, however, is now further complicated by incorporating life history data, including the above excerpts, obtained from black men and women in Logan County throughout the course of this research project. Their perspectives reflect that gaining power and forming strategic alliances despite powerful coal industry interests remains an uphill battle in the face of subtle and sometimes not so subtle cultural effects of racial discrimination.

Resource inequality in contemporary communities across West Virginia has resulted from a complex set of historical circumstances, in which the coal industry has been the leading employer and revenue-generator for the state for the past century. The irony of this situation is that nearly all benefits from the production of coal continue to be exported out of the state to the main company offices, which are usually located in major metropolitan centers. Very few new mining jobs are now created, due both in part to the mechanization of coal mining and the increased reliance on mountaintop removal mining techniques. Because of this set of circumstances, many scholars have applied a colonial model to the economy of coal, arguing that the export of revenues is an exploitation of both the natural resources of the state and the human resources of the local labor market.

Economic inequity thus arises not only on the microlevel (wages, job security, etc.) but on the macrolevel of state politics and economics as well. According to the most recent data, West Virginia usually ranks among the poorest states in the nation, with some of the highest rates of unemployment in the country. At the same time, the state has one of the richest reserves of fossil fuel in the country, lending support to the colonial model that has so often been applied to West Virginia and its labor force.

The social and cultural landscape of the southern part of the state has been transformed dramatically over the course of the past 100 years as a result of conflicts and tensions in the coal industry. While the first half of the century was characterized by coal company towns and the strife associated with the unionization effort, the second half of the century was marked by an increase in relative power of unions and members of coal communities. Although these stakeholders have not yet been able to enjoy the political and economic power that has consistently been held by coal companies, each new dispute has witnessed the increased participation among white women and non-industry stakeholders in the community. What remains to be seen, however, is where black men and women fall in this new cultural order created by the dissolution of the coal company town and the rise of mountaintop removal mining.

As reflected in the interviews conducted during my tenure as a Rockefeller Scholar, the coal mining industry has played a major role in shaping social relationships among blacks and whites in Logan County. When coal communities were established at the turn of the century, both housing and job segregation were standard practice. After the coal companies abandoned these communities, the lack of incentive for integration of these communities led to the continued segregation of blacks and ethnic whites in these

towns. Occupational segregation continued to modern times, with black men and women being awarded very few mining jobs relative to the number of employed white miners. The union, while a beneficial organizational tool for blacks in the earlier decades of the century, has now become a hindrance to racial integration and job advancement in the mining industry.

Without the help of a strong NAACP, black women have turned to the members of their own communities to begin the effort of transforming cultural stereotypes and promoting change in areas of racial discrimination and harassment among women with nontraditional jobs. As stated by one of my interviewees, all employed black women in Logan County have nontraditional jobs because they are black. The seemingly insurmountable hurdle of integrating black women into the coal mines was overcome by activism among members of the Logan black community, and assisted by grassroots organizations like NEW-Plus.

Given the context of this research project, including the interviews conducted with white women prior to the onset of this fellowship, the key finding thus far is the fact that survival among black men and women in Logan is paramount. All other issues are viewed as being of secondary importance. When discussing the mountaintop removal mining issue of protecting the environment versus protecting local employment, black women explained that the question is essentially irrelevant to them. While they are affected by the coal company on a daily basis, they are not able to express activism via traditional channels, such as white women's activism alongside the United Mine Workers of America during earlier disputes in the region. Their activism efforts instead are motivated by first affecting change on fundamental issues of class and race, which are

remnants of the institutionalized segregation policies proliferated by the coal companies for decades. Sexual harassment is coupled with racial harassment to prevent black women from entering the nontraditional job arena, so simply obtaining a job at all remains of utmost importance to the women in Logan I met as part of this project at CSEGA.

The task now at hand remains to consolidate this contemporary ethnographic information with historical documentation of black women's relationships with both organized labor and coal companies in southern West Virginia. This paper has merely touched upon and summarized these historically significant and ethnographically rich interconnections between local economy, politics, and community organizing. My goal is to use the astoundingly rich data collected during the term of this fellowship to reevaluate perceptions of women's roles in coal industry conflicts, and how larger issues of political economy interact with racial and gender stereotypes and discrimination at the community level. While it remains clear that white women have been influential in affecting change regarding power dynamics in the coal industry, so too have black women been affecting change regarding class and race issues in southern West Virginia. What is most interesting is how these two forms of activism have evolved in tandem, and how each is uniquely tied to the development of the highly-gendered coal mining industry in southern West Virginia.

Acknowledgements

I greatly appreciate the time, patience and stories provided by the many men and women with whom I have spoken and interviewed over the past several years. Your generosity clearly made this research project possible. I would also like to show appreciation to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Dispute Resolution Research Center at Northwestern University, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (Grant #6486), and the Rockefeller Foundation for supporting this research between 1997-2001. I am very grateful for the thoughtful conversations, suggestions, and comments received over the years from Lynda Ann Ewen, Shirley Lumpkin, Connie Leinen, Sharon Brescoach, Helen Schwartzman, Tim Earle, Judith Marti, Paul Durrenberger, Suzan Erem, Jeanne Brett, and Keith Murnighan. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia for their continued friendship and unfailing support of this research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bickley, Ancella and Lynda Ann Ewen, editors. *Memphis Tennessee Garrison: The Remarkable Story of a Black Appalachian Woman* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).
- Brooks, Frank. Interview by Mary Brooks, 12 December 1973. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Bruner, J. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Cline, G.C. Interview by G. Bausewine, Notary Public, submitted as affidavit to United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor. *West Virginia Coal Fields: Hearings...to Investigate the Recent Acts of Violence...*, 67th Congress, 1st sess., 2 October 1920. Transcript, Logan Coal Operators Association/Melvin Triolo Collection, West Virginia Division of Culture and History, Charleston, West Virginia.
- Collins, Burl. Interview by Claire Cipolaro, 3 August 1974. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Corbin, David Alan. *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.
- Corbin, David Alan. *The West Virginia Mine Wars: An Anthology*. Charleston, WV: Appalachian Editions, 1990.
- Gaventa, John. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.
- Hensley, Herbert. Interview by Mary Brooks, 9 December 1973. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Henson, W.A. Interview by Elizabeth A. Smarr, 28 September 1975. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Jones (Reichart), Karaleah S. "An Analysis of Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Southwestern Pennsylvania Coal Company Towns." *Proceedings of the Ninth National Conference on Undergraduate Research*. Asheville: University of North Carolina, Vol. 1, pp. 288-291, 1996.
- Lane, Winthrop. *Civil War in West Virginia*. New York: Arno, 1969.

- Lee, Howard B. *Bloodletting In Appalachia*. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 1969.
- Lewis, Ronald. *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict 1780-1980*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987.
- Logan Coal Operators Association/Melvin Triolo Collection: Historical Notes*, 1991. Photocopy, West Virginia Division of Culture and History, Charleston, WV.
- Lunt, Richard. *Law and Order vs. The Miners: West Virginia 1906-1933*. Charleston, WV: Appalachian Editions, 1979
- McGuire, Litz. Interview by Roscoe Spense, 23 April 1974. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Messer, Bryant. Interview by Shirley McCoy, 3 August 3 1974. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Miller, Ted. Interview by Anne Berry, 4 August 4 1973. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Mullins, Eli and Jane. Interview by Dorothy Lester, 20 April 1976. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Nash, Michael. *Conflict and Accommodation: Coal Miners, Steel Workers, and Socialism, 1890-1920*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992.
- Nyden, Paul. "Miners for Democracy: Struggle in the Coal Fields." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1974.
- Payne, Charles. Interview by Thomas Tull, 16 December 1978. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Payne, William. Interview by Ella Gibson, 3 November 3 1973. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Perry, Martin. Interview by Mary Gargarella, 24 November 24 1973. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Riessman, Catherine. *Narrative Analysis*. Qualitative Research Methods Series. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993.
- Rule, Mildred and Clarence. Interview by Donna Lawson, 27 October 1973. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.

- Savage, Lon. *Thunder in the Mountains: The West Virginia Mine War 1920-21*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990.
- Stewart, Kathleen. *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an 'Other' America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Sullivan, Ken, ed. *The Goldenseal Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars*. Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1991.
- Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act*. Public Law 95-87, 3 August 1977.
- Thornbury, Roscoe and Dorothy. Interview by Sally Barker, 5 July 5 1974. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- Thurmond, Walter. *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia: A Brief History*. Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1964.
- Warrix, Alex. Interview by Richard Ramey, 8 June 1976. Transcript, Oral History Collection, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia.
- West Virginia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. "Rising Racial Tensions in Logan County, West Virginia." Published by the author, August 1995.
- West Virginia Coal Association. *Coal Facts 1997*. Charleston, West Virginia: Published by the author, 1301 Laidley Tower, 1997.
- Williams, John Alexander. *West Virginia: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984.